

WHY JESUS?

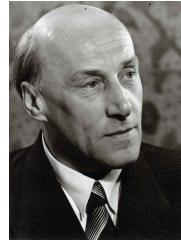
by

WILHELM BUSCH



Who was Wilhelm Busch?

Almost unknown in English-speaking countries, Wilhelm Busch was one of the most well-known and popular evangelists in Germany in the years before and after the Second World War. His direct, frank, and personal way of preaching biblical truth attracted thousands of people who flocked to hear him.



Wilhelm Busch was convinced that the message of the Gospel is the most extraordinary message of all times. His sermons and writings, in which he forcefully but simply presents the biblical answer to modern man's most pertinent questions, can be appreciated by the young and old alike, the rich and the poor, the well-educated and the man in the street.

Born in Wuppertal-Elberfeld, Germany, in the year 1897, Wilhelm Busch spent his youth in Frankfurt-on-Main, where he pursued and finished his secondary school studies.

Busch served in the German army during the First World War. Though still young, he held the rank of lieutenant. There on the battle-field, he met the living Saviour and gave his life to God. This decisive step was to change the course of his own life and to influence the lives of many thousands in years to come.

When the war was over, Wilhelm Busch studied theology at Tübingen, after which he entered the ministry and served as pastor in the Lutheran Church first at Bielefeld, then in a mining area, and at last in the city of Essen. He was pastor and youth leader there until the time of his death. But throughout his entire ministry, he travelled extensively in all of Germany and other European countries, preaching God's Word everywhere.

Because he adopted the strong uncompromising position of the German Confessing Church against the intrigues of the Third Reich in the life of the Church, and dared to proclaim his faith openly, Busch was imprisoned several times by the Nazis.

At the end of the Second World War, Wilhelm Busch once again took up his travels as an itinerant evangelist. And in 1966, after several decades of incessant labours, the Lord called his servant to himself.

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Why do I need Jesus?

God, yes; but why Jesus?

I am an old pastor. I have worked all my life in big cities. Year in and year out the same questions keep on coming up. There are heartfelt questions like, "How can God allow that?" And there are some old chestnuts like, "Who was Cain's wife?" But the question that people seem to throw at me the most readily is this one: "Pastor, you are always talking about Jesus. You are a fanatic! It doesn't matter what religion you have. What counts is to have respect for holy things."

That is as clear as daylight, isn't it? Goethe, who came from Frankfurt as I do, said something similar: "Feelings are everything; the name is only noise and smoke..." Whether we speak of Allah, of Buddha, of fate or of "the Supreme Being" is of no importance whatsoever. Believing in *something* is what counts. Wanting to specify your beliefs is fanaticism. Isn't that what most people think?

I remember a middle-aged lady saying to me once, "Pastor, you bore us with your talk about Jesus. Didn't he say, 'In my Father's house are many rooms'? Everyone shall find a place!" My friends, that is a very serious mistake.

I was in Berlin one day, at the Tempelhofer Feld Airport. Before boarding the plane, we had to go through Passport Control. In front of me was a big man, massively built, with an enormous travelling-rug tucked under his arm. He thrust his passport at the customs officer. "One moment!" said the officer. "Your passport has expired!" "Come on! Don't be so fussy," the man retorted. "The main thing is to have a passport." "That's where you're wrong!" declared the officer. "The main thing is to have a passport that is valid."

The same holds true of faith. The fact of believing - of believing in any old thing - is not what matters in the end. Because everyone in his own way believes something. Someone said to me the other day, "I believe I can make a good stew out of two pounds of beef." Well, that is belief - of a kind! What matters is not to have just any kind of faith, but to have the true faith, a faith which enables you to live when all around becomes dark, which supports you when you

risk falling into temptation, and which helps you face death. Death is a good test of the genuineness of your faith. Will yours stand the test?

Now there is only one true faith. One only which enables us to live and to die worthily. It is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is true that Jesus said: "In my Father's house are many rooms." But he also said that there is only one door by which to enter: "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."

Jesus is the door. I know very well that people do not want to hear that. They are willing to discuss God for hours, to exchange bright ideas about what he might be like. But Jesus cannot be a subject for discussion.

I repeat: it is only faith in Jesus, the Son of God, which can save us and enable us to live and die in peace.

I realized just how ridiculous this seems to some people when I was walking through the city of Essen one day. I met two men, most likely miners, standing on the pavement. One of them greeted me, "Hello, Pastor!" When I was nearer, I asked him, "Do you know me?" He began to laugh and said to his companion, "This is Pastor Busch! A nice fellow!" I thanked him. "Yes, a nice fellow," he repeated, "but he's crazy!" I was indignant and shouted rather heatedly, "What? Crazy? How can you say such a thing?" But he said again, "Pastor Busch! A nice fellow! Only, he never stops talking about Jesus." I was delighted. "My friend, I'm not crazy!" I said. "A hundred years from now, you will be in eternity. The only thing that will matter then will be whether or not you have known Jesus. That is what determines whether you will be in heaven or hell. Tell me, do you know Jesus?" With a laugh, he turned to the other miner, "You see, there he goes again!"

And that is exactly what I want to do now. There is a verse in the Bible which will serve as a spring-board. It goes like this: "He who has the Son (of God) has life." You may have heard about Jesus in Sunday School, but that does not mean that you *have* him. "He who *has* the Son of God" - listen carefully! - "*has* life" - beginning now and for eternity! "He who does not have the Son of God does not have life." It is the Word of God which says so. You know the old proverb: "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush!" Well - in your own interest - I would like to persuade you to accept Jesus Christ and to put your life into his hands. Because without him life can be really wretched.

But why does only Jesus count? Why is faith in him the only true faith? May I be more personal? I would like to tell you why / need Jesus and why / believe in him.

1. Jesus reveals God to us

When someone says to me, "I believe in God, but why do I need Jesus?" my reply is that that is nonsense! God is a hidden God. Without Jesus we can know absolutely nothing about him.

Men can invent their own god, to be sure; there's "the good Lord" who won't let a decent chap down as long as he doesn't drink more than five pints of beer a day! But that is not God! Allah, Buddha - these are only projections of our desires. But God? Without Jesus we would know nothing about him. Jesus reveals him. In the person of Jesus, God came to us.

Imagine a dense blanket of fog. Behind this is God. As men cannot live without him, they set about searching for him. They try to penetrate the fog. That is what the different religions do. Through them, men attempt to find God. But they all have this in common: they have all gone astray in the fog and have not been able to discover God.

God is a hidden God. The Jewish prophet Isaiah understood this. That is why he cried out, "We cannot reach you. Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down." And the amazing thing is this: God heard that cry! He tore through the blanket of fog and came down to us - in the person of Jesus Christ. In the fields of Bethlehem, when the choir of angels sang, "A Saviour has been born to you. Glory to God in the highest!" - God had come to us. And now Jesus says to us, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." Without Jesus I would know nothing whatever about God. He is the only person from whom I can gain a sure knowledge of God. How can anyone even dare do say, "I can do without Jesus"?

2. Jesus is the liberating love of God

Some time ago I was interviewed by a journalist. When he asked me why I held meetings like the one we were at, I replied, "I do it because I fear that people will go to hell!" "Come off it," he said smiling. "There is no such place as hell!" Thereupon, I said to him, "We shall see. In a hundred years you'll know whether it is you or the Word of God which is right. Tell me," I asked, "have you ever been afraid of God?" "What!" he exclaimed, "no one needs to be afraid of the good Lord!" "My friend," I said, "you haven't got the slightest idea what it's all about. If you had the right concept of God, you'd know that nothing is more terrible than the holy and just God, the judge of our sins. Do you think he'll overlook your faults? You

speak of 'the good Lord'. The Bible speaks of him differently: 'It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.'

Have you ever been afraid of God? If not, then you haven't even begun to perceive the awful reality of the holiness of God and the terrible reality of your sin. But if you have, you won't be long in asking, "How can I stand before God?" I believe that the greatest folly of our age is that we no longer fear the wrath of God. When a nation ceases to take the living God and his wrath against sin seriously, this is a symptom of a dreadful hardening.

Professor Karl Heim once told me about a trip he made to China. In Peking, he was driven to the top of a mountain where there was an altar called "the altar of heaven". His guide told him that on "the night of reconciliation", hundreds of thousands of people used to walk up the mountain, each one bearing a lantern. Then the emperor would climb up to the top - this was before the revolution - and offer a sacrifice of reconciliation for his people. Professor Heim remarked, "These pagans knew what the wrath of God is, and understood that man needs to be reconciled to him."

And the cultivated Westerner thinks that he can casually talk of "the good Lord" and that God will be happy as long as people give their offering without grumbling! It is time we began to fear God again! For we have all sinned. Yes, all of us.

Once we have learned to fear God again, we shall be asking, "How can we escape the wrath of God? Who will deliver us?" It is then that our eyes will open and we shall understand that Jesus is the liberating love of God. "God wants all men to be saved." But he cannot save us at the expense of justice. God cannot turn a blind eye to sin. It is for this reason he gave his Son for the salvation and reconciliation of the world.

Come with me to Jerusalem. On the outskirts of the city is a hill. Thousands of people are gathered there. High above the heads of the crowd are three crosses. The man on the cross at the left is, like us, a sinner. So is the one on the right. But look at the man in the middle. He is none other than the Son of the living God.

O sacred Head once wounded,
With grief and pain weigh'd down,
How scornfully surrounded
With thorns, Thine only crown!
How pale art Thou with anguish,
With sore abuse and scorn!
How does that visage languish,
Which once was bright as morn.

Why is he nailed to a cross? Because this cross is the altar of God! And Jesus is the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world and reconciles us to God.

Until you have found Jesus, the wrath of God rests upon you, even if you don't know it, even if you deny it. Only the person who comes to Jesus can enjoy the peace of God. "The punishment that brought us peace was upon him."

Allow me to use an illustration. During the First World War, I served as a gunner. Our guns had shields on each side. One day we found ourselves positioned in the front line without a single infantry bataillon in sight. And it was on that particular day we were attacked by tanks! A hail of bullets from the enemy lines rained on our gun shields, but the armour-plating was so thick that we were sheltered behind them. And I thought at that moment, "If I simply stuck out my hand, it would be riddled with bullets - and I would bleed to death. But here, behind the shield, I am safe."

This portrays just what Jesus means to me. I know that without Jesus I would be destroyed by the judgement of God. Without Jesus, no matter what I did, I could never have peace of heart. Without Jesus, I could not die without terrible anguish. Without Jesus, I would be walking straight towards eternal damnation.

And eternal damnation does exist, without a shadow of a doubt. Wait a little while, and you will see that what the Bible says is true!

But if I find shelter behind the cross of Jesus, I am as safe as I was behind that armour-plating. I can know for certain that he is my redeemer, my Saviour. Yes, Jesus is the liberating love of God.

Listen to me carefully. God wants all men to be saved. For this reason, he gave his Son for your salvation, for your reconciliation with himself. Do not rest until you have obtained this peace from God, this salvation!

Why do I need Jesus?

3. Jesus is the only one who can solve life's greatest problem

Do you know what life's greatest problem is? For older people it might seem to be their bladder or kidney complaint! Or for young people, their girlfriend or boyfriend. Everyone has a problem. But, believe me, the greatest problem in life is our guilt before God.

For many years I worked among young people. And I was always on the lookout for new illustrations to help them understand this truth. I would like to use one of these pictures again. Imagine that from birth we carry a heavy iron collar around our necks. Suppose

that each time I commit a sin a link is soldered on to it. I have an impure thought: a link is added. I am nasty to my mother: and another link is added. I speak evil of another person: and another link is added. I spend a day without praying, acting as if God did not exist: a new link is added. I am dishonest, I tell lies: and one more link is added.

Try to imagine the length of the chain we drag behind us - the chain of our guilt. Though this chain cannot be seen, our guilt is nonetheless very real.

In fact, it is enormous. And we drag it with us everywhere we go. I have often wondered why people are not more happy and satisfied. Things are not going too badly. It seems as though they have every reason to be happy. But they are not. And they cannot be because they are weighed down by the heavy chain of their guilt. Now no one can relieve them of it, not even a pastor, or a priest, or an angel. God himself cannot simply take it off, for he is just: "A man reaps what he sows."

But there is Jesus. He is the only one who can resolve life's greatest problem, because he died for our sins. By dying, he the just for us the unjust, Jesus has atoned for our sins. That is why he is able to free us from the chain of our guilt - and he alone is able to do so. I can say by experience that it is a real deliverance to know that our sins have been forgiven. It is the greatest liberation that one can experience. And it not only transforms our life, but also our death. You elderly people will understand this; it is one thing to die and to know that your sins are forgiven, and it is another thing to enter eternity with all the weight of your wrong-doing. It is a sobering and dreadful thing to think about.

I know many people who have claimed throughout their whole lives that they are good, that they do what is right. But one day they will die and will have to let go of the last friendly hand, only to discover that their life's boat is being swept along by the current of eternity to meet God. They can take nothing with them: not their little house, nor their bank account. Nothing, except their guilt. This is the way they will go to appear before God! How terrifying! But this is the lot of humanity. You may say, "That's how all men die. That's all there is to it." My friends, you need not die like this. Jesus offers forgiveness of sins. It is the greatest liberation that you could possibly experience. And it is possible right now.

I was eighteen when I learned from experience what forgiveness of sins means. My chain was broken and fell off.

Then, as the hymn says: "My heart was free. I rose, went forth, and followed thee!"

My wish is that you too might hearken to these words of life. Draw near to Jesus today. He is waiting for you. And say to him, "My life is a big mess. I've made so many mistakes. I've never wanted to admit it. On the contrary, I've always spoken highly of myself. Now I bring you all my mistakes. And I want to believe that your blood can take away my guilt."

In the seventeenth century, a man by the name of John Bunyan lived in England. He spent many long years in prison on account of his faith. Some things never change! After the Word of God, the next most stable thing in the world is prison! There in his prison cell, Bunyan wrote a marvellous book which is still relevant today - *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In it, he compared the life of a Christian to a journey full of adventures and snares. The book begins like this: A man living in the City of Destruction is suddenly overcome by anxiety. He says to himself, "What's wrong? I have no peace and I'm unhappy. I must get away from here!" He shares his concern with his wife, but she replies, "Your nerves are on edge. You need a good rest." But this does him little good. The anxiety persists. Then one day he says to himself, "It's no use! I must leave this city at all costs!" And he runs away. After his first few steps, he becomes conscious of a heavy burden upon his back. He wants to get rid of it, but he cannot. As he hurries on, his burden becomes heavier. Before starting on his journey, he had scarcely ever felt the weight of it. To him it only seemed normal. But as he hurries away from the City of Destruction, his burden becomes heavier and heavier. At last he can scarcely put one foot in front of the other. With great effort, he manages to climb up a mountain path. His burden is almost unbearable. Then suddenly, at a turning in the path, he sees a cross before him. Feeling faint, he collapses at the foot of the cross and clutching it, lifts up his eyes. At this precise moment, he feels the burden roll off his back and sees it disappear into the abyss with a loud crash.

This story is a beautiful illustration of what a man experiences when he draws near to the cross of Jesus Christ.

Upon that Cross of Jesus
Mine eye at times can see
The very dying form of One
Who suffered there for me;
And from my smitten heart, with tears,
Two wonders I confess -
The wonder of His glorious love,
and my own worthlessness.

I have forgiveness of sins because my Saviour suffered in my place. The chain of my guilt has been removed. My burden is gone. Truly, no one but Jesus is able to bestow such a gift: the forgiveness of our sins.

Why do I need Jesus? I must bring before you yet another reason why I believe in him.

4. Jesus is the Good Shepherd

At one time or another, everyone feels terribly alone and life seems terribly empty. Then we suddenly realize this: "Something is missing in my life. But what?" Let me tell you. You are lacking the living Saviour!

I have just told you that Jesus died on the cross to atone for our sins. Take note of this verse: "The punishment that brought us peace was upon him." After he had died, they laid him in a tomb which had been cut out of the rock. Then they rolled a heavy slab of stone before the entrance of the sepulchre. And to be absolutely sure, the Roman governor set his seal upon it and posted a squad of Roman soldiers to guard it. I imagine that there were some tough warriors among them who had fought in all the countries of the known world: Gaul, Germania, Asia, Africa. Their bodies were probably badly scarred. On the third day, at dawn, they were all standing about, their shields on their arms, their spears in their right hands and their helmets on their heads. A Roman soldier could be trusted when he was on guard. Now, the Bible says: "An angel of the Lord... rolled back the stone." And Jesus came out of the tomb. It was such a terrifying sight that these tough soldiers fainted. A few hours later, Jesus encountered a poor girl. The Bible says that Jesus had previously cast seven demons out of her. That morning, the girl was in tears. Jesus approached her. But *she* did not faint! On the contrary, her tears turned to joy as she recognized the risen Lord and cried out, "Master!" She was comforted because she knew that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, was living and that he was near her.

You see, it is for that very reason that I, too, am so keen to have Jesus. I need someone who will take me by the hand. Life has dragged me into deep waters. I was thrown into prison by the Nazis because of my faith. There, at times, I thought, "One step further, and you will sink into the darkness of insanity - and you will never be able to escape them." But Jesus drew near to me. And everything came back to normal again. I can testify to that.

I spent one night in prison when it seemed that all of hell had broken loose. There had been an arrival of prisoners who were in transit to a concentration camp. The people had no hope left. Among them were both criminals and innocent people - Jews. On this particular night, it was a Saturday, their hearts were filled with deep despair. Suddenly they all started screaming at the top of their voices. You cannot imagine the scene. An entire building filled with desperate people yelling and banging against the walls and doors of their cells. The guards fired shots at the ceiling and then, running from one cell to another, started lashing out left and right. Sitting in my cell, I said to myself, "It must be like this in hell!" It is difficult to describe such a scene. But at that exact moment, the thought came to me, "Jesus! Surely he is here!" Believe me, I have lived all that I am telling you about. Inside my prison cell, I whispered softly, very softly, "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" And within three minutes, silence was restored.

Do you understand? I cried out to him. No one but Jesus heard it - and the demons had to withdraw. Then, although it was strictly forbidden, I sang in a loud voice:

Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high:
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide,
Oh, receive my soul at last!

All the prisoners heard this song. The guards did not breathe a word, not even when I began to sing the second stanza:

Other refuge have I none
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee;
Leave, oh leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me:
All my trust on Thee is stayed,
All my help from Thee I bring;
Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of Thy wing.

My friends, on that occasion, I was able to experience what it means to have a living Saviour.

I have already alluded to the fact that we must all one day pass through that momentous crisis, death. Someone once reproached me by saying, "You pastors, you are always frightening people by talking to them about death." "I have no need to prompt this kind of fear in anyone," I replied. "We all, by nature, are afraid to die." What a comfort, at the moment of death, to be able to hold the Good Shepherd's hand! But people say - and I believe it is true - "Today, man is less afraid to die than to live. Life is far worse for him than death." I can assure you, however, my friends, that Jesus will also help you to live.

There is another story which I must tell you. I have often used it as an illustration. It is an incredible account, and yet it is true. I got to know an industrialist in the city of Essen. He was one of those people who are always good-humoured. He used to say to me, "Pastor, you are right to encourage young people to live decently. Here is a gift of 100 marks for your work!" But when I would ask him where he stood with regard to the faith, he would quickly reply, "Don't trouble me, Pastor. I've come to my own conclusions about the world!" He was that kind of person: a good man, but as far from God as the east is from the west.

One day, I had to take a wedding, which is not always very pleasant in our big empty churches. The young couple arrived, accompanied by about ten other people. They were lost in that huge church. My cheerful industrialist friend was one of the couple's witnesses. I really felt sorry for the poor man. He was standing there in elegant morning dress, with his top-hat in his hand, totally ignorant about how to behave in church. One could read on his face what he was thinking: "Do I have to kneel? Or cross myself? I just don't know!" I tried to make him feel at ease by taking his hat from him and putting it at the side. We then began to sing a hymn. He hadn't the faintest idea how it went, but at least he pretended to join in with the others! Just picture him. And yet he was perfectly at ease in any fashionable circle.

Then, a very extraordinary thing happened. The bride was a Sunday School teacher, so during the ceremony about thirty young girls, high up in the gallery, began to sing a hymn for her. With their sweet, childish voices, they began the first verse:

Saviour, like a shepherd lead us,
Much we need Thy tend'rest care;
In Thy pleasant pastures feed us...

I glanced at my friend and all of a sudden thought, "What is wrong

with him? Is he going to be ill?" He had broken down. His hands were covering his face, and he was shaking. My first thought was, "Something has happened to him! I must call a doctor quickly." But just then I noticed that he was weeping his heart out. The children continued to sing:

In Thy pleasant pastures feed us,
For our use Thy folds prepare.
We are Thine: do Thou befriend us,
Be the Guardian of our way;
Keep Thy flock, from sin defend us,
Seek us when we go astray.

And there was this man, this great business man, seated in the pew, weeping.

Suddenly I understood what had happened. He must have said to himself, "These children have something that I don't have: a Good Shepherd. I am a poor lonely man, a lost man!"

And you too, whoever you may be, man or woman, you will not get very far if you cannot say with these children: "I am happy to belong to the Lord Jesus' flock, to have him as Saviour and as Shepherd." No, you will not get very far. So why not take that vital decision which will enable you to make these words your own?

Why have I believed in Jesus Christ? Because he is the Good Shepherd, the best Friend, my living Saviour.

Why do I need Jesus? I would like to point out one last reason:

5. Jesus is the Prince of Life

Many years ago, I organized a camp in the forest of Bohemia. After the young people had left, I had to wait a whole day for someone to come and pick me up by car. I spent the night in an old hunting lodge which, in days gone by, had belonged to a king. At the time, its only inhabitant was a forest-ranger. The building was half in ruins. There was no electricity. But there was an immense living room, with a fireplace in which a small fire had been lit. The ranger put an oil lamp on the table and bade me good night. Outside the storm was howling. The rain came pouring down through the fir trees around the house. It was an ideal place for a good mystery story.

Now, just on that particular evening, I had nothing with me to read. And then I discovered a little book on the edge of the

fireplace. I began to glance through it by the glimmer of the oil lamp. Never had I read anything so terrifying. In its pages, a doctor was pouring out his anger against death. Page after page, there were passages like this: "O Death, the worst enemy of the human race! I struggled a whole week to snatch one human life out of your claws and just when I thought I had pulled him through, you stood up at his bedside and seized him with a sneer- and it was all of no use. Heal men as I might, I know that when you arrive with your skeleton hand, the struggle is in vain. O Death, you are a deceiver, an enemy!" He gave vent like this to his implacable hatred of death on every single page.

Then came the worst passage: "O Death, full stop, exclamation mark!" I quote him precisely: "Curse! If only you were just an exclamation mark! But when I gaze at you, you turn into a question mark. And I wonder whether or not you are a full stop! If not, then what? O Death, abominable question mark!"

That's where you can get to! But I can assure you that all is not finished with death. Jesus, who knew all about it, said, "Broad is the road that leads to destruction... and narrow the road that leads to life." Our lot is decided here on earth. That is why I am glad to have a Saviour who gives life here and now - who is life and who leads to life. For this reason I love to preach this message to others.

During the First World War, we fought for weeks near Verdun at the time when one of the worst battles was raging. There were heaps of dead bodies between the two enemy lines. And I have never in all my life been able to drive the sickly smell of those bodies out of my nostrils. Every time I stand at a war memorial, I can smell that stench of Verdun, that reek of dead bodies. And every time I say to myself, "In a hundred years' time, none of us shall be here any longer," that same horrible smell of death makes me gasp. Can't you smell it, too?

But in this mortal world, there is one who rose from the dead! And he says to us, "I live, and you shall live also! Believe in me! Come to me! Turn to me! Enter into my kingdom! And I will lead you to life."

Isn't that marvellous? How can you live in this mortal world without this Saviour who is life and who leads to eternal life?

A few days ago, I read an old letter which Professor Karl Heim had had printed. It was written by a Christian soldier who fell in Russia during the Second World War. The letter reads something like this: "What is happening around us is atrocious. When the Russians fire their rockets, we are panic-stricken. And such cold! And all this snow! It is terrible. But I have no fear! If I were to die, it would be wonderful. In one leap, I would enter into glory. The

turmoil would be over - I would see my Lord face to face and be enshrouded in his brightness. No, I would not mind dying here on the battle-field." And that is exactly what happened to him a short time later. I could not help but think, when I read this letter, what an amazing thing it was that a young man hadn 't the least fear of dying simply because he knew Jesus.

Yes, Jesus is the Prince of Life. And he gives to his own the assurance of eternal life.

On the annual Church Day in Leipzig one year, there was a reception at the Town Hall. All the important people of the city and the dignitaries of the Church were gathered there together. The speeches were as non-committal as possible to avoid stepping on one another's toes. Heinrich Giesen, who was at the time general-secretary of the Church Day, was to bring the ceremony to a close. I can still see him standing up and saying, "You ask us, gentlemen, what kind of people we are? I shall tell you in one short sentence. We are people who pray: 'My Lord, make me holy so that I may go to heaven!'" Then he sat down. It was startling indeed to see how such a simple declaration had deeply upset those who were present.

Years ago, a Christian poet wrote this prayer:

Oh, let me see Thy footmarks,
And in them plant mine own;
My hope to follow duly
Is in Thy strength alone.
Oh, guide me, call me, draw me,
Uphold me to the end;
And then in heaven receive me,
My Saviour and my Friend!

My desire is that you, too, may in this way continue your journey through this world.

Why do you need Jesus? Because everything, absolutely everything, depends on your relationship with him!

What is life all about?

Everything revolves around this question: What is life all about? What is the meaning of my life?

I received a phone call one day from a industrial tycoon of the city of Essen. He was very upset. "Pastor, please come right away!" In a flash I was on my way and when I arrived was greeted with these words, "My son has killed himself!"

I knew this young man. He was a student. He had everything one could wish for in life: he was young, rich and handsome, in perfect health, had his own car, and had never been mixed up in any shady business. And it was this young man who had just put a bullet through his head! He left these few lines to explain his act: "I have no reason to continue living any longer. So I am putting an end to my life. It has no meaning whatsoever." Isn't this a staggering declaration?

The question as to what life is all about is of great importance. It is all the more important because we have only one life to live. Have you ever thought of the personal consequences of this fact? Only one life to live!

When I was a school boy, I was not very good in arithmetic. My teacher couldn't understand my way of finding the solution to problems. When I had finished my homework, he would mark my exercise-book with red ink to show how little he appreciated my talent for finding wrong answers. When an exercise-book was completely covered in red, I would throw it away, sometimes even before it was full. Then I would buy another one. This one would be nice and new... and clean! So I could begin afresh.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could do this with our lives? Believe me, millions of human beings at death's door have had to confess, "If only I could start all over again! I would do things altogether differently." We can buy a new exercise-book and start all over again, but we cannot do so with our lives. *We have only one life to live.* How terrible to spoil it by using it in the wrong way. We have only one life to live. If we have lost it, we have lost it for eternity. What I have to say must be taken seriously. It is a matter of life and death!

This morning a large herd of cows passed by the hotel where I

am staying. I thought, "Those cows are lucky. They don't have to ask why they're in this world. For them it's clear: they're here to give milk and when they can't give any more, they provide meat." Do you understand what I mean? An animal does not have to question what life is all about. That is the difference between man and animal. Unfortunately, large numbers of people live - and die - without having ever asked themselves, "What is the real purpose of my life?" There is no difference between them and animals. A man will never be a real man until he has asked himself, "What is life all about? Why am I a man? What is the purpose of my life?"

1. Superficial and thoughtless answers

What is the purpose of my life? A whole series of superficial and thoughtless answers can be given to this question. Many years ago, I heard them all at the same time. It was in 1936 during the Third Reich. Some students from Münster, in Westphalia, had asked me to come and hold a discussion group with them on the theme: *What is the purpose of my life?* They made it clear to me from the start that they did not want a sermon but an open discussion on the subject. "All right," I said to them, "I'll let you begin. What is the purpose of our life? Why are we on earth?"

As the Nazis were in power at the time of this meeting, it was natural that one young man should stand up and declare, "I live for my people. It's a bit like the leaf and the tree. The leaf is nothing, the tree is everything. I live for my people."

"That may be so," I answered him, "but tell me: why is the tree there, for what purpose does *it* exist? And the people, why do *they* exist?" Silence. He didn't have the answer to that! Instead of solving the problem, he had only put it off. So I said to them, "My friends, you are dodging the question with answers like that!"

"What is the meaning of life? Why are we here on earth?" I asked again. Another student declared, "I live to do my duty." To this I replied, "That's the root of the problem. Just what is my duty? I, myself, am convinced that my duty is to preach the Word of God to you. Mathilda Ludendorff thinks that her duty is to deny the very existence of God. So, what is duty?"

A high government official said to me one day, "Pastor, just between you and me, I do nothing but sign papers from morning till night. But I know that if all these papers should happen to burn one day, the world would carry on. It really bothers me to have to devote my time and energy to such a senseless job."

Just what is duty? Under the Third Reich, thousands of SS men assassinated hundreds of thousands of human beings. And when they were put on trial, they all said, "We only did our duty. We had received orders." Do you think it is a man's duty to assassinate his fellow-beings? I cannot accept this myself.

I then said to these students, "That is the root of the matter. What is duty? Who can tell me? Here we are at a dead-end again!"

The young people looked thoughtful. Then one of them got up and proudly boasted, "I am a member of an old aristocratic family. I can trace my genealogy back to the sixteenth century. My ancestors were nobles of the purest stock. Isn't trying to perpetuate such a noble ancestry enough to fill a whole life?" I could not help but reply, "I'm sorry! But if you don't know what the past generations lived for, then it's not worthwhile producing another one!"

Numerous superficial and thoughtless answers to our question obviously can be found.

Some death announcements in our newspapers begin like this:

So hard through all your life you worked,
Your duty never dreamed to shirk.
Yourself you totally forgot
And 'twas of others that you thought.

These lines always drive me up the wall! I can't help thinking, "Why, that's a horse's obituary!" Am I wrong? A horse can't do anything but work. It seems to me that a human being is not on earth just to slave all his life. That would be very sad indeed. If that is all life is about, then it would be better to commit suicide at the age of ten. "So hard through all your life you worked..." It gives me the shudders! No, that isn't what life is all about either!

Another student said to me in the course of the discussion, "Look, I'm going to be a doctor. And if I can save human lives, isn't that a good reason for living?" I flashed back, "What you say is fine, but if you don't know for what purpose a man is alive, then it's senseless to want to save his life. It would be far better to give him a needle so that he could die right away." Now, don't misinterpret what I have just said! What I mean is that the answer the student doctor gave was not really a solution to our problem - the problem of what life is all about.

Surrounded by all these students, it gave me quite a shock to realize that even well-educated young people today let themselves drift along without knowing just why they are in the world.

You see, when you have gone through what we went through in

Germany -1 just want to mention this in passing - it is tempting to reply, as certain students did back in Münster, "Life has no deep meaning at any rate. It was through mere chance that I was born. So why bother looking for a reason? Let's enjoy life to the full; that's the best thing to do."

This attitude is tempting to the man who suddenly begins to think, "My life is absurd, it is senseless. If my parents hadn't married, I wouldn't have been conceived and I wouldn't have been born. It's by mere chance I exist. In reality, my life is completely absurd." And if this man encounters difficulties in his life, he is just one step away from suicide. The argument goes: Why carry on living? If life is nothing but mere chance and absurdity, then I might as well put an end to it.

Did you know that in West Germany the rate of suicides is higher than the rate of fatal road accidents? Did you know that about 50 % of the victims are young people under thirty? This is the most staggering evidence that our generation has not found out what life is all about.

I have often spoken to people who say, "Life is so senseless. So I'll either spend it enjoying myself or I'll put an end to it by committing suicide." "But," I have asked them, "supposing life does have a meaning after all? Just suppose it *does* have a purpose and you have spent your life as if it didn't have one? What will become of you at the end of your life?"

There is a verse in the Bible which should fill us with fear: "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement." No person can honestly consider his life if he is not acquainted with this biblical truth.

What *is* the purpose of my life? How can I die and face God's judgement if I have failed to see the very meaning of my life?

That is what is at stake.

2. Who can give us an answer?

What is life all about? Who can answer this question? My church? No. My priest or my pastor? No. He is in the same predicament as

I am. Scientists? Philosophers? They, too, are incapable of answering our question. Only one can tell us. We owe our very existence to him. He is the one who created us: *God*.

I'm going to use a rather silly illustration. Suppose one day I go into an apartment and find a boy sitting there, tinkering with some wire and light bulbs. "Tell me," I say, "what kind of infernal machine

are you making? What will it turn out to be in the end?" He tries to explain it all to me, but I have to admit I don't understand a thing. And inwardly I think, "No one can guess what it will be. Only the inventor can know what it's for and how it should be used."

It is the same with our lives. Only the one who created us can tell why he created us. In other words, it is only by revelation that we receive an answer to our question: What is life all about? God must give it to us.

If I were not already a diligent reader of the Bible, this question in itself would force me to read it. Personally, I would find it unbearable not to know why I am in this cursed world. Does the expression "cursed world" seem too strong to you? It is found in the Bible. On the other hand, you only have to spend six months with a pastor in one of our big cities to understand what I mean when I claim that the world is under a terrible curse. I couldn't endure living if I didn't know the answer given through God's revelation.

Yes, God does answer our question as to what life is all about. He does so in the Bible. And that's why the Bible is so important. I know people who take on an air of superiority and say, "But we don't read the Bible!" To them I can only say, "Then as far as I can see, you've never really given serious thought to the question of what life is all about." Stupidity is a widespread disease and if it were painful, the whole world would resound with shrieks of pain.

I shall sum up the Bible's answer in one sentence: God created us so that we might become his children. As a father likes to see himself in his son, so God made man "in his image". God wants us to become his children, children who will speak with him and with whom he will speak; children who will love him and whom he will love. Do you ever pray? It is a terrible thing for a father if his son hasn't spoken to him for years. And if a man does not pray, then he does not speak with his heavenly Father. Yes, God would like us to be his children: children who speak with him, who love him and whom he can love. That is the meaning of our existence. I am not talking about the Church, about doctrine, or about religion. I am talking about the living God!

God created you so that you might become his child. Are you his child?

I must go one step further. We have to *become* God's children. We are not born God's children. Right at the very beginning of the Bible, it says: "God created man in his own image." It then goes on to give an account of a great disaster: God had created man a free being, with the power to choose between good and evil. But man chose to be against God. He ate the forbidden fruit. That was his

way of saying to God, "I want to be independent. I can get along without you." Adam didn't doubt the existence of God. He only wanted to escape from his authority. "I want to do my own thing!"

The other day a man stopped me in the street. "You talk about God all the time," he said to me. "But I can't see God. Tell me how to find him." I replied, "Listen very carefully to what I am going to say. Just suppose there's a machine which could take me back in time. Suppose that I went right back to the beginning of human history and that one evening I am strolling in the garden of God. (You probably know the story of the Fall.) Well, there I meet Adam, the first man. 'Good evening, Adam,' I say. 'Good evening, Pastor Busch,' he replies. Then I explain how I got to the Garden of Eden. 'You seem thoughtful,' says Adam. 'What are you thinking about?' I answer, 'Oh, I was just thinking about a question a man asked me recently: How can I find God?' Adam burst out laughing. 'How to *find* God is not the real problem. He is here. Be honest. What is really preoccupying you all is how you can get *rid* of him! But you can't get rid of him. That's the big problem!'"

Could Adam be right? God is here. We can find him. But we cannot get rid of him.

When I think of the evolution of human thought through the past three centuries, I can see that we have tried everything to free ourselves from God. But we have not succeeded. In reality we all believe that God exists, but we simply don't want to have to bother with him. We just copy everyone else: we leave the question of God unanswered. We do not deny the existence of God, but we do not want to be bothered with him. We would not describe ourselves as his enemies, but neither are we his friends.

The biggest problem in life still remains to be resolved.

A Swiss doctor claims in one of his books that if a man does not resolve the important question of life, he will suffer deep mental and emotional disturbance. He goes on to say, "We Westerners, we are suffering from a lack of God. We do not deny his existence, but we have no relationship with him. We don't want to have anything to do with him and that is why we are suffering from a lack of God." I share his opinion.

Almost everywhere I hear people say, "Modern man is not interested in God." I can only reply, "Modern man's condition is very serious. I, too, am a modern man but I am interested in God. I don't believe I'm old-fashioned because of that! It's a very alarming fact that people today don't take the matter of salvation a bit seriously."

I shall use a rather simple illustration once again. Try to picture

an apprentice-cook. One day I hear the head cook say, "That boy is not at all interested in cooking!" So I ask, "Well, what is he interested in then?" He answers, "In pop music and girls!" "You should bring yourself down to his level," I say, "and from now on talk to him only about pop music and girls!" "Not on your life!" retorts the chef. "If that boy isn't interested in cooking, then he has missed his vocation."

Can you see the point I want to make? Our vocation is to become children of God. When modern man shows no interest in this, then he has missed his vocation as a man. Under these circumstances it is useless to discuss all kinds of possible *or* impossible things with him, even if the subject interests him. He must be told over and over again: "You will begin to be a real man only when you have become a child of the living God."

3. God's answer

I want to repeat that we are not born children of God, but that the purpose of life is to *become* children of God. Something, then, has to happen to us.

Think seriously about all this.

We must face it: we are not children of God, we do not love God, we break his commandments, we do not care a bit about him, we do not pray-though in emergencies we may ring the alarm bell! So it is vital for us to know the answer to the biggest question of all: How can I become a child of the living God?

Some people would say, "By being good." Others, "By believing in God." But all that is not enough!

Our question has not been answered.

How do I become a child of the living God?

The answer to this supremely important question can be received only by revelation. That means that God himself must tell me how I can become his child. No man - not even a pastor- can make it up. Now the Bible gives a very clear answer. Here it is: only through Jesus! Yes, to become a child of God, I must approach God through Jesus.

There is a verse in the Bible which, when translated word for word, reads like this: "Jesus came from the world of God into this world." Nowadays we repeatedly hear that the Bible is based on an outdated view of the world. What a mistake! It tells us vital things about God and about ourselves. It tells us that God is present everywhere. Even if I were to hide in the depths of the earth, God

would be there. The Bible holds what we call in modern language a multi-dimensional view of the world. We live in a three-dimensional world. There is length, height and depth. But other dimensions exist. And God is in another dimension. He is very near, within hand reach. He accompanies us. He sees us when we wander astray. But it is impossible for us to tear down the barrier separating us from this other dimension. Only God is able to do this. And he tore it down by coming to us in the person of Jesus.

Another verse in the New Testament, when translated literally, says this of Jesus: "He came to that which was his own," - and indeed the world does belong to him - "but his own did not receive him." Here we have the whole history of the Gospel right up to our day. Jesus comes and man refuses to let him in. "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." From a human standpoint, this is a dead end and should put an end to God's relations with man. But - how astonishing - the story does not stop there! "Yet to all who received him... he gave the right to become the children of God." It is by receiving Jesus, then, that we become children of God.

Have you as yet opened the door of your life to him? "To all who received him... he gave the right to become the children of God."

During the First World War I was a young officer and was living far from God. Yet it was at that particular period of my life that I opened my heart to Jesus and let him in. This experience completely changed my existence. I have never had the least regret since. Though, to follow Jesus I have had to tread many difficult paths. I have been in prison. And on numerous occasions I have been in distress. But even if I had a hundred lives to live, as soon as I had the faculties to think straight, I would each time cling to this verse: "To all who received him... he gave the right to become the children of God." Why? Because from the instant I become a child of God, my life takes on meaning. It makes no difference who I am: whether I be a pastor or street cleaner, manager or locksmith, housewife or school teacher, my life takes on meaning only from the moment I become a child of God.

Yes, you ought to let Jesus into your life. Only then will it have true purpose.

It is interesting to study the characters of the New Testament in this light. Take Mary Magdalene. Her life had absolutely no meaning at all. It is said of her - the only allusion to her past - that she was possessed by seven evil spirits. (I personally know some people who are possessed by a good many more than seven evil spirits.) It must have been terrible: a life dominated by the senses, a

life of slavery. The poor woman must have suffered a lot leading such a senseless existence. And then one day, Jesus, the Saviour, the Son of God, entered into her life and drove the evil spirits away. He can do it and he did it! From that hour, Mary belonged to Jesus. At last her life had purpose. But the day came when Mary Magdalene witnessed the crucifixion and death of Jesus. On that day a sudden fear came over her - a fear that her past life would begin all over again. On the morning of the third day after the crucifixion, she was on her knees, weeping, in the garden where Jesus had been buried in a rock tomb. She had come to the tomb and had found it empty. The stone had been rolled away and there was no trace of Jesus' body. That is why she was weeping.

I can understand her perfectly. For if I lost Jesus, it would lead me also to the depths of a meaningless existence. Yes, I can understand her. "The Lord is gone! My life has no meaning any longer."

But then she suddenly heard a voice behind her, "Mary!" She turned around and saw the risen Jesus there before her. The tears of despair flowing down her cheeks were changed into tears of joy. And a cry sprung up from the depths of her soul, "Rabboni! Master!"

This woman's story is confirmation that we do not need the great theories of philosophy to find the answer to the problem of what life is all about. Even the least educated man knows for a fact that his life has no meaning. And he too wonders, "What is the purpose of my life?" Does he want an answer to that question? He has only to accept Jesus. Then, like her, he will become a child of God. And his life, like Mary's, will be lived from then on in the light of a deep, exciting plan, God's plan.

My friend, I urge you to accept Jesus too. He is waiting for you. Talk to him. He is very near to you. All you have to say is, "Lord Jesus, my life has no meaning. Come to me."

When I accept Jesus, a real revolution begins in my life. I reap all the benefits of the death of Jesus: his death deals a finishing blow to my past life; I am also raised up with him and live a new life, the life of a child of God; he gives me his Spirit who changes my desires and even my way of thinking. Accept Jesus, and you will know about these things by experience.

Yes, it's true; the man who accepts Jesus begins a completely new life. Becoming a child of God means that not only our way of thinking changes, but also our entire way of living.

In the last century, a shoemaker by the name of Rahlenbeck lived in Westphalia. People had nicknamed him the "Pietistic Preacher" because of his eagerness to follow Jesus. He was a

man of great spiritual insight, a man blessed by God. A young pastor came to visit him one day. "Pastor," Rahlenbeck said to him, "your theological studies don't guarantee salvation. You must accept Jesus!" The young pastor replied, "I do have Jesus. His picture is hanging on the wall in my study." Old Rahlenbeck answered back, "Jesus is very still and peaceful on your study wall. But if you let him into your life, then there'll be lots of noise!"

I hope there will be lots of noise in your life. I hope you will be able to put a cross on your past and praise your heavenly Father for making you his child, for giving purpose to your life, and for enabling you from now on to honour him in word, thought, and deed.

Have you understood that this is not a religious craze I am talking about or the personal opinion of a pastor, but a question of life and death, of eternal life and eternal damnation?

The Lord Jesus says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in." He says this to you too.

One day an old miner came to find me, and he said, "Pastor, I must talk to you." He was well over seventy. "I attended an evangelistic meeting when I was seventeen. There I felt that Jesus was knocking at the door. But I thought, 'I bet all my friends will make fun of me if I take these things seriously and accept Jesus! No, I just can't do it!' And I ran out." He concluded, "Here I am at the end of my life. I'm old and I realize that my life is a failure. It's a failure because on that particular occasion I didn't open the door to Jesus."

We have only one life to live! For this very reason our question - What is life all about? - is of prime importance. God has given a clear, plain answer to it. The answer is in Jesus, the Crucified and Risen One.

This Jesus is standing now at your door. He is knocking. Open up your life to him.

You will never regret it!

Beware - Danger ahead!

As I was driving along the motorway at high speed a few hours ago, the theme of my talk kept running through my mind: Beware - Danger ahead!

You know as well as I do that in our generation people don't usually die in their beds at a ripe old age. Nowadays we die in accidents or from a heart-attack. In the old days, people would live to the ripe age of ninety, then they would lie down and die. But today things are different. An airplane crashes; there are many victims. A bus misses a curve in the road and goes crashing down the hill-side; there are at least forty killed. An explosion occurs in a factory; there are more deaths. In the depths of the coal mines there are always men losing their lives. And two world wars have broken out in the space of thirty years. The First World War claimed two million victims. The Second World War claimed five million in Germany alone. We are literally surrounded by danger. When I turn these things over coolly in my mind, I often think, "The chances of my dying peacefully in bed are really slim."

Try to imagine for a moment that you are going to have a fatal accident tonight at ten o'clock. It could happen. Where would you be at eleven o'clock? What would happen to you? Have you ever thought about that?

1. A serious situation

My grandfather, who was an excellent story-teller, used to tell me an interesting tale. A young man went one day to visit his elderly uncle. He said, "Uncle, you can congratulate me. I just passed my 'A' levels." "That's great!" answered his uncle. "Here's some money. Go and buy yourself something you'd like. But now, tell me, what are your plans for the future?" "To start with," answered the young man, "I'm going to continue my studies. I want to go to Law School." "Fine," said his uncle, "and after that?" "Well, after that, I'd like to get some experience at the County Court." "Fine," said his uncle, "and after that?" "After that, I shall be Assessor at the Court of Appeal." "Fine," said his uncle, "and after that?" "Well,

after that, Uncle, I'll get married and raise a family." "Fine," said his uncle, "and after that?" "I hope to become influential - a judge at the Court of Appeal, perhaps, or a Public Prosecutor." "That's fine," said his uncle, "and after that?" The young man was beginning to get annoyed, but he answered, "I guess by then old age will be creeping on and I'll have to retire." "Fine," said his uncle, "and after that?" "When I retire, I'll settle down in some beautiful part of the country, build myself a house and grow strawberries!" "Fine," said his uncle, "and after that?" By then, the nephew was fuming. "After that, some day I'll die!" "Is that so?" asked his uncle, "and what then?" The young man wasn't laughing any more. He was panic-stricken. The old uncle insisted, "And after that?" "Uncle, I've never really thought about it." "What," exclaimed the old man, "you've just passed your 'A' levels and yet you're not intelligent enough to see further than the tip of your nose? Shouldn't a boy to whom God has given a sound mind have a little more foresight than that? *What will happen after that?*" The young man replied hastily, "But, Uncle, nobody knows what happens after death!" "You're wrong, my lad," said the old man. "There's one person who knows exactly what happens after death. It is Jesus. And Jesus said: 'Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life.' After death comes the judgement of God. People are either lost or they are saved."

Making plans for your life up to the grave is not enough. You have to plan for what happens beyond the grave as well.

When I was in youth work, I often said to my young friends, "If I had a pair of shoes that needed mending, I wouldn't go to a service station. Mechanics are nice people, but they don't know anything about repairing shoes. I would take my shoes to the shoe-repairer. If, on the other hand, I had car trouble, I wouldn't get it fixed by a shoe-repairer but by a car mechanic. If I wanted to buy some buns, I wouldn't go to the butcher or to the grocer. They are all very nice people, but they don't know anything about baking buns. If I had a longing for buns, I would go to the baker's. If my water-pipe was leaking, then I'd go and get the plumber. In other words, I'd look up someone in the right trade.

"But when it comes to finding out what happens after death, we listen to every Tom, Dick and Harry; or we rely on our own vague mixed-up ideas. Shouldn't we for this matter, more than for any other, ask a specialist? Where can we find a specialist? There is only one. He is the Son of God who came from heaven and who went to the realm of the dead. He died on the cross, but he came

back to life. He knows all the facts about the hereafter. And he tells us: 'You can go to hell or you can go to heaven.'

"Even if twenty-five professors were to prove to me by logic that there is nothing after death, I would say to them, 'I'm sorry, but in spite of your university degrees, you are not experts on the subject; for the simple reason that you have never been to the other world. But I know someone who has been there: Jesus. And *he* has a totally different opinion from yours.'"

People today act as though death were final. They also seem to think that we will automatically go to heaven if we have been baptized and buried by a priest. If only I could convince you that you are in great danger! Hell will be crowded with people who were baptized and buried by the clergy. Sooner or later each one of us must appear before the tribunal of God.

I have to admit that it was the thought of the coming judgement that compelled me to become a Christian. During the First World War, I was a young officer in the German army. Our regiment had suffered heavy losses. I was just like any other officer, neither better nor worse. If someone had told me then, "You'll be a preacher one day", I would have burst out laughing. At the time I was living far away from God. One day my father asked me, "Don't you believe in God?" "I'm not silly enough to deny the existence of God," I answered. "You have to have a good dose of stupidity to be an atheist. But," I added, "so far I haven't met God personally, so he simply doesn't interest me."

A short time after this conversation with my father - it was during the German offensive in France - I was sitting beside a friend of mine, a young lieutenant like myself, in a trench near Verdun. We were waiting for orders to attack. To kill time, we started telling some dirty stories. (Everyone who has been in the army will know exactly what I mean.) I had just finished telling one of my barrack-room jokes when, to my amazement, I realized that my buddy hadn't laughed. "Kutscher," I said, "hey, Kutscher, didn't you find that one funny?" Just then he fell heavily on his side. He was dead! A tiny piece of shrapnel had hit him and lodged deeply in his heart. And there was I, a young boy in my eighteenth year, standing over the dead body of my friend.

It didn't really affect me at first. Jokingly I said, "Look here, old boy, what's the big idea of beating it like this before I've even finished telling my joke?" But a second later I was wondering: "Where is he now?" I can still see myself in that trench at the instant this truth dawned on me like a blinding light, more brilliant than the flash of a nuclear explosion: "He is standing before the holy God."

Then another idea seized me: "If I'd been sitting where he was, it would have been me who was hit - and right now I would be standing before Almighty God."

Not standing before just any old God, but before the God who has revealed his will and given laws which I had broken, everyone! I knew then that I had broken all of God's laws and that if I were shot I would immediately appear in the presence of God. And there wasn't the shadow of a doubt in my mind that I was bound for hell.

The arrival of our boys with the horses put a stop to my meditations. "Quick march!" came the order. I mounted. But before leaving my dead friend, I did a thing I hadn't done in years: *I prayed*. "Oh God," I cried, "please don't let me die on the battle-field before I'm sure that I won't go to hell!"

A little later I went to see the chaplain. I asked him, "Chaplain, what must I do so that I don't go to hell?" His answer was: "Lieutenant, what counts right now is to win, to win, to win!" I exclaimed, "You don't even know yourself!"

Isn't it staggering to think that thousands of young men were going to die within the next few weeks without anyone being able to tell them how to be saved? And yet we lived in a supposedly Christian country!

I probably would have become very desperate if one day a New Testament hadn't come into my possession. I can still see the place where I was staying that day: it was at a farm in France behind the front. "A New Testament!" I thought. "If I read it, I could probably find out what to do not to be damned." But as the New Testament was not familiar to me, I started reading it at random: a little here, a little there. Then my eyes fell on this verse: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." It struck me like lightning. *A sinner*. That's exactly what I was! No one had to convince me of that. *I was a sinner!* This was very clear to me. And I wanted badly to be "saved". But I didn't understand exactly what this meant. I had at least understood that to be "saved" meant getting out of the state I was in and making peace with God. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." If Jesus could really do that, then I had to find him at all costs!

This went on for weeks. I looked for someone who could help me find Jesus; but I found no one.

Then I did something I wish all of you would do. Although a new offensive was on, I went off by myself one day and hid in an old French farm-house. It was largely in ruins and had been evacuated. One room, however, was still undamaged. The key was in the door. So I went in and locked the door from the inside. Then I fell on

my knees and prayed: "Lord Jesus! In the Bible it is written that you were sent by God 'to save sinners'. I am one of those sinners. I can't make you any promises for the future, because I have such a bad character. But I don't want to go to hell if I get shot. That's why, Lord Jesus, I want to commit my whole life to you. Do what you want with me!"

There was no magic click. Nothing special happened. But when I came out of that room, I had found a master, a master to whom I have belonged ever since.

As the days went by, I began to understand that the world is living under a great threat. People are in danger of death. Men and women go through life without ever seeking forgiveness for their sins. What about your sins? Are you certain that they have been forgiven? No? Then how can you ever hope to stand when you come to trial in God's tribunal?

People go through life without ever knowing the peace of God. People go through life without ever putting their lives straight with God. They wear a thin varnish of Christianity, but underneath is a miserable heart without peace, because it has never been changed a scrap.

God doesn't want anyone to go to hell. The Bible says: "God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." That is why he sent his Son. But in order to be saved we have to take a step towards Jesus. We have to *belong* to him.

Beware - Danger ahead! We are heading towards the judgement of God.

There used to be a very nice boy in my youth group. For a time he came to our Bible study regularly. This was under Hitler's regime. And then one day the authorities forced him to follow a Nazi indoctrination course. He broke with the youth group then. I lost touch with him for a long time; then suddenly one day I bumped into him. "Hello there, Günther!" I said. "Heil Hitler," was the reply. "Günther," I said, "how are you? We haven't seen you for a long time!" He straightened up and answered, "My motto is: 'Do your duty, come what may!' And if sometimes I do happen to fall short of my duty, and if there really is a God, then I'll be honest enough to admit my faults to him. But I don't need a scape-goat, like Jesus, to die in my stead."

In my mind's eye I can see the millions of men and women who think like that. They boast, "My motto is: 'Do your duty, come what may', and as for the rest, I'll manage to explain things to God!" Not for anything would I want to come before God's judgement with only the words "I have done my duty". I know that I am heading for

a sure condemnation if I stand on that ground. You can count on this: the day will come when every one of us must give account of himself to God.

The great sculptor Ernst Barlach also wrote a play entitled, *Boll the Drunkard*. The leading character, Boll, was a landowner. He was always a bit tipsy. One day, after a good meal and a good drink, he walked to the village square at an hour when the sun was at its highest. And there he suddenly found himself standing in front of the village church. On the church doors were sculptures representing four cherubim blowing their trumpets. As Boll looked at them, he had the curious impression that they had suddenly come to life and were announcing the Last Judgement: "The hour has come for all humans to appear before the tribunal of God." Barlach wrote these words: "You dead, come out of your graves! Don't try to invoke the decomposition of your bodies as an excuse! No! Come out!" Boll the drunkard had begun to understand. "I can't escape God. I'll have to appear before him in all my misery some day."

Deep inside we all know that we can't get very far with our self-righteousness. God's judgement is close at hand. On that day all our good works will melt like snow under the rays of the sun.

I know that people don't want to hear this sort of thing nowadays. When I declare that if we don't turn to Jesus we will go to hell, people just smile and say, "What? To hell? That's a medieval idea. Hell doesn't even exist!"

That kind of statement always reminds me of an experience I had during the last war. I had to make a call, so I started out; but on the way I was surprised by an air-raid. I ran into the nearest air-raid shelter and stayed there until the alert was over. Then I continued on my way until I finally got to the district where I had to make my call. None of the homes were damaged. And yet I had the impression that the area was totally abandoned. There wasn't a cat in sight! "You must be dreaming," I thought. "It isn't possible! The houses are undamaged and yet everyone has gone." A few minutes later I happened to meet the head of the area's civil defence. So I asked him, "Why has everyone gone?" By way of explanation, he took me by the arm and led me inside one of the houses. He took me up to one of the windows which looked out on the back. From there I could see that the houses encircled a lawn. And right in the middle of the lawn was a huge bomb, about the size of a steam locomotive's boiler! "It hasn't blown up yet?" I asked. "No," he answered, "it's a delayed-action bomb." These were the most treacherous bombs. They did not explode when they hit the

ground, but five or even as many as twenty hours later. Usually these bombs would explode when the people had come out of the shelters. "Everybody here has run away," explained the man. "Can you hear it ticking?" We could easily detect the noise of the detonator's timer. The bomb could explode at any moment! "Come," said the civil defence man, "we had better not stay here any longer." We went back a few steps where we would at least be sheltered if the bomb exploded. Just then I saw a very unusual sight. A flock of sparrows flew down and landed softly on the bomb! One of them flew to the head of the bomb and sat right on the detonator. I shouted, "Look out, you sparrows, you are flirting with death!" But it seemed as though the whole flock was chirping in reply to my warning, "Ha, ha, we know what it's all about! Who in our day still believes in bombs? There isn't the slightest danger!"

People today show just as much stupidity when they laugh at the peril that is threatening them. God has already spoken very seriously to all nations by his Word and by the judgements which have fallen upon them.

The Son of God came, he was crucified and rose again from the dead. Everyone, then, should understand that God is real and that he is holy. But when a man stands up and says to people, "Beware - Danger ahead! Think about saving your souls," they just laugh and say, "Ha, ha, who believes in that nonsense nowadays?"

Even God makes some ironical remarks at times. The Bible refers only once to atheism, in this single sentence: "*The fool* has said in his heart, There is no God!" With the Bible's outlook on life, what else could be said?

2. To the rescue

God struck the world once before with a terrible judgement. Only one man and his family were saved that time. His name was Noah. God gave him instructions to build an ark before the disaster began. Just before the terrible cataclysm broke out, he ordered Noah to board the ark with his entire family. And when every member of the family was inside, God himself shut the door behind them.

The world is going on its way to meet God's just judgement. But there is an ark to rescue us: it is the grace which is offered to us in Jesus Christ. He came from God's world into our world of misery. He died for us on the cross. If God allowed his Son to die such a horrible death, the salvation which he acquired for us through his

death must be great enough to save even the worst of sinners. Jesus rose from the dead and he calls us to him by the Holy Spirit. *Jesus is the ark of salvation.*

As God said of old to Noah, "Enter into the ark, you and your house!" he is now urging you by my words to get under the shelter of the grace of Jesus Christ. Take that step towards making peace with God. Let go of everything that is holding you back. Say to your Saviour, "A very great sinner is coming to you." Lay down your sins at the foot of the cross. Believe that Jesus' blood was shed for you personally and tell him, "Lord, I put my whole life into your hands." That is what it means to enter into the ark.

Beware - Danger ahead!

So many of us are heading towards God's judgement without salvation, without protection. Yet God's grace is so great we can take hold of it at any time. *Believing* means to step out of the sphere of God's judgement into the sphere of the grace of Jesus Christ. Taking this step is not child's play. But it saves us from danger, from the danger of death.

Albert Hoffmann, the well-known pioneer of missionary work in New Guinea, told me a story that I have never forgotten. I had said to him, "Brother Hoffmann, I find it a real struggle to live the Christian life. It's no joke, even for a pastor, to belong to Jesus Christ in a world like ours."

"I'd like to tell you about an experience I had," he said. "It was our custom in New Guinea to give some instruction in the Christian faith to the Papous who wanted to become Christians. This helped them to get to know Jesus better. Then on a chosen Sunday they would be baptized. It was always an occasion for a great feast. Many pagans attended each time. A great bonfire would be lit. The candidates for baptism would approach, carrying in their arms all their paraphernalia for fetish worship: objects of magic, statuettes, and amulets. When they came up to the bonfire they would throw all these relics of their former life into the flames.

"One evening, I watched a young native woman approaching the fire, her arms burdened with statuettes and amulets. But when the decisive moment came for her to throw them away, she couldn't do it. She must have thought, 'All this is part and parcel of my ancestors' way of life. My entire past is rooted in them. I can't possibly deny my heritage.' She took a step back. But at the same time another idea must have taken hold of her: 'In that case, I can't belong to Jesus.' So she took three steps forward, but a second later, feeling absolutely incapable of being separated from these objects, she went back three steps again. I went up to her," said the

missionary, "and I said to her, 'It's too difficult for you! Perhaps you should think the matter over a little longer. You can be baptized at the next baptismal service.' The woman thought a moment, then moving forward quickly, she threw her fetishes into the fire and fainted."

I shall never forget what this missionary said, his face all wrinkled as though sculptured in wood, as he finished his tale, "I am sure that only those who have experienced an authentic conversion can understand this woman's struggle."

My friends, there is just one step between you and the ark. Escape from the danger of death and judgement by throwing yourself into Jesus' arms. This step is not an easy one to take. It demands a total rupture with the past. Nothing less!

Have I been clear enough?

I am always upset to see how many people continue on their way to everlasting damnation in spite of the warnings they have received. God does not want this. He wants you to be saved. And that is why he sent his Son to pay the penalty for your sins. All you have to do now is to recognize your guilt and to accept by faith the work of salvation that Jesus has accomplished for you.

I was summoned many times by the Gestapo under the Third Reich. On one occasion, they made me wait in a room where there was nothing but rows of pigeon-holes filled with all kinds of records. A tab was sticking out of each file and on each tab there was a name, such as: "Karl Meier" or "Friedrich Schultze". During that unending wait, surrounded by all those records, I thanked God that I wouldn't have to spend my whole life in their company. But as I was getting bored I started to read the names on the tabs. "Karl Meier" on one; "Friedrich Schultze" on another. Suddenly I read: "Wilhelm Busch". So I had a record of my own! As if by magic, the files didn't seem the least boring any more. My personal record was there on one of those shelves! Burning with curiosity, I was tempted to take it down and have a look at what those people had written about me. But I didn't dare take such a risk. Still, I literally trembled at the thought: "My record is up there!"

There was a period in my life when nothing bored me more than Christianity. I was a lot more interested in having my beer-mug filled up. Then one day, for the first time, I saw the cross of Jesus for what it really was: it had something to do with my record. It had something to do with my guilt and my salvation. Since that day the cross of Jesus is of the greatest interest to me.

Jesus is indeed the great Rescuer.

3. From death to life

Let's look at this from another angle. When this subject was trotting through my mind (Beware! You are in mortal danger! Stop! Turn around and go back! Search for your Saviour!), this thought suddenly came to me: only a person who is alive can be in danger of death.

Do you see what I am trying to get at?

You are in danger of never really finding life. You are in danger of going through life as a dead man and finally of being rejected as a dead man. The danger facing you is that you may totally miss out on life. The Bible states very clearly: "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

Not too long ago I met a single lady from Berlin who teaches languages. "Excuse me, Miss," I said to her, "maybe a pastor has the right to be rude now and then! Tell me, how old are you?" As a rule, asking a lady her age is not the thing to do; but an old pastor can take this liberty occasionally. Without hesitation she answered, "Eight years old... !" "Wait a minute," I said, surprised, "eight years old? You teach three languages, and yet you are only eight years old?" She started to laugh, then explained, "Eight years ago I came to know Jesus Christ." I was amazed. "That's a funny way to put it!" I said. She quoted the verse: "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." She went on, "In the past, I didn't have a Saviour; I wasn't really living. I was satisfied with making a lot of money and having a good time, but that was not living!"

Isn't that a courageous declaration? Truly, the person who has not surrendered his life to Jesus by a deliberate act of the will cannot say he is living. Without Jesus, we do not even know what life is all about. Only a person who has the Son has life.

Many years ago, a young man came to see me. "What brings you here?" I asked. "I really don't know myself!" he replied. "Only I have the feeling that the life I'm leading is no life at all." Astonished, I asked, "What? You have a good job as a locksmith and you are making good money." "But it's no life," he answered back. "No, it's no life at all. On Monday, it's the locksmith's; Tuesday, it's the locksmith's; Wednesday, it's the locksmith's; Thursday, it's the locksmith's; Friday, it's the locksmith's; Saturday, it's football; and Sunday, it's the cinema and girls. It really is no life at all!" "My friend," I said, "you're absolutely right. If you have understood that, you've already come a long way. It *is* no life! Let me tell you, my friend, what it means to live. In my own life, a complete change

came about when Jesus made himself known to me. He became my Saviour; he reconciled me to God. When I understood this, I gave my heart to him. And ever since I have had life."

The young man finally found life too. I saw him again recently in Freiburg. "Well," I said, "how are things now? Are you really living at last?" His face shining with joy, he answered, "Yes, now I am really living!" As a matter of fact, he is a very outgoing Christian. He leads a young people's group and shows other people the way to the one in whom he himself found life - Jesus Christ.

One of my friends owns a business. He was invited recently to the home of a leading industrialist. The man had a beautiful home situated in a magnificent park. There were at least a hundred guests invited. Pressed by the crowd, my friend found himself at one point next to his host, so he said, "Aren't you lucky! You live like a king: you have a beautiful estate, a prosperous factory, a lovely wife and charming children." The man answered, "Yes, that is true, I am very lucky." Then suddenly becoming very serious, he said, "But all the same, don't ask me how things are in here," and with that he pointed to his heart.

When I walk down the street, I often think, "If people were really sincere, they would all stop and shout, 'Don't ask me how things are in here, in my heart!'" They have no peace. Their consciences are accusing them. They feel guilty.

And there is only one person who can heal us. Remember, God sees our misery. We cannot of ourselves go to him. But in his love he came to us in the person of Jesus Christ. That is the amazing message I have to announce to you. "God so loved the world..." I could not have loved the world. I would have beaten everybody with a club; this old world so full of defilement, wickedness and stupidity. Yet God loved it. I am dumb-founded! "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Tell me, could God do anything more than that - deliver up his own Son to death - so that we could have life?

One more story. One evening after a church service, a young man went up to the great English preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, and said, "Pastor, you are right. I, too, need to meet the man of Calvary and to become a child of God. I'll get converted some day." "Some day?" Spurgeon asked. "Yes, but later." "Later? Why not today?" An embarrassed look crossed the young man's face, but he replied, "I certainly do want to be saved and that's why I intend to get converted at some time, but before that I want to enjoy life a little." Spurgeon burst out laughing, then said,

"Young man, you don't have much ambition in life. I wouldn't be satisfied simply with enjoying life *a little*. I want a whole lot more out of life. I want life *in abundance*. In the Bible it says (he showed him the passage): 'Jesus said, I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.'"

God allowed Jesus to die on the cross for poor, lost sinners like you and me, so that here and now we might have life. When I wake up in the morning, I can sing for joy because I am a child of God and because I have found life in him. Yes, Jesus came to give us life down here on earth ; he came to preserve us from God's judgement and to grant us eternal life. When we have accepted these things, we can walk along life's way with joy.

Just one last illustration. It is a November evening. Wet snow is falling. Two men are walking along a road. The first one has no rain-coat, but his jacket collar is turned up. He doesn't seem to care about being soaked through. It matters little to him where he goes. He could go here, he could go there - it's of no importance - he is homeless. This is the way most people trudge through life. They have no goal in life.

What about you? Where are you going?

The German atheist and philosopher Nietzsche wrote these words in one of his poems: "Woe to the man who has no home!" Do you have an eternal home?

Now for the second man walking along the road. He has to face the same storm, the same mud, the same rain, the same snow. But he is whistling a tune and his step is lively. Why? Because shining in the distance he sees the lights of his home. There he will find warmth. There he will laugh at the hardships of the road. This, my friends, is the way people who have committed their lives to Jesus Christ and have found life in him go through the world.

God said to Noah: "Go into the ark." I urge you to look for some quiet spot. Jesus will be there. Have a little talk with him and tell him everything that is on your mind. Someone asked me once, "May I have a talk with you, please?" But I answered, "What's the use? It's not with me, but directly with Jesus that people should be talking!"

And that is exactly what you, too, should do!

What should you do?

In one of the many letters sent to me, I was asked the following question: "Do you proclaim your own views in your sermons or simply the doctrines of your church?" In my reply I wrote: "I preach the message of the Bible." And for my readers I add: You will be quickly frustrated if you only listen to the opinions of Pastor Busch. They will not be much use to you. What you need is to listen to the voice of Jesus, the voice of the Good Shepherd. My role is to help others, with the feeble means I have, to hear the voice of the Shepherd of our souls.
What should you do?

1. Put an end to your unbelief

Over many years of ministry in large cities, I have heard all sorts of arguments against the Bible's message. I have seen so much unbelief that I must urge you at the outset - because the salvation of your soul is at stake - to put an end to your attitude of unbelief. For part of the last war, besides my work among young people, I was in charge of the chaplaincy in a big hospital. One day as I was about to knock on the door of a private patient's room, I saw a young nurse rushing towards me from the other end of the hall. All out of breath, she said, "Please, Mr. Busch, don't go into that room." "Why not?" I asked. "The man in that room," she explained, "totally refuses any pastoral calls. If you go in, he'll throw you out!" She pointed to the inscription on the door and I recognized the name of a well-known businessman. "Nurse," I answered, "don't worry. I've got nerves of iron." So I knocked on the door. "Come in!" said a loud masculine voice. I entered. A grey-haired old man was lying on the bed. "Hello!" I said. "My name is Busch, Pastor Busch." "Ah," he said, "I've heard a lot about you. You may come in for a short visit." "That's very kind of you," I exclaimed overjoyed. Quickly he added, "But don't start pestering me with your Christianity!" Laughingly I replied, "Bad luck! that's exactly what I came to talk to you about!" "No way!" he replied emphatically waving me away with his hand. "I've finished with religion. When I was a child,

my parents stuffed me with psalms and when I couldn't recite them properly, I got a smack. I threw all that overboard when I grew up. I've formed my own philosophy of life. It's thinkers like Darwin, Häckel and Nietzsche who have inspired me."

At that I flared up. Unfortunately I lose my temper easily. "Listen to me, my friend," I said. "When a sixteen-year-old adolescent tells me that Nietzsche is his 'guru',¹ I just chuckle to myself and think, 'Well, you're going through a period of transition. You'll end up discovering that modern philosophers themselves no longer believe in those who were their models.' But when an old man like yourself who already has one foot in the grave says things like that, it's very serious. You are critically ill. Do you think you will be able to talk such rubbish when you appear in the presence of God? I ask you!"

He looked at me, stunned. Obviously he was not used to being spoken to like that. "Careful," I said to myself, "don't get worked up! This is a hospital and we don't have the right to explode." Then a deep compassion for this poor man took hold of me. I changed my tone and, in spite of his initial refusal, began to explain how Jesus wanted to be his Shepherd too. The sick man sighed deeply and said, "Yes, it would be very nice. But what should I do with my philosophy of life? Do I have to throw overboard everything I have believed up until now?" "That's right, Sir," I said, my heart filled with joy. "Throw away everything that is useless to you in the light of eternity. Do it right now. Don't wait for tomorrow. You can neither live nor die in peace with unbelief like yours. When you have let everything go, throw yourself into the open arms of the Son of God who died to redeem you. He wants to become your Saviour too."

Just then the nurse came into the room and was very surprised to find us talking together like old friends. She motioned with her hand and I understood it was time to leave. I held the old man's hand for a long time, then left the room in silence. I shall never know whether he followed my advice. That night he died.

I was dismayed to see that day how even cultivated people allow themselves to be led by the nose by such men as Darwin, Häckel and Nietzsche. Their unbelief based on erroneous reasoning puts them in danger of missing out on eternal salvation. That is why first and foremost I urge you to throw away all the superficial thinking on which you base your unbelief. Get rid of it! Your unbelief is not worth a penny. The Bible says: "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

I was sitting one day opposite a man whom I had nick-named "the striped man" because of the striped-design on his pullover. He

was a great strapping man, built like a battle-ship. His wife had perished in an air-raid and his two sons had been killed on the front. Poor fellow! I had come that day to pay him a call. But no sooner had I sat down than he began railing at me. "Pastor Busch, shut up right away about your religion! I've seen plenty in my life-time and now I don't believe a thing."

I laughed and said, "That's impossible. You take the train sometimes, don't you?" "Yes." "I suppose," I continued, "that each time you do, you go and find the driver and ask him to show you his diploma?" "Of course not!" was the answer. "The railways can be trusted to employ drivers who..." "What," I interrupted, "do you mean to say that you get on a train without making sure beforehand that the driver has the qualifications to drive it? Do you put your life into his hands, without the least guarantee? Well, well! Did you know that putting your life into someone's hands is a form of believing? So you'd better not say any more that you don't believe in anything. You should say, 'I don't believe in anything - except in the railways!'" "Ah... !"

I went on questioning him. "Do you ever go to the chemist's?" "Yes," he replied, "I have quite a few headaches and I have to go to the pharmacist for some pills." "You probably know," I said, "that certain pharmacists have given poison to their customers by mistake. So I suppose you have the pills analysed before taking them?" He answered, "No, Pastor Busch. A certified pharmacist knows his profession. He wouldn't play a trick like that on me." "What?" I said astonished. "You take your pills without having them checked first? You entrust your life to a pharmacist? You take his pills without the slightest hint of suspicion? Well, I would call that faith! My friend, stop saying that you don't believe in anything; but rather say, 'I don't believe in anything - except in the railways and the pharmacist.'"

I continued to add to the examples. Finally I shared my own experience with him. "One day I met Jesus, the one God sent to us. Yes, Jesus, who rose from the dead and who still bears the nail prints on his hands. Those marks prove in an eloquent way that his love for me was so great that he even gave his life for me. No one in the world ever did as much for me as Jesus! No one is more worthy of my confidence than he is. Do you think Jesus ever told a lie, even one single time?" "No," was the reply. "I can't say as much for anybody else. But that day, many years ago, I said to myself, 'You can trust your life to Jesus. He is worthy of your confidence.' And that is what I did!"

"Is it as simple as that?" the man asked. "Yes," I said, "it's as

simple as that. You trust all kinds of people around you - except Jesus. And he is the only one who is totally trustworthy. So get rid of the false reasoning your unbelief is built on. Then surrender your life to the Lord Jesus."

At a meeting once, I challenged a crowd of young people in this way: "I will give a one million mark reward to anyone who can bring me a single man or woman who regrets having let Jesus Christ into his or her life!" Obviously I didn't have such a large sum of money. But I could make the offer without hesitation - for no such person can be found. I have known, though, many people who regretted *not* having received Christ.

So I urge you once again to get rid of your unbelief. Trust Jesus who has done so much for you. This is a personal matter between you and him. Steal away into a quiet corner and say to him, "Lord Jesus, from now on I want to belong to you!"

2. Your good opinion about yourself must go!

The Bible says: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst." Many people reading this verse get annoyed and declare: "*I'm* no sinner. *I* haven't committed any crime." It is to these people that I will now direct my remarks.

What you have just claimed is totally and absolutely wrong. Can you imagine yourself on the Judgement Day saying to God's face, 'I'm not a sinner. I have observed all your commandments.' Would you dare say this to God?

Come on now! You have to give up that good opinion you have of yourself. Stop thinking - or pretending - that your life is in order. Nothing is in order, absolutely nothing!

I had a talk many years ago with a young man of twenty. I shall never forget him. Bumping into him one day, I said, "My dear Heinz, I haven't seen you for quite a while at our Bible studies or young people's meetings." "That's true," he replied. "Pastor Busch, I've been thinking it over. You are always talking about Jesus dying for sinners. As far as I'm concerned, I feel no need for a scapegoat to bear my sins. If I have done something wrong and if God does exist, then I shall answer him for myself. The idea of a Saviour dying in my place seems so ridiculous." "All right!" I answered. "When you are summoned before the holy God, you intend to appeal to justice. This is your right. You have the liberty to reject Jesus and to say, 'I appeal to justice.' But you must realize one thing: in England, people are judged by English law; in

Germany, they are judged by German law; and before God, we shall be judged by divine law. I hope you have never broken a single one of those laws-otherwise there's no hope for you. Good-bye!" "Wait a minute!" the young man exclaimed. "God is not that finicky!"

"Ha! What do you think the holy God is like?" I asked. "Let's suppose for a moment that after living honestly for fifty years, one day I commit a petty theft which takes three minutes at the most. The thing is eventually discovered and my case is brought to trial. During the hearing, I say to the judge, 'Your honour, don't be so strict. Three minutes of theft are greatly outweighed by half a century of honesty. Who could be so scrupulous as to penalize me for so little?' Do you know what would happen? The judge would reply, 'Just a minute! What concerns me right now are not your fifty years of honesty, but the three minutes it took to commit that theft. The law is judging you for that particular offence. ' If an earthly judge would react in this way, why shouldn't God go just as far?"

Why not plead guilty before God? Why not recognize your need for pardon? Why not admit that you are a sinner? Get rid of your self-righteous attitude and look for the Saviour. He died for your sins and paid your debt. Receive him as your Saviour, confess your sins to him and say, "I throw myself at your feet with all my imperfections. Have mercy upon me and purify me by your blood."

3. Take the decisive step

Another illustration will help you to understand what I am trying to convey.

It was at the beginning of the Hitler regime. I had to contact a top Nazi official. I did so with fear and trembling, because the regime was not well disposed towards pastors. To my astonishment, instead of throwing me out the door, the official listened to me attentively. I said to him at the end of the interview, "I have seldom been treated with so much benevolence by any of your colleagues. I would like to thank you. And as you have been so kind to me, may I leave with you, as a gift, the message which has been entrusted to me: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ' "

He looked at me for a moment, then replied, "You need say no more. My parents are believers and they taught me those things from the cradle. But..." He put a large sheet of white paper on the table, took a pencil and drew a line across it. Then he continued,

"You see, Pastor, I know all about it. But in order to gain salvation, I would have to cross a line like the one I just traced on the paper. I am very near - and with his finger he pointed to a spot just below the line - but the decisive step over the line has yet to be taken." Then he added, a little embarrassed, "My social position, however, hinders me from taking that step."

I left him, sad at heart. This man died a long time ago. But his social position was of no help to him when he stepped into eternity. He had understood, nonetheless, that he had to take a decisive step, that he had to cross over the line, in order to enter into the Kingdom of God.

Do you have the courage to do this? It is well worth it. Jesus is waiting for you, his arms are wide open. Take the decisive step; cross over the line and you will find yourself in Jesus' arms!

4. Stop all deliberate wrong-doing

I know a man who has a mistress. One day I cornered him and said, "You are living in adultery. You are making your wife unhappy. You are on your way to hell." He answered, "What you say is absurd. Let me explain my situation to you. My wife doesn't understand me..." Then he told me a long story. Yet, deep down he knew only too well that his behaviour was wrong.

We often hear people who have fallen out with someone say, "He (she) started it all." Whatever the quarrel may be about, it is always the other person's fault. *You* never start the trouble, do you? No! The other person is always to blame!

Let me remind you that in God's sight a quarrel is just as serious as a murder. So why not settle that argument? "How should I go about it?" you may ask. Let me tell you how: stop all deliberate wrong-doing right now.

If only you would pause for just a moment and ask yourself this question: "What's wrong in my life? What needs to be put right?" Actually you know only too well what is wrong! Do you think Jesus will forgive you if you continue to sin deliberately? The Bible says: "Right about turn!" The prodigal son, whose story is told in the Bible, turned his back on his former life.

You too can come to Jesus just as you are: unbelieving and weighed down with your sins. But you must go a step further and do away with everything which is dragging you down to your ruin and which you consciously know to be evil.

In the many letters I receive daily, people sometimes get angry

and write: "You are too severe in what you say. Such-and-such a thing is not sin." Then they list things I have never talked about! On such occasions, I become particularly aware how rebellious we are against having Jesus Christ rule in our lives. You will never be able to become a Christian or to live as a Christian if you do not have the courage to surrender your life to Jesus Christ and to give up once and for all those things in your life which must disappear.

5. Talk to God

Do you know how to pray? Perhaps you are able to recite some kind of formula, but do you really know how to pray? Some people's ideas about prayer are so strange that they could make my hair stand on end... if I had any left!

The other day I was visiting a family. The mother said, "We're good Christians too. Claire, come here." When her little four-year-old had come up to her, she continued. "Show the pastor how nicely you already know how to pray." The child began to recite a prayer. I interrupted her immediately. "Stop, sweetheart. You musn't show me how you can pray. Please don't!"

Real prayer is something totally different. Prayer is talking to the living God to whom we draw near through Jesus Christ. Prayer is pouring out our hearts to him. Have you ever prayed like that?

An Anglican bishop by the name of Robinson wrote a controversial book called *Honest to God*. In it he writes, among other things, that modern man no longer knows how to pray. I agree with him on this point. The fault is not with prayer, but with modern man. Robinson's theory is that the Christian faith should be completely revised because people today no longer know how to pray. It seems to me rather that people need to be taught how to pray again.

Why not have a try at praying? Even if you can only say: "Lord, let yourself be found!" Or: "Lord, please save me too!" Or: "Lord, help me find the true faith!" Or: "Lord, forgive me my sins!" Take the plunge! Your prayers at first may not be as nice as those pastors and priests recite with prayer-book in hand and glasses perched on the end of the nose! But it isn't necessary to pray nice prayers. What counts is that you learn to speak to the living God with an open and honest heart. Simply begin praying and the rest will follow naturally.

Faith is a living relationship between God and man. Dialogue is indispensable to that relationship. I talk to God; he talks to me.

6. Read the Bible

How does God speak to people? He speaks to them through the Bible. So it is absolutely essential that you begin to read it. You may be thinking that hardly anybody reads the Bible any more. This, unfortunately, is only too true.

Often, during my calls, people say to me, "Oh, Pastor, we have an old Bible dating from 1722. It's a family heirloom handed down from our great-grandmother." Then they show me a huge museum-piece which obviously nobody ever reads. I have lots of respect for old Bibles, but you go and buy yourself a nice little New Testament! Some of them are smaller than my hand. Certain editions are very attractive. Get yourself one of those modern New Testaments. And then put aside a moment of each day to read it. Simply listen to what Jesus is saying to you through its pages.

Undoubtedly you will come across some passages that you will not understand. Just go on reading. This is how I explain things to my young people: A Brazilian farmer told me that when he settled in Brazil he was given some land. Once on the site, he discovered it was just a patch of jungle. So he started to clear the trees, dig up the rocks, and uproot the stumps. The day came when he was ready to hitch a pair of oxen to a plough and begin ploughing. He had scarcely taken three steps when the ploughshare got blocked by a rock. So what did he do? Run home to get some dynamite to blow up the rock, plough and oxen? Of course not! He unhooked the ploughshare from the plough, passed around the obstacle, then went on ploughing. When he had finished, the result was not quite up to the mark. He sowed the land all the same and a few months later gathered in a small harvest. The next year it was a little better. He was able to dig up more rocks and uproot more stumps, which made it much easier for the plough to get through. The third year, the situation had greatly improved.

That is how you should read the Bible. The main thing is *to begin* reading. If there is something you do not understand, go around the difficulty and keep on reading.

In the very first chapter of the New Testament, after a long list of names which you will probably find dry and boring, you will suddenly come to this verse: "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." You will probably respond to this verse by saying: "I can understand that! That's just for me!" Let God speak to you through the Bible in this way. Take the time to read it daily. And offer this prayer to God: "Lord, enlighten me! Give me intelligence to understand your Word."

One thing more: allow no one to denigrate the Bible. It is a unique book. No other book is as relevant or as fascinating.

As a young soldier in the First World War, I was sent one day on a special reconnaissance mission. It was evening, at dusk. I was sitting at the edge of a ravine. And then, suddenly, just before nightfall, I saw an enemy mobile kitchen bumping its way across a small clearing in the forest. It had probably left a little too early. We would never have guessed that they could pass by there! But that mobile kitchen, which had not waited until nightfall, had revealed to us one of the ways leading to the enemy positions. If a mobile kitchen could find its way through the forest, then enemy troop reinforcements and ammunitions could also find their way to their camp. Here was a strategic route and we had no intention of sparing it. On the contrary. We shelled it all night.

The Bible is the main line that God uses to send food and ammunition to Christians. And the Devil is smart enough to make it the object of his attacks. That is why the Bible is under persistent attack. The most stupid youngster says, "Bah, you have to be completely crazy to read a book like that!" The well-educated university professor tries to prove that the Bible is just another book. On this one point they all agree: heavy fire at the Bible. But if you want to become God's child, you must not let this stop you. Allow no one to denigrate the Bible. The Bible declares itself to have been written by men who were filled and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. And when you have begun to read it yourself, you will not be long in discerning that a different spirit, a divine spirit, breathes throughout its pages.

Somebody made this complaint to me: "The Bible is a closed book to me. I would like to be saved, but I get nothing out of Bible-reading." I replied, "Ask God to give you his Spirit. Pray, for months if it is necessary: 'Lord, grant me the gift of your Spirit so that I may understand your Word and come to have a living faith.' Believe me, God will answer your prayer."

7. Listen to the preaching of God's Word

Go and listen to God's Word where it is clearly preached. I must warn you that a diluted gospel message is being announced in many pulpits today. I wouldn't attend one of those churches if I were you. For myself, I don't want lemonade, but the pure wine of the Gospel. It will not take you long to recognize whether or not the pure Gospel is being preached. Fortunately, there are preachers

almost everywhere who faithfully teach the truth. Go where they are and remain under the sound of the Gospel. Associate with other people who are intent on hearing God's Word.

A man recently said to me, "You know, I am an individualist." I couldn't help but answer, "You will never be able to keep your faith alive if you are not in contact with other Christians and if you don't attend a church where the Word of God is announced."

Before I finish, I would like to tell you a story about an old woman I knew. She played an important role in my own life and was the means of bringing three engineers I was acquainted with to the Lord. It seemed to me that a great spiritual force must flow from her, so on this particular occasion I went to visit her. She was a miner's widow. She was glad to see me and told me how she had come to the faith.

At the time, she was living in one of the former suburbs of Essen. It has since been incorporated into the city. The name of the suburb was Stoppenberg. She had read in the local newspaper that two new pastors were going to be consecrated at St. Paul's Church. So she said to her friends, "Let's go and see. Things like this are always quite an event in Essen." It was a long walk to St. Paul's, though they did take a short-cut across the fields. When they arrived, the vast building was already full to bursting point. So they had to stand at the back of the auditorium. One of the pastors who was consecrated that day, Julius Dammann, later had a great influence on the city.

This is the story the old lady told me: "When Julius Dammann occupied the pulpit for the first time, he read from the third chapter of John's Gospel: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.' Then he leaned forward and said, 'Of all the words in the Bible, there is not a single one I fear as much as the word "lost". You can be eternally lost, to the point that even God himself withdraws from you. That is hell!'" The lady continued: "There was I, a small young girl, standing at the back of that big church. I didn't hear one more word of the sermon. It was as if I had been struck by lightning. I kept repeating to myself, 'You too are lost. You are not at peace with God. Your sins have not been forgiven. You are not a child of God. You are lost!' Somehow I managed to return home, but it was as if in a dream. Three days later my father asked me if I were ill."

She tried in vain to explain to her parents what had happened. All they could say was that she had gone out of her mind, that she was having a nervous break-down. No one seemed to understand the

deep anguish she was experiencing at the thought of being eternally lost.

"For four weeks," the old lady continued, "I just went round in circles, completely bewildered. Then I read in the newspaper that Pastor Dammann was going to preach again. So once again I walked all the way from Stoppenberg to Essen. I prayed the whole way. The same prayer - it was a verse of a hymn - kept running through my mind."

In this mood she arrived at the church. The building was packed. No seats were free, so she had to remain standing as before. She prayed again. Then she opened her hymn-book to the number indicated on the panel and discovered, to her great astonishment, that it was the hymn she had been reciting along the way. "If everyone would sing this hymn prayerfully," she thought, "something would very probably happen."

Pastor Dammann got up and read another text from John's Gospel: "Jesus said: I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."

"It was the second time I had been in this church," she told me. "And once again I heard nothing but that one verse. 'I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.' In an instant everything had become clear to me. The Risen Jesus was the door to life. And I walked through that door! I heard nothing more of the sermon; but what I heard was enough. I had taken hold of life."

I sometimes tell this story to people who say, "Oh, I never go to church. I can't stand the atmosphere in churches. I'd rather go for a walk in the woods where you can hear the birds singing and the breeze rustling through the trees." "Well," I answer, "that woman would never have come to believe if she had not gone somewhere where the Word of God was preached!"

So, what should you do?

1. Put an end to your unbelief.
2. Your good opinion about yourself must go!
3. Take the decisive step.
4. Stop all deliberate wrong-doing.
5. Talk to God.
6. Read the Bible.
7. Listen to the preaching of God's Word.

Each one of these points is important. But I want to sum up with a truth which is even more important.

The important thing is not what *we* do. It is rather what *God* has done for us in Jesus Christ. This is the good news which I am happy to announce to you: Jesus has done *everything* for each one of us. He came to us, he died for us, he rose again for us, he is seated at the right hand of God for us.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who has done *everything* for his sheep. The author of the twenty-third psalm bears witness to this. He says: "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall lack nothing." And he goes on to name all the things the Good Shepherd has done for him...

My greatest desire is that you too will come to say: "The Lord is *my* Shepherd."

I just can't believe!

1. No one can make it without faith

Now right at the outset I have this to say to you: no one can get along in life without faith in God. And I don't know what to advise; simply because nothing can be done to help the person who doesn't believe in God.

Let me explain why...

To some people God seems to be just a theological or philosophical concept, or some force of nature. In reality God is personal. He is very much alive and fills the whole universe with his presence. And if I have not made peace with God, if I have not put my life right with him, if I am not his child, then I am passing by the main purpose of life. This is very serious indeed.

The crunch point came in my own life when I was a young officer in the First World War. Suddenly it hit me: God is here! I felt like someone who had driven his car straight into a brick wall. Up to then I had pretended like so many other people that I believed in God. But I had not grasped the fact that God was real. Then, in the space of a second, I found myself face to face with the reality of God.

One of the psalms in the Bible describes the reality of God in very striking terms. Whatever we may do, we cannot escape God. "If I go up to the heavens, you are there." The American astronaut John Glenn declared that what had impressed him most in his space capsule was the thought: God is here too! "If I go up to the heavens," - or if I speed along in outer space - "you are there!" Or if I hide a mile below ground in the lowest gallery of a mine - I would find God there too. The psalmist even goes so far as to say: "If I go down to the place of the dead, you are there."

Recently I flew to California. My wife had slipped a little note into my suitcase on which she had written a verse of this psalm. I read it when I unpacked my suitcase in San Francisco: "If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me."

Yes, God is a great reality.

And because God is a great reality, I cannot ignore him and get

away with it. If I go on living as if God didn't exist, if I go on living in contempt of his laws - not considering the Lord's Day holy, committing adultery, lying, having no respect for my parents, and none for God's name - then I am passing by the purpose of life. Under these circumstances, it is impossible for me to cope with life.

Look around you! People simply can't find a way out of their difficulties, not even those who earn a great deal of money. Everyone is worried. Nothing is going right in their private lives and everything is going wrong in their family lives.

How can we go on living when we have no faith in God? We cannot cope with life and we are helpless in the face of death.

Not a single one of us will be living in a hundred years' time. We all shall have crossed over to the other side. There is no doubt about that! "But once in the grave, everything is all over," you may be thinking. "We shall be dead and that's that." If this is what you believe, then stop a minute and think. What should you rely on for your facts about death: your own ideas or the Word of God? How can you cope with death if this thought suddenly takes hold of you: "I can't take anything I've stored up with me"? Perhaps you have built a little house; or, like me, you have a great collection of books. But you can take nothing that you cherish with you. And you can take none of your loved ones with you, either. There is only one thing we take with us into eternity: it is our guilt before God.

Try to imagine yourself lying on your death-bed, with this thought continuously running through your mind: "I'm going to have to leave everything behind. Everything!... except the transgressions and sins I've committed since my youth. My wrong-doings will follow me right into the very presence of the holy and just God!" How can you be acquitted at the tribunal of God if you do not believe in the one who can justify the sinner? Never forget this: one day you will have to appear before God!

The Lord Jesus, merciful as he was, nevertheless said on one occasion: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body." (Yet I am afraid of such people.) "They are just the small fry," Jesus implied. "Do not be afraid of them. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell." And, as if he had shivers down his spine at the thought, Jesus repeated, "Yes, I tell you, rather be afraid of *him*."

A well-known scholar by the name of Ole Hallesby lived in Norway a few years ago. It was my privilege to know him. He was an extraordinary person. For a whole week on one occasion, he gave a talk each evening on national radio. I find it easy to picture him sitting in front of the microphone saying, "You may drop off to

sleep peacefully in your bed tonight but wake up in hell tomorrow morning. It's my duty to warn you." These words set off a storm of protests. A journalist on Oslo's largest daily newspaper wrote an editorial along these lines: "We are no longer in the Middle Ages! It is totally inadmissible that a modern invention such as the radio should be used to spread nonsense of this sort." When an important newspaper publishes an article like this, all the smaller papers follow suit. Soon the whole press was repeating: "We are no longer in the Middle Ages. How can a scholar in our day possibly talk of hell!" The controversy was hot.

Finally, Radio Oslo had to ask Professor Hallesby to clarify his position. He came back to the microphone again, and this is what he said: "I have to clarify my statements. Well, all right! Here you have it: You may drop off to sleep peacefully in your bed tonight but wake up in hell tomorrow morning. It's my duty to warn you."

That was the last straw!

Then all the bishops of Norway were questioned. "Does hell exist or not?" Even the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* took up the debate and published a lengthy article entitled: "The quarrel over hell in Norway".

Less than a year after this storm, I was in Oslo for a series of student conferences and for several public meetings in the evening as well. As soon as I arrived, I had to hold a press conference. The different newspaper reporters had gathered at my hotel. Curiously, on my right was the journalist who had been at the origin of this controversy, and on my left was Professor Hallesby representing the Protestant press. They began questioning me. The journalist on my right was the first to attack: "Pastor Busch," he said, "I am totally in disagreement with Professor Hallesby. You are a modern man. In your opinion, does hell exist? Yes or no?" "Why, of course hell exists! It stands to reason." "Come, come!" he replied. "How can you be so positive about it?" I resumed, "I shall very gladly explain. I believe that hell exists because Jesus said so. And I fully believe what Jesus said. He knew a lot more about this subject than all our so-called intelligentsia."

God's Word declares: "God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." God has showed us in his Word how we can live and die in peace. And that is why we insist upon the necessity of believing. How can I go on living and cope with my problems if I can't believe?

There is absolutely no way out!

Let me explain this another way. Let's pretend that you have a little goldfish. One day you have a bright idea: "Poor little creature,"

you say to it. "How terrible it must be to have to stay all the time in that cold water. Wait a minute; I'm going to see what I can do for you." So you take the goldfish out of the water, dry it with a towel and place it in a beautiful gilded cage. You give it the best of goldfish food and say, "Little goldfish, you've got a beautiful gilded cage, appetizing food and wonderful fresh air. Life is great for you now!" What do you think the goldfish is going to do? Wriggle its fins and say, "Thank you. Oh, thank you"? No! Not on your life! It is going to struggle desperately to catch its breath. And if it could speak, it would say, "I don't want your gilded cage or fancy food. I want to go back to my natural element - water."

Well, you see, our particular element is the living God who created the heavens and the earth, and who created us too. "All life comes from God", begins one Swiss patriotic song. God is our element. But as long as I have not made peace with God, the best I can do is to provide a gilded cage for my soul. You understand what I mean: man today offers his soul everything that appeals to him - pleasures of all sorts, trips abroad, good food and wine. But our soul struggles within us and sighs, "I really don't want all these things. I want to be in my element. I want to be at peace with God!" Don't be so cruel with yourself. Your heart will always be troubled until it finds rest in the living God. As a fish wants to be in its element, our soul wants to be found in God. Only then will it be in its element.

How can we get through life if we don't believe in God? I can only answer that there is no way out: neither in this life, *nor* in death, nor in eternity! You may object that most people seem to make it fairly well. That, in my opinion, remains to be seen! Take, for instance, a man like the German poet Goethe. He was handsome, rich, intelligent. He had everything one could wish for. But towards the end of his life, he confessed to a friend that if he were to add up the hours of real happiness he had had during his lifetime, there would not even be three days. Goethe had no peace.

How true it is that without faith we can't get through life.

2. It is vital to have true faith

What really counts is that you have true faith: faith that saves.

It is a matter of simple fact that every human being believes in something. I was at home one day during my student days when a lady came to visit my mother. As my mother had gone out, I said to the lady, "My mother hasn't come home yet, Madam, so I'm afraid

you will have to put up with me." "How kind of you!" she replied politely. When I had invited her to sit down in the living room, she asked me, "And what do you do in life?" I told her I studied theology. "What!" she exclaimed. "Theology? Who believes in anything nowadays? It's impossible. We have the faith of Goethe." (This happened in Frankfurt, the city where Goethe had lived.) "Christianity is out-dated, finished!" the old lady proudly declared. We were getting into deep waters, and as I didn't want to have an argument, I changed the subject. "May I ask how your health is, Madam?" She answered quickly, patting the table gently at the same time, "Quite good... touch wood! But look here, young man, you shouldn't ask such questions!" "Pardon me," I replied, "but why did you say, Touch wood?" "To prevent bad luck." "Really!" I exclaimed. "You have rejected faith in the living God, but you have faith in the act of touching wood. That's strange. I hope you have benefited by the exchange!"

That day I understood that everyone has some kind of faith. But it remains to be seen whether it is true faith, a faith that saves. People in our day are saying that the main thing is to believe. Some say, "I believe in the good Lord!" Others, "I believe in nature!" And still others, "I believe in fate!" or "I believe in providence!"

No, my friends, that's not it! The main thing is to have true faith, the kind of faith which brings peace: peace with God, peace of heart. I need a faith which will save me from hell, a faith whose impact I can feel right now because it has given me new life. If I have any other kind of faith, I should consider it worthless.

There was a time when many of us Germans believed in Germany, in the Führer, in the final victory. And what became of it all? Can't you see that faith can be false?

But true faith - the one that saves - is, in a word, faith in Jesus, who is none other than the Son of the living God. Faith in Jesus Christ. Not faith in the founder of a religion - there's any number of them - but faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.

A beautiful story is told in the Bible which illustrates perfectly what this saving faith in Jesus really is. In your imagination follow me back two thousand years to Jerusalem - out through the gates of the city and up to a hill called Calvary (which means "The Place of the Skull"). Pay no attention to the hysterical, screaming crowd, or to the Roman soldiers on guard who are gambling for the prisoners' clothing. But lift up your eyes. On the middle cross the Son of God is nailed, his face all blood-stained from the crown of thorns digging into his head. It is God who is hanging there! On the cross at his right they have crucified a murderer. Another murderer

is on the cross at his left. Night is falling rapidly. Death is drawing near. Suddenly, one of the two murderers cries out, "Hey, you in the middle, listen! You said you are the Son of God. If this is true, and if you're not a liar, then come down from your cross and get me off mine too!"

That's easy enough to understand. When people are at death's door, they say things they would never normally say.

Then the other murderer speaks out. Turning to his companion, he says, "Don't you fear God yet?"

And that is where faith must *begin*: we must recognize that God is holy and that his wrath is terrible.

When the bombs were falling on our cities during the last war, people were shocked and bewildered. The churches were probably to be blamed for this, because they failed to warn the people that God's wrath can be terrible and that he lets individuals and nations do their own thing without his intervening.

Don't you fear God yet? This question should be shouted from the rooftops of all our cities. Don't you fear God yet? It should be shouted far and wide. Don't you fear God yet? What are you thinking about? Are you blind?

That's where you must begin: recognize that God is holy and that his wrath is terrible.

But the second criminal, the assassin, continues speaking, "We are rightly punished; we are getting what our deeds deserve."

This is the *second step* leading to faith and salvation: he admits his guilt.

I have met many people who have said to me, "I just can't believe!" I have asked them, "Have you realized that you are guilty before God?" And they have answered, "I've got nothing to feel guilty about!" I have had to tell them, "You'll never see the light if you keep on fooling yourself."

I met someone recently who excused himself in the same way. "I've got nothing to feel guilty about!" he said. "Congratulations," I replied. "I can't say as much. There's always something wrong in *my* life!" The other person said, "Oh, naturally, if you go into details." "But God does look at the details," was my answer. "Stop fooling yourself."

You will never come to have true faith - this faith which saves - unless you call sin by its name: your irregular sexual habits - *fornication*; your marital infidelities - *adultery*; your deceitfulness - not astuteness, but *lies*; your egoism - not a legitimate love of self, but a form of *idolatry*, because you have made yourself your own god.

Let me repeat again that the second step towards faith and salvation is to call sin by its real name and to admit before God that you deserve his condemnation.

It is alarming to see how so many people of our day try to convince themselves there is nothing wrong. One day God will have to remove the scales from their eyes.

Finally, the robber turns to Jesus and says, "But you, you have done no wrong. Why are you being crucified?" In a flash he understands. "It's for me he is hanging there. To take away my sin." And he shouts, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

He has taken the *third step*: he has believed that Jesus can save him for all eternity. He has believed that Jesus is bearing the punishment for his sins. And Jesus' answer is immediate: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

This is saving faith: I become aware of the holiness of God. I realize I am lost. But I believe that Jesus, who died on the cross for me, is my only hope of salvation. Without this faith there is no way out. But with this faith you can be sure of getting out of the mess you are in. That's all I can tell you.

I have often been accused of over-simplifying matters. I can only answer that I'm sorry, but the simple fact is there just isn't any other way for us to pull through life, confront death and stand before the judgement-seat of God.

I have no choice, as a sinner, but to come to Jesus, to repent and confess my sins, then to repeat in faith:

I do believe, I do believe
That Jesus died for me.
And by his blood, his precious blood,
I am forever set free.

Never forget the words: *Jesus Christ died for me*. When you wake up tomorrow morning, they should be ringing in your heart: Jesus Christ died for me! When you are going through the daily grind at work, you should give them some thought too: Jesus Christ died for me!

The day will come, if God has mercy upon you, when you will be able to praise him and say, "*For me...* Yes, I do believe!" The instant you have grasped this truth, you will become a child of God; because Jesus said, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."

But I must go on to my third point.

3. People who can't believe in God

Many people say to me, "Pastor Busch, what you have to say is all well and good, but as far as I am concerned, I simply cannot believe in God."

Let's examine this type of reaction more closely.

There are generally four categories of people who say this sort of thing.

First, there are the people who say *they aren't religious*. Their argument is, "I can't believe simply because I'm not religious. You are, Pastor Busch, but not me." To this objection I can only answer, "It may surprise you, but I'm not religious either!" To be truthful, I attach very little importance to church bells, incense and other such things. In these past years at Essen, it has been my joy to preach in a chapel where there is only a good brass band. No organ, no church bells - and I haven't missed them in the least. I am not against such things, but I don't need them. I'm afraid I am not very religious!

When Jesus, the Son of God, was here on earth, there were some very religious people around. There were the scribes, the priests and the Pharisees - all of them were very religious people. The Sadducees, though more liberal in outlook, could also be numbered among them. And these were the people - these religious people - who crucified the Son of God. Jesus wasn't the man for them!

Then, there were other people around who weren't religious at all: prostitutes, swindlers - the Bible calls them publicans - and the workers who struggled so hard to earn their daily bread. They were all people without faith or law! And yet it was they who turned to Jesus! Why? Because deep down in their hearts they admitted, "We are guilty before God. So many things are not right in our lives. But here is a man who will save us and make us children of God." And they believed in Jesus.

No, the Lord Jesus did not come to make religious people even more religious. But he did come to save sinners from death and hell and to make them children of God.

To those who say, "I can't believe in God because I'm not religious," I answer without hesitation, "You are the ones who are most likely to become children of God." Sinners we all are - and we all know it too!

Let me repeat this: Jesus did not come to make religious people even more religious, but to make poor lost sinners children of the living God.

The second category of people also says, "I *can't* believe in God." But if they were honest with themselves, they would be saying, "I *don't want* to believe." If these people were to believe in God, their whole lives would have to change. And that is one thing they do not want. They know only too well that many things are not right in their lives. To become children of God, they must come to the light. And that is another thing they do not want. Why, their friends would probably make fun of them! And what would all their relatives say if they were suddenly to become Christians? No, better not!

So if you meet people who tell you that they can't believe in God, look at them more carefully. Perhaps they really should be saying, "I don't want to believe."

There is a touching story in the Bible. Jesus, the Son of God, was sitting somewhere on the Mount of Olives. The city of Jerusalem was spread out below him. Facing him just a short distance away was the magnificent temple. Even the pagans said that the temple of Jerusalem should have been counted as one of the marvels of the world. This was the view before Jesus. Suddenly the disciples noticed with surprise that tears were flowing down Jesus' cheeks. Dismayed, they looked questioningly at him and then heard him sob, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, *but you were not willing.*" This is one of the most moving passages of the Bible.

"But you were not willing."

The inhabitants of Jerusalem had also said, "We cannot believe." In reality they did not want to believe.

The person who does not want to believe in God is under no obligation to do so.

Let me say this in passing. In our churches there are still all kinds of restraints. But in the Kingdom of God everything is done by free will. The person who wants to live without God has a perfect right to do so. God offers himself to us, but we can reject him if we want to.

Do you want to live without God? You have the right. Do you want to live without making peace with God? You have the right. Do you want to live without ever praying to God? You have the right. Do you want to live without the Bible? You have the right. Do you want to break God's commandments? You have the right. Do you want to profane the Lord's Day, do you want to commit adultery, cheat and steal? You have the right.

The man or woman who does not want the Saviour sent by God

to save sinners is free to reject him. The man or woman who wants to jump into hell has the right to do so. God forces no one.

Only never forget that you must take the consequences of your choice. God offers pardon and peace to you through Jesus. You have the right to answer that you neither need them nor want them. And you can keep on living with this attitude. But don't suppose that in the last five minutes of your life, just before you die, you can take hold of the salvation that God has been offering to you during your whole lifetime. It is your privilege to refuse the offer of peace which God makes to you through Jesus. If this is what you choose, you will never be at peace with God throughout all eternity!

Hell is the place where we get rid of God for good. Once there, there is nothing that will ever draw you to him. You may desire to pray, but you won't be able to any longer. You may long to call upon the name of Jesus, but you won't even remember what it is.

You are under *no* obligation, for sure, to accept the message I bring to you. You can choose not to follow Jesus Christ. But never forget that it is hell you are choosing instead. You are absolutely free to make this choice.

"But you were not willing," said Jesus to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He did not force them, but the choice that they made was horrible.

The third category of people who say, "I can't believe in God," puts up a rather curious explanation. They are never women, always men. This is what they say: "Pastor Busch, *I've seen so many things in my lifetime* that I just can't believe any longer." I usually inquire, "Now, tell me, just what has happened during your lifetime? My life hasn't been boring either!" "People have done me a lot of harm. And I simply can't believe any more." This kind of thinking haunts the world of men.

I have the rather naughty habit of teasing people who tell me this. "Do you believe what you read on the railway time-table? Do you believe what the policemen tell you when you ask for information?" I usually ask them. "Well, of course!" And so I go on: "Stop saying, then, that you don't believe in anything any longer. You should be saying, 'I don't believe in anything any longer - except what's written on the railway time-table, except what the police say. And we could go on and on! But I am sure you have understood the point.

Usually, with this kind of person, I end up by saying, "You see, I myself was leading a dismal life of sin, impurity, darkness and error. Then Jesus intervened. I recognized that he is the Son of God, God's Messenger, and gave my life to him. He had done so

much for me. You may have the impression that you really can't believe in anybody or anything any longer. But perhaps you could at least believe the word of the one who gave his life for you? Surely you can believe *what he* says! You believe so many things. And yet you say 'No' to the only person who is worthy of your complete confidence. You say 'No' to the only person who has never disappointed anyone! And you dare to say that you've seen so many things during your lifetime. In my opinion, you haven't seen enough!"

The fourth category of people who pretend not to be able to believe in God are *those who have been shocked by the Church* or who are disheartened by its teachings.

A young student sat down before me one day and said, "I study natural science." "That's fine," I replied, "but what is your trouble, young lady?" "Pastor Busch," she answered, "I attended one of your meetings. I feel that you have something I'd like to have myself. But I can't believe. I can't accept the doctrines and traditions of the Church just like that! It would feel like swallowing a bundle of hay!" I couldn't help but laugh, but hastened to reply. "There is no need for you to swallow a bundle of hay! Have you ever heard of Jesus?" "Yes," was the answer. "What would you say," I then asked, "if I were to suggest that Jesus is a liar?" "I'd say that I don't believe it." "So, you do believe that Jesus told the truth?" "Yes," she said, "I believe that!" I continued, "Is there one single person in this world to whom you would dare say, 'I'm sure you've never told a lie'?" "Oh no," she said, "I could never say that to anyone." I continued, "From all that you have just said, it's clear that you already believe. You have confidence. That's great. You've got the right end of the stick, young lady, you believe that Jesus told the truth. The Bible says: This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

In conclusion I said, "You don't have to struggle with the doctrines and traditions of the Church. Out of the fog of this world someone has come to meet you. And as he draws closer, you will be able to distinguish clearly the nail prints on his hands and the marks of the crown of thorns on his brow. They are the proof that he took your sins upon himself and that he loved you when no one else loved you. May you see Jesus more and more clearly and may you be able to say to him, 'My Lord, my Saviour and my God!'¹ Believing does not mean swallowing doctrine like hay, just because the pastor has said so.

"No, believing is *knowing* Jesus Christ."

Someone else may say, "As far as I'm concerned, I can't believe because I've seen a pastor who did this, that and the other thing..." And away they go! What haven't I heard about pastors! One had shady affairs with women. Another ran away with the church funds. There has been trouble with pastors everywhere. "So, how do you expect me still to be able to believe?" And I can't help blushing, for I know myself only too well. Naturally I have never run away with the church funds. But if people knew all that goes on within me, they would realize that I am not perfect either.

What can I say? Simply that nowhere in the Bible is it written: "Believe in your pastor, and you will be saved." The Bible, however, does say: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." A pastor is - oh, I know it's not always the case, but if he is doing his job correctly- a pastor is a signpost pointing to Christ. A signpost may be a little crooked, twisted, or washed out by the rain. It doesn't really matter too much as long as people can see what it is pointing to. As for myself, I wouldn't listen to a pastor who is not directing people to Jesus, the crucified and risen Son of God. But I'm certainly not going to get angry with a signpost, deformed though it may be, which is pointing to the right road. No, I'll just get on with going down that road.

Do you really think that you will dare to say to the living God when you come into his presence at the Last Judgement, "Lord, I didn't want your salvation, I didn't accept the forgiveness of my sins, and it was all because of that good-for-nothing pastor"? Is this the way you see yourself standing before God one day?

My friends, it is wrong to say, "I can't believe." Jesus said something which in my opinion is of the utmost importance: "If any one chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own." The issue at stake is whether or not I am willing to obey and to put into practice, right down to the smallest detail, what I have recognized as the truth. Then, and only then, will I be able to go forward in life.

4. What should you do?

Here in a few words is what you should do if you can't believe in God.

First, *Ask God to enlighten you.* He is beside you. Say to him, "Lord, help me to believe. Help me to see the light." God answers this kind of prayer.

Second, *Count on God's presence*. Turn your thoughts to him and say, "Lord Jesus, I want to give you my life." This is what I did when, as a young man in a state of unbelief, the fear of God had become very real to me. When I heard about Jesus, I gave my life to him.

Third, *Read the Bible*. This is how you can get to know Jesus better. Every day, spend fifteen minutes or so quietly with him. Read a passage of the Bible and listen to what God is saying to you through it. Read, keeping your ears wide open to the voice of God. Then, in whatever way comes naturally, bring your concerns to God. Tell him about your unbelief. "Lord Jesus, I have so many things to tell you. I just can't find my way out. Please, help me!"

Finally, *Get in contact with other Christians*. Look for other people who are in earnest about God too. Don't remain alone. There are no solitary travellers on the road to heaven. So look for fellowship with other Christians who are walking along the same road.

How can we enjoy life if our faults and failures weigh us down?

As they say, "It's no joke any more!" That's how I want to introduce our subject, because now we are going to tackle some very serious problems.

How can we enjoy life if our faults and failures weigh us down? I ought to point out straight away that the question isn't put very well:

... //our faults and failures weigh us down? The truth is, every one of us *is* burdened by them. Our faults and failings follow us everywhere we go. That is why I am so glad I can tell you about something absolutely wonderful - a gift - which can enrich your life and fill it with happiness. It is something which cannot be bought in any country of the world. Even if you were a millionaire and were willing to spend your entire fortune, you would not be able to buy it! Nor can you get it through influential friends - even though a lot of people nowadays manage to get things money can't buy by pulling strings. There is absolutely no way of your getting it on your own either.

If you want it, you must accept it as a gift. This wonderful, important, incomparable thing I am talking about, which can neither be bought with money nor obtained through our connections, is nothing less than the forgiveness of sins.

Perhaps you are disappointed. Maybe you pulled a long face when you read the words "forgiveness of sins", and wondered:

1. Do I really need it?

I am convinced that most men and women reason as follows: "Forgiveness of sins? I don't need that." Recently a young man explained things to me like this: "We live in an age where our needs are created by advertising. Our great-grandparents knew nothing about chewing-gum or cigarettes. But by incessant commercials on radio, television, and posters, we have been gradually conditioned; so that now we are convinced, for instance, that we couldn't live without cigarettes. The need is created first, then they start the hard sell." The young man went on: "The Church works in exactly the same way. It tells people: 'You need forgiveness.' Then

it goes on to sell forgiveness. In reality we don't need it, but you church people have created the need in order to sell your goods."

Is this really true? Let's suppose that you stop someone strolling down the street and say, "Hello! What's your name?" "Brown," he replies. "Good! Tell me, Mr. Brown, do you need to have your sins forgiven?" Mr. Brown would most likely answer, "Bah! What rubbish! What I need is a good, round sum of money, not forgiveness of my sins."

Is the young man right? Have we created a need that was previously non-existent and are we using the Bible to try and meet that need?

No, no, a thousand times no! It is the greatest of mistakes to think this. Our deepest need is to have our sins forgiven. The man or woman who thinks he or she can do without it does not know the holy and awesome God. So much emphasis has been put on the love of God in our day that we have forgotten that the God of the Bible is also a God to be feared. What shook me out of my sinful life was this thought which suddenly struck me: there is good reason to be afraid of God. The person who says, "I don't need to be forgiven", does not know the living God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Oh yes, there is a hell; there is eternal damnation. Jesus said so and he should know! And though the whole world may cry, "We don't believe it", the whole world will perish nevertheless. Jesus knows what is awaiting us beyond the grave. And he warns us about eternal condemnation.

Some years ago, I held a meeting in the beautiful city of Zurich, in the Congress Hall, before a huge audience. A lot of people had to stand and lean against the wall. Among those standing there, I noticed two men who were chatting away merrily. It was clear from their behaviour that they had only come out of curiosity. One of them had a nice little goatee-beard. (It had caught my attention and I had said to myself, "What a shame you can't grow one like that!") From the beginning of my sermon, I had determined to capture the two men's attention. Actually, they were very attentive until I pronounced the word "forgiveness". Immediately a mocking smile appeared on the lips of the man with the goatee. I saw him whisper something in his friend's ear. The hall was vast, and as the two men were standing at the back, I did not hear what he said, of course. But I could guess from the look on his face that it was probably something like this: "Forgiveness of sin - typical minister's blah-blah!" And perhaps he also thought: "After all, I'm no criminal. I don't need forgiveness. Come now!" (Isn't that exactly what you're thinking too?) At any rate, when I saw that man's reaction, I could

feel myself getting angry. I know God doesn't like to see us get angry, but I just couldn't help it. So I said, "Now listen, everyone. We are going to have thirty seconds of silence. And I want each one of you, during those few moments, to answer 'yes' or 'no' to this question: 'Are you willing to reject the possibility of having your sins forgiven for all eternity just because you think you don't need it?'" For half a minute a deep silence fell on this great crowd. Suddenly I saw the bearded man, leaning heavily against the wall, turn pale with fear. He must have thought, "Right now I claim that I'm not a bad chap; but when the time comes to die and things become really serious, I'd be jolly happy if my sins were forgiven. No, I'd rather not do without forgiveness for all eternity."

Would you?

If our conscience has not been totally smothered, we know very well that our greatest need is to have our sins forgiven.

A few years ago, Bill Haley gave a concert in Essen. He is among the modern musicians I call "hip rollers". Thousands of teenagers had gathered together in the "Grugahalle" to listen to him and his group. Right from the very first song, the audience went wild. They literally tore the hall to pieces. Damages were estimated at 60000 marks. A young policeman later confided to me, "I was sitting right at the front and I had to cling to my chair so as not to join in!"

As I was walking through the centre of town the day after the show, I spied three teenagers who looked as though they had taken part in the events of the previous night. So I went up to them and said, "Hi! I bet you boys were at Bill Haley's show last night." "That's right, Pastor." "Good," I replied, "then we're on familiar ground. Tell me, what made you all tear the hall to pieces?" "We did it out of despair, Pastor Busch," replied *one* of them. "Out of despair? Despair of what?" "We don't know!"

The great Danish theologian and philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, tells how as a child he often went walking with his father. Sometimes his father would stop and, looking thoughtfully at his son, would say, "My boy, you carry hidden despair within you." When I read this, I couldn't help thinking that as a city minister for forty years I have discovered that this is true of every human being.

What about you? Are you too tormented by some hidden despair? Let me tell you where it comes from. Let's take a look into the depths of your soul by means of a little illustration.

Since my parish is in the Ruhr Valley, I have often gone down the mines. It is a tremendous experience. First they give you a miner's outfit and helmet to put on; then you go down the shaft with lightning speed in a lift, to about the eighth level. Can they go even

further down? Probably, but no one does because below that, it's just a pit full of mud. That is where all the water gathers which has seeped through the rest of the mine. Only once, since I have been in Essen, has the hoisting cable broken. That day the lift dropped right down to the mud-pit. It was awful.

The pit and its miry waters remind me of man. Everybody knows that there are several "levels" in our lives. Outwardly we can look very cheerful, while inwardly things are just the opposite. We can have a nice big smile on our face and yet be sick at heart. It sometimes looks as if we regard life as a big joke, but in reality dark despair is hiding deep down in the innermost recesses of our heart.

Doctors, philosophers and psychiatrists all recognize this fact. It is the subject of many books and novels. It is disturbing to see the way our despair or anxiety comes out in the open some times. A psychiatrist told me one day, "You can't imagine the number of young people who come to me for treatment." Most people, however, don't even try to find out the cause of their despair or anxiety. They simply try to get rid of it by getting drunk or by taking drugs. Isn't it more reasonable to face the facts?

Most people think that the deep-rooted despair of the human heart was only discovered this century. But, amazingly, the writers of the Bible knew about it more than two thousand years ago. The Bible speaks of a "discouraged soul". It also shows us the deep-seated cause of our despair: since the Fall, we are alienated from God, out of our element, and we dread the day when we will have to appear before him. To put it even more strongly, our greatest problem in life is our guilt before God. When we are faced with a problem of this size, we realize our inability to find a way out by ourselves. Hence the dark despair in our innermost being.

Do we need to have our sins forgiven? We most certainly do! We need forgiveness more than anything else.

Sin - what is it? Sin is anything which separates us from God. We are born sinners. A child born in England during the war, for instance, had nothing against us Germans. But he was in the enemy camp nevertheless. In the same way, having been born into the world, the camp hostile to God, we are by our very nature separated from God. As life goes on, the wall of our guilt grows higher and higher, and we get further and further from God. Each transgression of one of his commandments is like a brick we add to this wall. Sin is a terrible reality.

I'd like to tell you how I first became aware of the terrible reality of sin and of its irreversibility. I had a remarkable father. We had a

wonderful relationship. One day I was nicely settled in one of the attic rooms of our house studying for an exam, when I heard a voice calling from below: "Wilhelm!" I leaned out of the window and saw that it was my father who was calling me. "What's wrong?" I asked. "Is the house on fire, or something?" "I'm going into town," he replied. "Do you want to come with me? It's much more fun to go with someone else." "But Dad," I answered, "I'm just going over a very important point for my exam. It couldn't be a worse time!" "Never mind! I'll go alone."

Two weeks later he was dead.

It is the tradition in our country that the sons of the deceased take turns at keeping vigil over the body. The night was still. Everyone was asleep. I was sitting alone by the open casket. Suddenly I remembered my father's invitation two weeks earlier to go into town with him, and how I had refused. I looked at him and cried out, "Oh, Dad! Ask me again. I'll go a hundred kilometres with you if you like." ,

There was no answer. His mouth stayed shut. I realized then that my lack of kindness was a terrible reality that could never be changed, even if I had all of eternity before me.

Have you ever thought about the number of times you've failed? How can we live with a burden like that? We can't cope with life if our sins have not been forgiven.

And how can we face death? Do you want to carry your faults and failings with you into eternity?

I often try to imagine my last moments. It's quite normal at my age. I can see myself holding the hand of a loved one. Then the moment comes for me to let it go; and my boat glides away into the great silence until it comes into the presence of God.

Yes, without the shadow of a doubt, you will appear before God one day. With all your mistakes, with all your failures, you will face the living and holy God. And your blood will run cold at the sight of the huge pile of faults and failings that have followed you.

Do we need to have our sins forgiven? We need forgiveness more than anything else, even more than our daily bread.

2. Where can I find it?

I just told you what happened between my father and me. There will never be a chance for me to go back on my mistake. It is impossible for us to undo the mischief we have done, and its effects abide in the sight of God. The bill is sent for payment.

A man named Judas betrayed his master for thirty pieces of silver. But almost immediately after, he was smitten with remorse. So he went back to the group of men to whom he had sold his master and said, "I've made a big mistake! Here, take your money back. I want to put things right." With a shrug of the shoulders, they replied, "What do we care? That's your business." You can talk to whoever you like; they will invariably answer, "That's your business."

Is it possible, in spite of this, to have our faults and failures washed away, to put things straight with God? Where can we receive forgiveness of sins? How can we go about getting it?

To these questions the writers of the Bible give a unanimous, warm, joyful answer. From the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation, in the Old Testament as in the New, the same theme keeps coming up again and again: our sins can be forgiven!

But where? Follow me through the gates of Jerusalem and up to the hill called Calvary. Pay no attention to the crowd which has gathered there or to the two criminals hanging on the crosses on the right and the left. Let us give our whole attention to the man nailed on the cross in the middle. Who is he? Clearly he is not like us. One day he stood before a crowd and challenged them to convict him of sin. Not a single person took up the challenge. They could find nothing wrong in him. Later he was put on trial and questioned by the Roman authorities and by the Jewish religious leaders. They could find no reason to condemn him. No, he wasn't like us. He does not need forgiveness because he has never sinned. Yet it is he who is hanging up there on that cross!

Why?

God is just. He cannot leave sin unpunished. So he placed our sin on Jesus, his Son, and his Son was punished in our stead. "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities: the punishment that brought us peace was upon him; and by his wounds we are healed." This is the heart of the Bible's message. God's judgement was inflicted upon Jesus so that we might find peace. This is where we can receive forgiveness of sins.

Where can I get rid of the burden of my faults and failures? Where can I make peace with God? At the foot of the cross of Jesus. "The blood of Jesus his Son purifies us from all sin." May we all take advantage of it!

An American by the name of William L. Hull published a very interesting book. He was appointed chaplain to Adolph Eichmann, the man who was responsible for the massacre of millions of Jews. Hull visited Eichmann thirteen times during his imprisonment, had

long conversations with him, heard his last words, accompanied him up to the gallows and was present when his ashes were scattered over the Mediterranean.

Rev. Hull published the substance of his conversations with Eichmann in a work entitled, *The Battle for a Soul*. He wrote at the beginning of his book: "My goal was to save this loathsome sinner from going to hell." And we learn with consternation that this man who assassinated millions of people from his desk and who plunged the world into untold suffering dared to say right up to his last breath, "I don't need someone to die for me. I don't need forgiveness of sins, and I don't want it."

Do you want to follow Adolph Eichmann's example and die as he did? No? Well, if you don't, you had better turn to Jesus with all your heart. Jesus, the Son of God, is the only person in the world who can forgive sins because he died to atone for them.

During his conversations with Eichmann, Rev. Hull was almost afraid to offer forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus to a man like him. Could such a great criminal possibly be forgiven? Yes! By all means! "The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from *all* sin." But to get forgiveness I have to confess my sins and say to God, my eyes fixed on the cross:

I do believe, I do believe!
That Jesus died for me;
And through his blood,
his precious blood,
I shall from sin be free.

The Bible uses different illustrations to help us understand the relationship between the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of our sins; (for, as you probably know, Jesus did not stay in the grave but arose the third day and is living today). One example the Bible uses is that of a *guarantor*. A guarantor is a person who makes himself responsible for the debts of another person. He promises to pay that person's debt for him if he can't do so himself. Somebody has to pay. It's always like that in life. Now every time I sin, I get into debt with God. The Bible says: "The wages of sin is death." This means that God demands our death in payment for our sin. But this is where Jesus intervened and died for our sins to save us from eternal death. Jesus stands surety for us before God. It is now up to you to choose: either you pay your own debt and go to hell, or you turn to Jesus and say, "Lord Jesus, I want to believe that you paid my debt. Thank you."

This leads us to the second illustration used in the Bible: a *ransom*. Supposing a man falls into the hands of a slave trader. He cannot redeem himself. Then a man full of compassion comes along and goes up to his master saying, "How much do you want for this slave? I'll buy his freedom." When does the slave get his freedom back? The very moment the last penny is paid! On Calvary, the Lord Jesus paid the price of our redemption right to the last penny. Believe it, and claim as your own the freedom he has purchased for you. Jesus redeems, Jesus liberates slaves from sin!

That's not all.

Another image which appears frequently in the Bible is that of *reconciliation*. Even the least enlightened pagan knows he needs reconciliation. That is why in almost every religion there are priests who seek to appease the gods by propitiatory sacrifices. But God Almighty accepts one sacrifice only: the sacrifice of "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". Hosts of priests have offered countless sacrifices. But Jesus is the great high priest who reconciles us to God. He is, moreover, the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He alone, therefore, can restore peace between God and us.

Another biblical picture used is that of *purification*. A Christian wrote to his brethren: "God has loved us and washed us from our sins by his blood." You probably know the story of the prodigal son who finally landed up among the pigs. Many are those - alas! - who have followed in his footsteps. But the day came when the prodigal son pulled himself together. He turned his steps homeward, then threw himself into his father's arms, just as he was. He didn't start by taking a good bath or buying a new suit of clothing and a new pair of shoes. No, he went home just as he was. And it was his father who took care of cleaning him up and getting him properly dressed.

A lot of people think they have to improve first before becoming Christians. This is a terrible mistake. We can come to Jesus exactly as we are, filthy and repulsive. He is willing to accept us with everything that has soiled our life. He himself will wash us and make us clean. He makes all things new. "The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." This was the Apostle John's testimony and it can be yours too.

I cannot refer to all the many images which come up in the Bible. However, I hope you will get down to reading the Bible for yourself. And as you do, you will discover its wonderful message of forgiveness more fully.

How can we enjoy life if our faults and failures weigh us down? We can't! But everything changes when we find Jesus, when through him we come to experience the joy of having our sins forgiven. Gone our fears, our deep despair!

Surrendering our lives to Jesus is not a sad and solemn affair. Quite the contrary. It is passing out of the darkness of anguish into the light of the sun of grace.

3. How can I claim forgiveness?

You may be thinking at this stage: "It must be wonderful to know that one's sins are forgiven. But how can I get hold of this forgiveness? No newspaper has ever written a line about it. Modern novels don't deal with the subject and I don't know of a single film that can tell me anything."

How can I get forgiveness? That is the burning question!

It seems to me that the best thing for you to do is to find some quiet spot and to call upon the Lord for help- right now. He is risen, he is living. People who "believe" are described in the Bible as "those who call upon the Lord". Why not call upon him yourself?

There is a direct line connecting you to Jesus. Perhaps you have never used it before. What a shame! Why not give him a call now? You don't even have to dial! Just say: "Lord Jesus", and you'll have him right on the line! The contact with him will be immediate. That's what praying is all about.

But what are you going to tell him? Everything that is bothering you. You can say, for example: "Lord Jesus, I'm having a love affair and I just can't break it up. But I know it's wrong. Lord, help me." Or: "Lord Jesus, things are not above board in my business. For years I've been fiddling my tax returns. If I try to straighten things out, I might go bankrupt. Lord, help me." Or perhaps this: "Lord Jesus, I'm unfaithful to my wife. I can't get out of the mess I'm in. Lord, help me." You know, on this private line you can share with the Lord Jesus things that you would never dare tell anyone else. He hears you. Pour out your heart to him. Confess all your mistakes. It will liberate you.

Then say to him: "Lord Jesus, Pastor Busch claims that on account of your blood everything will turn out all right. Is that true?" Ask him. You can talk to him for hours if you want. He'll listen to you.

"Okay," you may say, "but when I have told him everything, he probably won't even answer me." Yes, he will! Listen carefully. I am going to tell you on what line you can hear him speak. Get hold of a

New Testament. Leave the Old Testament aside for the time being, because it is too difficult to start with. Open your New Testament at the Gospel of John and start reading. After, try the Gospel of Luke. Read them as you would read a newspaper article. And it won't take you long to notice that Jesus speaks throughout the entire text. This is what makes the Bible different from all other books. It is the line the Lord uses to speak to us.

Someone once said to me, "When I want to hear God speaking, I take a stroll in the forest." "That's ridiculous," I answered. "When I'm in the forest, I hear the leaves rustling, the birds singing, and the waters murmuring. And it's simply delightful. But the forest can never tell me whether or not my sins have been forgiven. Nor can it show me how my heart can be made new or how I can find God's grace. God has revealed all that to us only in the Bible."

Try putting fifteen minutes aside each day to meditate and pray. Call upon Jesus and tell him absolutely everything: "Lord, you see how much I've got to do today and that I'll never get through it all by myself." You can share everything with Jesus. Then, take your New Testament and read half a chapter, praying all along: "Lord Jesus, speak to me now." And suddenly you will come upon a word from God that is just for you. You will say to yourself, "He is saying that to me!" Underline the passage, and if you like, write the date in the margin.

When I was a young man, I was visiting a family one day. There was a Bible lying on the piano. Leafing through it, I noticed that many passages had been underlined either in green or in red. Dates had been noted in the margins. As it was a large family, I asked whose Bible it was. "It's our Emmi's Bible," was the reply. I looked at Emmi a little more closely - and I married her! She was just the kind of girl I wanted: a girl who understood that it's on this line, and on no other, that Jesus speaks to us.

I served as a telegraphist for a while during the First World War. At the time radio communications were unknown. Our instruments were small and we had to attach the wires to them. One day I had to go to an observation post situated on a hill. No shelter had been built there. So I had to lie down on the grass. As I was trying to contact our troops, I suddenly saw a slightly wounded soldier appear on the hill-top. I yelled to him. "Hey, you over there! Get down! We've been spotted. It won't be long before they shell us." He threw himself on the ground, crawled up to me and said, "I'll be given a leave with this bullet I've got. I'll be able to go back home. Say, your equipment is pretty old." "Yes," I said in a low voice, "it's an old model." "The clamps are loose." "Yes, the clamps are

loose." "And look here, there's a piece missing." I flew into a temper and said, "Will you just shut up! I don't have time to listen to your comments. I've got to concentrate on getting in touch with headquarters."

It's the same thing with the Bible. I myself want to listen to the voice of Jesus. But when people come along and say to me, "The Bible is just a book written by men", and other such foolish remarks, I can only answer, "Do shut up! I hear the voice of Jesus in the Bible."

Do you see what I'm getting at? Don't let yourself be led astray. Jesus speaks to us on one line only - the Bible.

You should also get in touch with other people who study the Bible. When I mention things like this to people, they always answer, "All that is so old-fashioned. Only old people go to church these days." I have been a youth worker for over thirty years, and have met countless numbers of young people who can testify that forgiveness of sins is a reality, that we can talk to Jesus and that he answers us.

Seek the friendship of men and women who have experienced these things. Yes, it *is* possible to find people who want to travel on the road that leads to heaven.

Jesus is standing before you today and he says: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, weighed down by your faults and failures, and I will give you rest for your souls. Yes, I can forgive your sins."

Is there any certainty in religious matters?

No! It is clear that in religious matters we can have no assurance. Religion is, by definition, man's search for God. Worry and continuous uncertainty are necessarily part of this pursuit.

It is not so with the Gospel, which is God's search for man. Perhaps it would be better then to put the question another way: Does the Gospel give us any certainties?

1. People are content to be uncertain about God

People are funny nowadays! As soon as a strong healthy chap has some little ache or pain, he runs to the doctor's and says, "Doctor, it's really sore here. What's wrong?" He wants to know exactly what is wrong.

Or take the case of a family which is looking for a maid. A young girl applies for the job. "Well," says the mistress of the house, "you'll have a room with hot and cold water, television and a hi-fi. You'll also have a whole day off each week." "That's fine," the girl answers, "but I'd like to know how much money I'll get at the end of the month." The lady replies, "We'll come to an agreement on that point only after I have seen how you work!" "Never!" retorts the girl. "Under those circumstances, I'd rather not take the job. I want to know in advance how much I'll be earning!" Wasn't she right? Of course she was.

When we apply for a job, obviously the most important matter is what our salary and status will be. We want to know where we stand. Where money matters are concerned, we tolerate no uncertainties. And so it is with all areas of our life - except the most important one of all: our relationship with God. There we tolerate the most unbelievable ambiguity.

Many years ago, I held a series of meetings in the city of Augsburg. A tent had been erected on Plärrer Square where the annual fair is held. The committee organizing the meetings had an excellent idea. On Saturday night the city's places of entertainment were usually packed. So they decided to hold a meeting on Saturday night - at midnight! The meeting was not publicly

announced. They didn't want to see a lot of Christians swarming in out of curiosity.

On the stroke of half-past eleven, my friends jumped into their cars to pick up the people out on the town as they left the cafés and cabarets closing at midnight. Waiters and waitresses on their way home from work were also taken along. One after the other, the cars dropped off their passengers in front of the tent door. And when at midnight I got up on the platform to speak, a most unusual audience was there before me. Some people were a little tipsy. Seated in the very front row was a big fat man with a half-chewed cigar clamped in his mouth and a bowler hat on his head. "Well," I thought, "let's hope things go off all right!" Then I started to speak. The moment I mentioned the name of God for the first time, the fat fellow with the bowler hat yelled out, "Doesn't exist!" Everybody burst out laughing. But I leaned over the pulpit and asked, "Are you sure about that?" He scratched his head, and his bowler fell on his nose; then, rolling the stub of his cigar to the other corner of his mouth, he finally answered, "Well, I guess no one really knows anything certain about God." I just laughed and said, "Sorry, but I have some sure information." "What do you know about that!" he exclaimed. "And what is your source?" I answered that it is Jesus who gives us all the facts about God. A deathlike hush at that moment fell on the hall.

Do you have certainties about God? And you Christians, can you say, "I *know* I have life in him; I *know* that in his love he has saved me"? Most of you would probably answer, "I hope so!"

Isn't it surprising that where God is concerned, believers and unbelievers alike are resigned to living in doubt and uncertainty. If I walked from one end of town to the other, asking this question to everyone I met on the way, "Tell me, do you believe God exists?" they would all reply, "Yes; there must be a God!" But if I continued with this question, "Do you belong to him?", these same people would say, "I don't know."

In a realm as vital as this one, men and women are willing to accept the haziest situation!

One of our young people had an interesting experience just recently. He is a student; and in order to make a little pocket-money, he got a summer job as an unskilled worker in a construction company. One day his fellow-workers discovered that he was active in a Protestant youth group. "Good Gracious!" they exclaimed. "Are you in with Pastor Busch?" "Yes." A regular round of ribbing followed. They started to jeer at him. "You probably go to church on Sunday?" "Of course I do!" "Every Sunday?" "Yes,

every Sunday." "But, you must be crazy!" they exclaimed. "Of course not! I even go to Bible study during the week." "Are you kidding?" was the reaction. "Why, it's pure insanity!" Then they spat all their poison at him: "Preachers only aim to make their congregations stupid!" "Christianity has failed miserably after two thousand years of effort." "The Bible is just a heap of rubbish."

The young man came under very heavy attack. But he had a hide like an elephant's, and simply let everything slide over him. Then he said to them, "If that is your attitude towards Christianity, I presume you have all left the Church." Silence. One of the older men took up the conversation, "What do you mean by 'left the Church'? Hell! I believe in the good Lord too. You seem to think you're the only one who is a Christian. I believe in the good Lord just as much as you do!" The others chipped in, "You have a way of making yourself look better than others. We're Christians too. We believe in God, just like you do." Suddenly the roles were reversed. They began to yell all together; "We believe in God too. We are Christians just as much as you are." When they quietened down, my young friend asked them, "Well then, why are you making fun of me?" They replied, "You get on our nerves. There's no way of discussing with you."

Those construction workers were husky chaps and after a lot of hard work they could gulp down a couple of pints of beer at once. They didn't care a hoot about Christianity; but when they were cornered, all they could find to say was, "We're Christians too!"

What should we think of it all? Isn't it disturbing?

Where God is concerned, it doesn't bother us to be in the dark. People act sometimes like pagans, sometimes like Christians. Am I wrong? I am afraid that most of you live in the same uncertainty, the same confusion.

2. The Bible gives us wonderful certainties

You may protest: "But Pastor Busch, the Christian faith has nothing to do with certainties! Doesn't the genius of Christianity lie in the fact that we know nothing but that we believe everything?"

Not long ago, a man gave me one of those stock arguments I've heard so often throughout the years: "I know that two and two make four; but as to Christianity, we can know nothing, we only have to believe." According to this viewpoint, it seems that where biblical truths are concerned we are supposed to put our logic to sleep and have a blind faith. Most people believe this.

Someone else may say, "But you Christians don't even agree among yourselves. There are the Catholics, the Protestants, and the sects. And among Protestants, there are the Anglicans, the Lutherans, the Presbyterians, and so many others. Which group is right?"

It seems to me that even Christendom is convinced that the Christian faith is, in its essence, something particularly vague, particularly uncertain. But this is a serious mistake.

In fact, it is only through the New Testament that we can learn just what the Christian faith is. Every single phrase contains certainties. That is beyond all doubt! It's not normal that Christians should live in such uncertainty. But it isn't Christianity's fault - absolutely not! The New Testament is full of wonderful certitudes, from beginning to end.

One of them is the fact of *the existence of God*. He is not presented as the Supreme Being, Providence, Destiny, or the good Lord, but as the *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. That God does exist! How can we know it? Because he revealed himself in the person of his Son. We can be absolutely certain about that. Open your Bible at any page. The Bible does not speak about religious problems. It testifies that God exists and that he revealed himself through Jesus Christ. It shows too that the man who lives without God is not living right.

Another certainty is the fact that this *God* (who is capable of destroying nations and of administering justice) *loves me deeply*. We are not reduced to guesses. We read in Romans 8:38: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This is something we do not suppose; it is something we *know*.

How is God's love made known to us? It is manifested in Jesus Christ. Therefore the believer can sing:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows, like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
"It is well, it is well with my soul."

Tho' Satan should buffet, tho' trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin - oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin - not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to His cross; and I bear it no more:
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live!
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.

But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait;
The sky, not the grave, is our goal:
Oh, trump of the Angel! oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope! blessed rest of my soul!

Do you know something of this? Are you sure about this?

The different believers mentioned in the Bible also had *full assurance of their salvation* and they knew they were God's children. "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son he loves." Jesus' disciples experienced a radical change in their lives - and they knew it! Paul wrote: "We know that we have passed from death unto life." Can you say that? Elsewhere we find this: "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." Here we have a present tense: "we *are*".

The Bible is full of certainties.

Where, then, does this absurd statement come from: "I know that two and two make four. But as to Christianity, we can know nothing, we only have to believe"? I too know that two and two make four. But I am even more certain that God exists. I know that two and two make four. But I am even more certain that God loves us in Jesus Christ. All those who have surrendered their lives to the living God can go a step further: we know that two and two make four. But we are even more certain that we are children of God.

Tell me, in what churches today do they preach such absolute certainties? Where, I ask? Doesn't this demonstrate that we have deviated from the biblical position and that it is high time we came back to it? Let's get rid of our watered-down Christianity! A touch of Christian faith is of no use. What we need is a faith that is thoroughly biblical, a faith that takes God at his word. This is what we all need to be sure of: that God exists, that he loves us and that we are his children. Everything else is secondary.

There are two aspects to the certainties of the Christian faith. I know *objectively* that God exists and that his revelation in the person of Jesus Christ is authentic - even though the whole world rejects it. I know too that Jesus died to reconcile the sinner with God and that he rose from the dead to save him - even if no one were to take advantage of it. On the other hand, I know *subjectively* that God exists, that he revealed himself in Jesus Christ, that he died and rose from the dead. I know it because I have personally claimed it for myself by a deliberate act of faith.

If ten thousand scholars were to declare to a young believer that Jesus did not rise from the dead, he can say this, "Gentlemen, in spite of the respect I owe you, I *know* that my Redeemer is living." Were the whole world against him, the believer can firmly declare, "I know in whom I have believed." Were you to drown me in scientific arguments, I would answer, "I know more about it than you do!" And even if the whole universe were to doubt it, I would still say, "I am certain of it."

When our faith is founded on the Bible, it is just as solid as that!

3. Do you have this certainty?

Now I have to ask you a question. Do you personally have assurance like that? Or is it still missing in your life? I will not have spoken in vain if you come to admit, "I thought I was a Christian, but I can't be, because everything is so vague in my mind..."

I remember a young people's camp I attended in Holland. Around two o'clock in the morning I was awakened by a knock on the door. I opened it and saw there before me the whole group in their pyjamas. "What brings you here at such an hour of the night?"

I asked. One of them answered, "We thought we were Christians. We've just come to realize we were wrong." They were so troubled about it that they wanted to clarify the matter then and there in the middle of the night!

We have taken a great step in our life when we admit that, though we call ourselves Christians, we are far from having the assurance the Bible gives.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the famous London preacher who was at the origin of a powerful revival in the last century, once said, "Faith is a sixth sense."

As you know, we have five senses which allow us to perceive the outside world: taste, smell, hearing, touch and sight. By their means we are able to find our way in this three-dimensional world.

A man who accepts only what can be perceived by the senses reasons like this: "Where can God be? I can't see him. I can't see Jesus either. So how can you expect me to believe?"

But when God enlightens us by his Spirit, he causes a sixth sense to develop within us. This means that we are not only capable of seeing, touching, hearing, smelling and tasting, but we can perceive the spiritual world as well. As the Bible puts it: "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." Only a sixth sense can grasp this truth.

Recently I went to visit an industrial magnate in Essen. His office was situated in a big commercial building overlooking half the city. After passing through several offices and waiting rooms, I found myself at last seated in front of him. I explained the reason for my visit, and in a few seconds the matter was settled. So we started to chat... He said, "How thrilling to have a pastor in my office for once!" "Oh, I'm sure it must be very exciting!" I replied teasingly. "You know," the man went on, "after the war, from time to time I attended some conferences on theology. What struck me at those meetings..." "Go on," I interrupted to encourage him, "I'm not easily shocked." "What struck me most at those meetings," he repeated, "was that Christianity seems to lack clearness. Subjects like *The Christian and the Economy*, *The Christian and Disarmament*, *The Christian and Money*, *The Christian and the Church*, were dealt with. But they never explained what a Christian is! Obviously those people didn't know themselves!"

Seated in that magnificent office, I hit hard, "Oh, that's not true! You must be mistaken." He then asked me, astonished, "Can you tell me what a Christian is?" "Of course," I answered, "I'll make it very clear to you. There can be no possible confusion on that point." "Well now," he said in a slightly mocking tone, "some people say that a Christian is someone who has never been in trouble with the police. Others think that a Christian is anyone who has been baptized and buried religiously." "Sir," I replied, "let me tell you what a Christian is. Hold on tight! A Christian is a person who can say from the depths of his being, 'I believe that Jesus Christ - true God of true God, begotten by the Father from all eternity, but also true man of true man, born of the Virgin Mary - is my Lord and that it was he who saved me, a poor, lost and condemned sinner.' Sir, you are a poor, lost and condemned sinner!" He nodded in agreement. He had understood that much - and was willing to admit it.

"Good," I replied. "... It was he who saved me, a poor, lost and

condemned sinner, who bought me and liberated me from sin, from death and from the Devil's hold. Sir, bought and liberated from the power of the Devil!" He nodded assent once again. He obviously was not ignorant about these matters. I continued. "... It was he who bought me and liberated me from sin. The Bible says: 'For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without defect or blemish.' Listen to me carefully," I said. "Only the man or woman who can say, 'I belong to Jesus; he has liberated me from sin, from death and from hell by his own blood. Of that I am certain' - only that person is a Christian!"

There was a moment of silence in the office. Then the man asked, "But how can it be done? How can it be done?" I replied, "Your secretary told me just before I came into your office that you are going away on holiday. I'll send you a New Testament right away this afternoon. Take it along with you and every day read a chapter of the Gospel of John. Read it in an attitude of prayer. That's how it will be done!"

To sum up, the Christian position as described in the New Testament carries a double certainty: one, *objective*, that the biblical truths are trustworthy; and the other, *subjective*, that I can claim them by faith and be saved. Do you have these certainties? For my part, I couldn't go on living if I were not certain that God had accepted me.

I asked a young man one day, "Do you love the Lord Jesus?" "Yes," he answered. "Do you know whether he has accepted you and whether you are his child?" "I'm not altogether sure," he replied. "I still have many doubts." "I for one," I retorted, "couldn't bear to live in such uncertainty. I need assurance that I am God's child."

The person who calls himself a Christian yet who doesn't even know if God exists - although he knows right to the last penny what his financial situation is - that person is not a Christian at all. According to the New Testament only the man or woman who can declare, "I know that Jesus has become the Master of my life", is a true Christian.

Let me illustrate this by means of an anecdote that you have perhaps already heard. General von Viehban tells that one day during manoeuvres, as he was riding through the forest on horseback, his uniform got caught on a branch and was torn. It is against the regulations for a general to walk around with a tear in his uniform. When he arrived at the army quarters that night, he

spied a few soldiers sitting on a stone wall. He drew his horse to a stop and called them, "Is there a tailor among you?" One of the soldiers rushed up to the general, saluted, and said, "Here, Sir!" General von Viehban barked out this order: "You will come immediately to my room at the Golden Lamb Hotel and repair my uniform." "But I don't know how to sew, Sir," came the reply. "What! You don't know how to sew? But aren't you a tailor?" "Forgive me, Sir," answered the soldier. "My name is Taylor, but I am not a tailor!"

So it is with the majority of men and women. They call themselves Christians, but in reality they are not Christians at all. What a dreadful and extremely serious situation, because it means that these people are not saved.

I must, therefore, go a step further and ask this question:

4. How can we get assurance?

If you want to be sure about these things, I advise you first of all to ask God for assurance; then start reading the Bible for a few minutes every day.

I draw your attention to an important point: we do not come to assurance of salvation by means of our logic, but by means of our conscience.

Every time I start a discussion on the Christian faith these days, somebody always comes up with this: "You know, I just can't believe! There are too many contradictions in the Bible." "Contradictions?" "Yes, contradictions!" they declare. "For instance, the Bible says that Adam and Eve had two sons: Cain and Abel. But Cain killed Abel. And so Cain was the only son left. The Bible goes on to say that Cain went into a far country and found a wife there! Now, if they were the only people on earth, how could Cain have found a wife elsewhere? It just doesn't make sense!"

Have you ever come up against this objection? It seems to me that this is a key argument used by men here in Germany to escape from God. Usually I answer them like this: "What you say is very interesting. Here's a Bible. Show me where it is written that Cain went into a far country and took a wife." They usually start to blush. I continue: "If you have rejected the Bible, the means by which multitudes of reasonable men and women have come to the faith, if you consider yourself more intelligent than they are, you have probably studied the Bible thoroughly! Please, show me the passage where this is found!"

It always turns out that they don't know a thing about it. So I show them the passage in the Book of Genesis myself. It says: "Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain lay with his wife and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch." Cain had simply brought his wife with him! Who was she? In the context it is said that Adam "had other sons and daughters". Cain, then, had married one of his sisters. It is clearly stated in the Bible, on the other hand, that God wanted all humans to be descended from the same blood. Consequently, it was necessary in the beginning for brothers and sisters to marry among themselves. God later prohibited blood-relations to marry. Is this clear?

Then I draw my conclusion. "Your objections," I remark, "fall down like a stack of cards!"

Do you think this man is going to open up to the Gospel now? No way! He already has another objection on the tip of his tongue: "Yes, Pastor Busch, but tell me something..." And away he goes again! Even if I were to answer ten thousand similar questions, he obviously wouldn't budge an inch.

No, faith does not spring from our logic but from a troubled conscience.

One of my predecessors in Essen, Reverend Julius Dammann, was at the origin of a great spiritual awakening in our city. A young man came to see him one day to ask him questions like the one about Cain's wife. With a wave of the hand, Julius Dammann evaded the question by saying, "Young man, Jesus Christ didn't come to quibble over trivialities, but to save sinners. When you are convinced that you yourself are a sinner, you may come back."

It is people with guilty consciences, people who are willing to admit deep down that their lives are one big mess and that they'll never get out of it by themselves, who come to believe in the Saviour. Logic follows.

One day I walked into a hospital room where six men were in bed. I received a warm welcome. "It's really nice of you to come and see us, Pastor Busch," they said. "We'd like to ask you a question." "Okay. I'm listening." From the very first glance, I knew they were going to ask me a trick question. One of them, under the watchful look of his room-mates, asked, "You believe that God is all-powerful, don't you?" "Yes, I do." "Well," he continued, "here is my question: Could your God create a rock that would be so heavy he couldn't even lift it himself?"

Have you seen the trap? Whether I answered "yes" or "no", the conclusion would be the same - God is not all-powerful.

I thought the matter over for a moment, and wondered if I should explain this to him, but it all seemed so stupid to me that in turn I asked him a question: "Young man, before answering, I'd like to know whether you have sleepless nights over this question." "Sleepless nights?" he asked, a look of blank astonishment on his face. "Oh no!" "Well, it's like this," I continued, "my time is limited, so I can answer only those questions which are depriving people of their sleep. Tell me, young man, what is hindering you from sleeping?" The answer was immediate: "I've got a problem with my girlfriend. She's pregnant, and we can't get married yet." "Well," I said, "if that's what is causing your sleepless nights, let's talk about it." "All right, if you want," he agreed, rather surprised. "But what does all that have to do with religion?" he asked. I answered, "Your question about the rock has nothing whatsoever to do with Christianity. But it's not so for the affair with your girlfriend. In that instance, you were at fault. You broke one of God's commandments in having sexual relations with her. So now you are racking your brain trying to find a way out - an even greater sin. You see, you are stuck in the mud. Your only chance of getting out is to turn to God, and to repent, by confessing to him, 'Lord, I have sinned.'¹ Then, and only then, will the Lord be able to do something for you." The young man listened attentively. And suddenly he saw the light: "Jesus is interested in the burden which is weighing on my conscience. He can help me and repair my wasted life."

The young man tried first of all to resort to reason. But he just talked nonsense. Only when he became aware of his guilt did he see things clearly.

Have you understood now that to gain assurance of salvation there is no sense wasting time on thorny questions like the ones we referred to? No. The only way to get assurance is to listen to your conscience and to cry out, "I have sinned." At that moment, the crucified Saviour will make himself known, and you will *know* that your sins have been forgiven. The way of salvation passes through our conscience and not through our logic.

If you want to get this certainty, then you must be willing to run a risk. Let me explain. Most churches have multi-coloured stained-glass windows. When you look at them from the outside, even in full daylight, they seem dark, and you can scarcely distinguish the colours. But as soon as you go inside the church, the colours take on life. It is exactly the same for the Christian faith. Seen from the outside, it appears obscure, dull. But you have to get inside - that is, you have to risk taking the step towards Jesus. You have to

surrender your life to the Saviour and trust him. *Then* everything becomes clear and bright. It is a step from death to life. And in a second all the beauty of the Christian faith is unfolded before your eyes.

One day Jesus was preaching. Thousands of people were listening to him. As he spoke, Jesus clearly said that unless there was a radical change in their life - brought about by God himself - they could not enter into the Kingdom of God. Thereupon several men stood up, saying, "Come on, let's go. He exaggerates. We can't accept what he says." And so they left. Some women, who saw them get up and leave, decided to do the same. Then a gang of young people followed on their heels. Finally the whole crowd began to break up. It must have been terrible.

Imagine that I am preaching a sermon and that suddenly the people start leaving the hall one after the other. Well, that's just what happened to Jesus! All of a sudden he was alone. Thousands of men and women left while he was speaking. They didn't want to listen to him any longer.

Only the twelve disciples remained.

If I had been in Jesus' place, I probably would have pleaded with the Twelve: "You at least, please stay with me. You my faithful friends, don't leave me!" But Jesus' reaction was quite different. Do you know what he said to them? "You may go too, if you want." In the Kingdom of God there are no restraints. It is the only kingdom where there is no police force. True liberty of choice is part of it. "You may go too, if you want." That is what Jesus said to his disciples. They must have been torn. When six thousand people get up and leave, it is tempting to do the same. Probably they felt like following the crowd - especially when Jesus offered them the possibility: "You may leave too..." The way was wide open. "If you want, you may be lost. You may choose to live without God. You may run straight into hell." But Peter started to think: "Where could I go? But where? Should I throw myself into a job and work like a slave? Or live in the filth of sin? And find myself in the end facing death and hell? That would be stupid!" Then he glanced at Jesus. And he became absolutely certain of one thing: only a life lived with Jesus was a life worth living. He said, then, to Jesus, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know (which is the equivalent of: we have the certainty) that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. We will stay."

My friends, that is how we get absolute certainty. After looking carefully at the different paths open to us, we come to the conclusion that Jesus is the one and only way out. I hope you, too,

will come to share this wonderful assurance of the disciples: "We have believed and know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Before closing, I would like to say a special word to those among you who have already taken the first step of faith - by surrendering your life to Jesus Christ - but who think deep down: "I'm not sure of my salvation. How can I get assurance? There's still so much sin in my life!" I'd like to say this to you, "Do you really think it is necessary to wait until we no longer sin before we can be sure of our salvation? In that case, we'll have to wait till we are in heaven!" We will need the blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins up to our very last day, up to our very last breath!

You no doubt recall the story of the prodigal son who fell into his father's arms uttering these words: "I have sinned." His father received him with open arms and had a great celebration in his honour. Now, try to imagine the following scene: the next morning the boy accidentally lets his cup of coffee fall to the floor. In the far country, among the pigs, he had lost the habit of being at table. So when he hears the cup breaking into a thousand pieces, he begins to swear: "Damn it! It slipped out of my hands. " Is his father going to throw him out the door because of that, and say, "Go away! Go back to your pigs!"? Never. He'll say just the opposite: "Never mind; it's all right." Turning to his son, he may even add, "Son, try not to let that happen again. We'll do our best to help you learn again how to put your coffee cup on the table properly, to stop swearing, and little by little to get used to the ways of home." But the father will never send him back to the pigs.

When a man surrenders his life to Jesus, it is not long before he makes the sad discovery that his old nature has not disappeared and that he still falls into sin from time to time. When you have suffered defeat after your conversion, don't despair. Get down on your knees and say three things to God: *first of all*, "Thank you, Lord, because I am yours forever"; *secondly*, "Forgive me by virtue of your blood"; and *thirdly*, "Liberate me from the hold of my old nature."

But above all, let him know how grateful you are for the fact that you are still his child.

To sum things up, being certain of my salvation allows me to say, "I have come back home; I have come back to my father. I'll strive for holiness like a son who has come back home for good, and not like a son who is put out the door each time he blunders and who is forever coming back."

Those who preach that we have to claim salvation afresh every day proclaim a terrible message. My children don't have to stand every morning before my desk and ask me, "Daddy, can we be your children again today?" They *are* my children. And the man or woman, boy or girl, who is a child of God, is God's child for ever. He (or she) will battle against sin while being and remaining a child of God.

May each one of you come to the full assurance that you are a child of God!

What's the use of walking with God?

Actually, I could put it another way: Is it worth being a Christian?

By way of introduction, I would like to refer to a sentence which is found at the beginning of the Epistle to the Ephesians: " Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." This Bible verse admirably reminds us of the rich blessings which are available to the Christian through Jesus Christ.

But before entering into the heart of our subject, I have to deal with two preliminary points.

1. Walking with God is no illusion

I want to state this categorically: the Christian life is not a product of the imagination, nor is it the fruit of an illusion. Let me prove this to you.

Ministers working in big cities make all kinds of interesting contacts, as the following conversation I had with a young man not long ago shows. "My friend," I said point-blank, "you could make something great of your life if you surrendered it to God." "Pastor Busch," came the reply, "you'd better come down to earth! God doesn't even exist!" "That's hot news," I exclaimed. "Listen to me carefully," he continued. "Because men in the past felt weak and helpless when confronted with the forces of nature, they concluded that superior forces existed which could help them. They gave these forces different names, such as Allah, God, Jehovah, Buddha, and who knows what. It has since been proven that all this is nothing but the product of the imagination and that heaven, in reality, is empty." These were the kind of remarks the young man made. When he had finished, I replied, "The trouble is, my friend, that you don't know Jesus." "Jesus?" he said. "He's just one of the many founders of a religion!" "That's where you're mistaken. Let me tell you just who Jesus is. It is because I know Jesus that I know God exists. Without Jesus, we would be completely in the dark about God."

Who then is Jesus and how does he reveal God to us?

To help you understand, I will use an illustration. During my life I have passed through many a hard trial. I have, on more than one occasion, been thrown into prison; not for some crime that I had committed, but simply because of my religious convictions. Under Hitler's rule, pastors like myself who worked among the young people were not liked by the authorities. I was therefore thrown into some pretty sinister prisons. The worst one was a huge concrete building. Its partitions were so thin that you could hear others coughing in the cells below, and when a prisoner fell from his bunk on the floor above, you almost jumped out of your skin! I had been locked up in a very narrow space.

One day they brought a new prisoner into the cell next door. He was a prisoner of the Gestapo too. He must have been in the depths of despair, for at night I could hear his stifled sobs coming through the thin wall separating us, as he turned over again and again on his hard bunk. It's awful to listen to a man crying. We were forbidden to lie down during the day-time, so I could hear my next-door neighbour as he paced back and forth in his cell: two-and-a-half steps one way, two-and-a-half steps the other way. He was like an animal in a cage. Sometimes he groaned deeply. And there was I, just two steps away, enjoying the presence of the Lord, my heart at peace! I thought, "You ought to go and see him, and talk to him. After all, you are a minister!" So I rang for the guard. When he arrived, I said to him, "The man next door is desperate. He's going to crack up. Please, let me visit him and talk to him. I am a minister." "Okay," replied the guard. "I'll go and ask for permission." An hour later, he was back with the answer: "Rejected. That sort of thing is not allowed." I never did see the man in the neighbouring cell, even though the distance between us was not more than a hand's breadth.

I never discovered what he looked like, nor how old he was. But I felt the depth of his despair. Sometimes, standing before the thin partition which hid him from my sight, I would think, "If only I could dash that wall to pieces and get to the man!" But not even by hammering with all my strength would I have been able to make the slightest breach in it.

Now God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, finds himself in a very similar situation to mine in that prison. We humans are imprisoned in this visible, three-dimensional world. God is very near. The Bible says: "You hem me in - behind and before." Which means that the distance separating God from us is no more than a hand's breadth. Nevertheless, between him and us there is a wall, separating two different dimensions. His ears can very clearly hear

the cries of human distress. He hears the blasphemies of those who have become embittered, the sobs of lonely people, the lamentations of families in mourning, the sighs of victims of injustice. All this grief gets through to God's heart, as the despair of my fellow-prisoner in the next cell got through to me.

But just think of it: God did what I was unable to do! He smashed the wall which stood between him and us and entered into our world in the person of his Son. God himself came to earth in Jesus Christ - right into the filth and suffering of this old world. Since I have come to know Jesus, I have become certain of the existence of God. I often say that since the coming of Jesus, atheism is only a form of ignorance.

Let me talk to you now about Jesus.

If it were left to me, I would talk about nothing but the life of Jesus at all my meetings. Even then, time would be too short for such a vast and glorious subject.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He grew up and became a man. Nothing of his divine glory could be seen in his outward appearance. And yet, people were attracted to him. Instinctively they felt that God's love and grace had come close to them.

At that particular period, the land of Canaan, where Jesus lived in the midst of his people, was occupied by foreign troops, Roman troops. In the city of Capernaum, the Roman garrison was under the command of a centurion. It is worth noting that although the Romans believed in a host of gods, they had no particular god of their own. Now, at Capernaum it happened that one of the centurion's servants, of whom he was very fond, fell sick. His master had several doctors examine him, but they couldn't do a thing for him. He was on the verge of death when the centurion suddenly remembered having heard of a certain Jesus. "Maybe he could help," he thought. "I'm going to try to get hold of him." So this unbeliever, this man raised in paganism, went and found Jesus and said to him, "Lord Jesus, my servant is desperately ill. Would you heal him?" "Of course. I'll go with you," replied Jesus. "But there's no need for you to go out of your way!" objected the centurion. "When I give an order," he went on, "it is executed immediately. You too, all you have to do is to say a word and my servant will be healed!" In other words, this pagan centurion had just declared, "For you, it is possible to do the impossible. You are God in person." Jesus then turned around and said to the crowd following him, "I have not found such great faith even in Israel." It's as if Jesus had said in our twentieth century language, "I have never found faith like this atheist's, not even in the Church." The

centurion had understood that God himself had come to us in Jesus.

It is essential that you get to know the life of Jesus. Go and buy yourself a New Testament - please! Read the Gospel of John, then the other Gospels. They are wonderful accounts of the life of Jesus. No magazine in the world contains stories as beautiful as those to be found in the New Testament.

But Jesus, the Son of God, did not come into the world for the sole purpose of healing the centurion's servant and of proving by this healing that God exists. His plan went much farther: in coming to live with man, Jesus came to offer us peace with God.

We are separated from God by the fact that we are in a different dimension. But that is not all. The wall of our sin also separates us from God. Have you ever told a lie? You have? Well, when you lied, you placed a stone between you and God. Have you ever lived a whole day without God, without prayer? You have? That makes another stone. Bad thoughts, adultery, stealing and lying, not to mention the multitude of little things which are just as much violations of the divine law- and, with each transgression, another stone is added. We all, each one of us, have contributed to the building of this wall which separates man from God. God is a holy God. And so, simply pronouncing God's name will inevitably raise the problem of our sin and guilt. It is a problem which must be dealt with.

God takes our sin very seriously. I know of people who secretly think, "God must be really glad that I still believe in him." Good heavens! That's not enough! Far from it! The Devil himself also "believes in God". He certainly is no atheist! The Devil is perfectly aware of the existence of God. Yet, for all that, he is not at peace with God.

We can be at peace with God only when the wall of sin separating us from him has been destroyed. That's why Jesus came - to break down the wall of our guilt. To accomplish this, he had to let himself be nailed to the cross. He knew that someone had to bear the punishment for sin - either mankind or himself. To make it more personal I will say, "either Wilhelm Busch or Jesus". And that is how Jesus, the innocent one, took the place of the guilty one and bore the penalty of my sin - and yours.

Once again I would like to describe the Lord Jesus on the cross. It is the most precious scene in the world to me. Look at him hanging on that cursed tree, the one of whom the Bible speaks in these terms: "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all." He bore, as it were, on his own shoulders, all the stones composing the wall

of our sin. Thus he did what no other person could do: he took them all away. Read it for yourself in the Bible, particularly in the fifty-third chapter of the book of Isaiah. There on the cross Isaiah's prophecy of a suffering Saviour was fulfilled: "The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."

I have a dear friend in Switzerland. We have had some very enjoyable outings together. Of course each time we ate in a restaurant a bill would have to be paid. The problem was, who would pay it? Whose wallet was the fattest? The answer was clear. So I would say to my friend, "Okay, this time I'll let you pay!" But someone had to pay the bill.

It is exactly the same with the debt we owe God as a result of our sins and transgressions. Someone had to pay it. Either you believe that Jesus paid your debt for you, or you will be obliged to pay it yourself some day. That's why, for me, Jesus is of such great importance. I cling to him because he is the one who paid my debt.

But Jesus did not remain in the grave. Death had no power over him. Isn't that wonderful?

Three days after the crucifixion of Jesus, a man could be seen lost in his thoughts. He was wondering: "What should we think about Jesus now? He's dead and gone! I saw for myself how they placed his body in the tomb and rolled a big stone before the opening. Was he, or was he not, the Son of God?" The man's name was Thomas. While he was mulling over his doubts, he saw his friends running towards him, bubbling with joy. "He's alive," they yelled. "Stop looking so glum. He's alive!" "Who's alive?" "Why, Jesus... of course." "That's not possible," was Thomas' reply. "*But it is!*" We saw the empty tomb with our own eyes. We can swear to it. And then... we met Jesus!" "Has anyone heard of such a thing?" thought Thomas. "Someone rising from the dead? If it were true, then Jesus might really be the Son of God. It would be God's verdict in favour of Jesus."

But Thomas remained sceptical. He continued to think, "I've been fooled so often in my life that now I only believe what I see." Turning to the others, Thomas declared, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." The disciples tried to persuade him until they were blue in the face, but Thomas kept on repeating, "I don't believe it."

Eight days later, Thomas was with his friends when suddenly Jesus appeared and said, "Peace be with you." Then, turning to Thomas, he said, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach

out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." The poor doubter fell down heavily on his knees and exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!"

Maybe by now you have understood why I declare that walking with God is neither an illusion nor the product of the imagination. God is no vague concept, as people sometimes imagine. "There must be a God somewhere, but nobody knows exactly what he's like," they say. No, that is not right. The possibility of walking with God is a direct result of the Son of God's coming into this world, and of his death and resurrection for us. That is why we can have clear and reliable knowledge of God.

Now I come to the second question:

2. What must I do to walk with God?

How many times I've heard this remark: "Pastor Busch, you've got something we don't have!" I have answered, "Don't talk such rubbish. You can have it too. Jesus is there for you too." Then people usually bring up this question: "What must I do to walk with God?" The Bible gives a very clear answer, in one sentence: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ."

But before trying to persuade you to believe, I must first of all explain the meaning of the word "believe"; for many people have a totally wrong idea as to what faith is. If you have a watch, you can look at it and say, "I know that it is exactly twenty past seven." But if you don't have one, you have to be content with saying, "I believe it is twenty past seven." The idea is quite wide-spread that faith is a sort of vague and uncertain knowledge. However, in this verse of the Bible - "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ" - the word "believe" has quite a different meaning. What does it mean? I am going to try and make it clear by the following anecdote.

I had just finished a few days of seminars in Oslo, the capital of Norway. I was scheduled to go home on Saturday morning, because the following day I had to speak at a big gathering in Wuppertal. From the moment I set foot in the Oslo airport, things started going wrong. First they announced that my flight would be delayed by one hour because of fog. The plane took off at last for Copenhagen where we were to make a connection. We were already flying over the Danish capital when the captain suddenly changed course and headed for Sweden. He explained to us by way of the public address system that it would be impossible for us to land in Copenhagen because of the heavy fog covering the area.

For that reason we were en route for Malmö. The last place I wanted to go to was Malmö in Sweden. I had to get to Düsseldorf and from there to Wuppertal where I was scheduled to speak the next day!

In due course we landed at Malmö airport, only to find it swarming with people. Since it was the only airport in the region which was not fogbound, there was a continuous flow of aircraft coming in. The airport facilities at Malmö were modest, and there wasn't a single seat free in the whole place. I had struck up an acquaintance with an Austrian businessman. We were wondering what was going to happen. "For all we know, we may still be standing here tomorrow morning. We'll end up not being able to stand on our feet!" Everyone was grumbling, fuming and groaning as always in such circumstances. Suddenly a voice came over the loud-speaker announcing, "In a few minutes an aircraft will take off southwards. We do not know whether the aircraft will land in Hamburg, Düsseldorf or Frankfurt. Travellers on the way to Germany may proceed to the boarding gate." We didn't know what to do. A woman next to us exclaimed, "You'll never get me on that plane! It's too risky." "Madam," I answered, "no one is forcing you to take this flight. You can very well stay here." Next, my Austrian friend gave his opinion, "A flight in heavy fog is not an ideal solution, especially if they don't know where they are going to land." Just then I saw the pilot of the announced flight passing close by. I was struck by the serious, determined expression on his face. It was clear that he was not taking the situation lightly but was acting responsibly. I shared my impression with my Austrian friend, saying, "That pilot has his head screwed on. We can trust him." Then I added, "Come on, let's get on board." So we got on the plane. From the instant the cabin door was locked we knew our lives were in the hands of this man. But we had confidence in him. I had placed my life into his hands.

This is the meaning of the word "believe": it means "having confidence in someone".

What must I do to walk with God? Believe in the Lord Jesus. In other words: get on board with Jesus! On that occasion, as we were boarding the plane, I got the impression that my Austrian friend would have liked to have one foot on the ground and the other on the plane. But that was impossible! It was a question of either staying behind or putting one's entire life into the hands of the pilot.

It is exactly the same thing where Jesus is concerned. You cannot with one foot live without him and with the other "get on

board" with him. It just won't work! Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, walking with God, demands a total surrender of your life:

Take my life, and let it be
Ever only, all for Thee.

On the other hand, who better than the Son of God could we find to trust? No person in the world ever did so much for me as Jesus. He loved me so much he gave his life for me. For you too. No one ever loved us like Jesus. He died for us but he rose again from the dead. So why shouldn't we entrust our lives to the one who triumphed over death? It would be foolish not to.

From the moment we surrender to Jesus, we begin to walk with God.

What about you? Do you want to entrust your life to Jesus, do you want to "get on board" with him, place your life into his hands? If you do, tell him about it, I beg you. He is there, right beside you. He hears you. Tell him: "Lord Jesus, I give up my life to you. Take it."

The day I put an end to my life of unbelief and sin - the day of my conversion - I prayed like this: "Lord Jesus, I now give my life to you. I can't make any promises to improve. You'll have to give me a new heart for that! I've got a really bad character; nevertheless, I come to you just as I am. Lord, make something useful out of my life." It was at that moment I "got on board" with Jesus - with both feet - and entrusted the direction of my life to him.

If we want to advance in our walk with God, what must we do? Time and time again I have repeated that three things are absolutely essential: the study of the Word of God, prayer, and fellowship with other believers.

No one can walk with God if he does not have fellowship with him. That is why you must get hold of a Bible or a New Testament, and set aside fifteen minutes daily for *reading and studying* a portion of it. For the time being, simply leave aside what you don't understand. As you progress in your reading, the text will become clearer and the wonders of God will be unveiled before your eyes. How often my heart overflows with joy at the thought that I belong to this wonderful Saviour and that I have the privilege of proclaiming him to others!

The first requirement for Christian growth is the study of God's Word; the second is *prayer*. Jesus hears you. You don't have to make a big speech. If you are a housewife, it is enough to say, "Lord Jesus, everything is going wrong today. My husband is in a

bad mood, the children won't listen to me, it's wash day and I don't have enough money to pay the rent either. Lord Jesus, I bring all these worries to you and lay them at your feet. Help me to be joyful all the same by living close to you. Help me to get through. Thank you, Lord Jesus, because I can wholly trust you."

Do you see what I am trying to get at? We can tell Jesus everything that is on our mind - absolutely everything. You can also make this request: "Lord Jesus, help me to get to know you better and to give myself up more fully to you."

The third requirement for Christian growth is *fellowship with other Christians*, with men and women who, like you, want to walk with God. Someone said to me lately, "I want to believe, but I'm not making any progress." I answered, "What you need is fellowship with Christians." "But," he objected, "I don't get on with those people." "In that case," I retorted, "there's nothing to be done. But if you expect to live with them in heaven some day, it may be a good thing to start practising right now! God can't tailor people just to suit you!"

When I was a young teenager, I knew the director of a bank at Frankfurt. He was an elderly man and would quite frequently talk to me about his youth. When he had passed his "A" levels, his father said to him one day, "Son, here is such-and-such a sum of money. You have my permission to go abroad and visit all the capitals of Europe." What a godsend for a young fellow of eighteen just out of school!

This is the story the old banker told me: "I was deeply aware of how easy it would be for me to fall into sin and shame in those big cities. I was determined to follow Jesus. So I put my New Testament into my suitcase, and every day, wherever I might be, before leaving my hotel room, I had a quiet time. I read my Bible and had a moment of prayer. Then, wherever I was, I tried to locate other Christians. I met Christians in Lisbon, Madrid, London... The city where I had most difficulty finding Christians was Paris. I asked left and right whether there were any disciples of Jesus Christ. At long last someone pointed out a certain cobbler, saying, 'That man reads the Bible too.'" Soon the distinguished young man could be seen walking down the steps leading to a cobbler's shop. Once inside the shop, he asked the shoemaker, "Do you know Jesus?" By way of reply, the man's eyes began to shine. So the young man made this suggestion to him: "If you are in agreement, I'll come every morning to pray with you." Having fellowship with other Christians was, for him, of the highest importance.

And now I come to the central question:

3. What's the use of walking with God?

If I wanted to describe all the benefits which come from a life of fellowship with Jesus, I would be here till Doomsday, and even then the subject would not be exhausted.

I will never forget what my father said to me just before he died at the age of fifty-three. These were some of his last words: "Wilhelm, I want you to tell all my friends and acquaintances how happy Jesus made me throughout my life and even now at the hour of my death." When a man is at death's door, he no longer tries to put on a front, he doesn't waste time in small talk. And if, in his agony, he still says he has known true happiness in Jesus, it touches us to the core; believe me. At such a time, no one can help thinking, "What about me? How will I react when my hour comes?"

Early in my ministry, I witnessed an extraordinary scene in a district of the Ruhr Valley. It was about 1925. A large meeting had been organized during which a very scholarly man gave a two-hour speech to prove the non-existence of God. He had made a great show of all his learning. The hall was packed and the atmosphere smoke-filled. Applause broke out in every direction. "Hurrah! There's no God. We can do what we like." When the speaker was seated, the chairman stood up and said, "The debate is open. Those who have a word to say may come up to the platform." No one, of course, had the courage to get up. Everyone was probably thinking, "Who can contradict such a cultivated man?" No doubt there were many people who did not agree with the speaker, but no one seemed to be daring enough to go up to the platform and air his disagreement before a crowd of one thousand persons. Then a woman's voice rose from the back of the hall. It was the voice of an old grandmother, one of those black-bonneted East Prussian women one sees frequently in the Ruhr Valley. The chairman asked her, "Do you want to say something, Grandmother?" "Yes, I'd like to say a few words." "All right," he answered. "Come right up here on the platform, please." To which she replied, "Don't worry! I'm coming!"

The old lady made her way up to the front with a determined step. She got up on to the platform and stood behind the speaker's stand. And this is what she said: "Sir, you have talked to us for two hours about your atheism. Allow me, for five minutes, to say a few words about my faith! I'd like to share with you all that my Lord, my heavenly Father, has done for me. A few years after our marriage, my husband was the victim of an accident in the mines. They brought him home -dead! I found myself suddenly alone with three

young children. In those days, there was hardly any social security. I could have despaired at the sight of my husband's lifeless body. But God intervened. He comforted me as no one else could. What people said to me went in one ear and out the other. But the living God knew how to comfort me. I said to him, 'Lord, you'll have to be the father of my children from now on.' (It was moving to hear the way the old woman told her story.) Very often, I would have no idea in the evening where I was going to get the money to feed my children the next day. So I would talk to my God about it. 'Lord, you know all about my misery. Help me, please!'"

Turning towards the speaker, she said, "He has never let me down. No, never! The way was sometimes very dark, but he never once failed me. And God did a whole lot more than that for me. He sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into this world. He died for me and rose again from the dead for me; and by his blood he has washed all my sins away. I'm an old lady now and soon I shall die. But, you see, God has given me the assurance of eternal life. And I know without a shadow of a doubt that when I close my eyes here below, I'll wake up in heaven. And all that because I belong to Jesus Christ. That is just a short account of what God has done for me. Now I am going to ask you a question. Tell us, Sir, what has your atheism done for you?"

The speaker stood up, patted the old woman on the shoulder, and answered, "Far be it from me to think of undermining this brave grandmother's faith. Religion has its usefulness for older people."

You should have seen the old lady's reaction! Suiting her actions to her words, she exclaimed, "No, no, a thousand times no! Let's stick to facts. I asked you a precise question and I want a precise answer. I told you what my Saviour has done for me. Now it's your turn to tell me what your atheism has done for you!"

There was an embarrassing silence. That grandmother was a shrewd woman.

Today, when the Gospel is under attack from all directions, I too must ask the question: "What profit do you get from your unbelief?" I never get the impression that people have peace of mind or are happier for all their unbelief. No, my friends.

What's the use of walking with God? As for me, I couldn't have coped with life's difficulties if I had not found peace with God through Jesus Christ. There have been times in my life when I thought my heart would break. Only today I learned that a terrible accident happened not far from here which has plunged two families into mourning. If I understand correctly, the children were run over by a car. Accidents happen so quickly. And when they do,

suddenly all our certainties vanish into thin air. All we can do is to hold out our hand in the dark and cry, "Is there no one to help me?" Yes, it is when trials come that we appreciate all that Jesus is and does for his own.

When we got married, I said to my wife, "I'd like to have six sons, and all of them will have to learn to play the trumpet!" I had dreams of my own family band. We eventually did have a family of six children: four girls and two boys. But I lost my two sons. God took them from me in horrible circumstances. I can't understand it. As a youth worker, all my life I have had to look after other people's sons, whereas mine...

I remember the day I learned that my second son was dead. I paced to and fro, feeling as if someone had plunged a knife into my heart. People filed in to express their sympathy. But their words didn't speak to my heart, they didn't get through to me. I was a youth worker at the time, and I kept on thinking, "Tonight you have to go to the youth centre and joyously proclaim the Word of God to 150 young people." My heart was bleeding. I went to my room and shut the door. Falling on my knees, I prayed, "Lord Jesus, you are alive. Have mercy on me." Then I took my New Testament, opened it, and read: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." I knew that God always keeps his promises. So I persevered in prayer: "Lord Jesus, I don't know why you did this to me, but I beg you, give me your peace. Fill my heart with your peace." And he did!

The day will come when you will need Jesus too, for no one else will be able to comfort you. On that day, when not a single person in the world will be able to do anything for you, you will appreciate knowing Jesus, the one who redeemed you by shedding his blood on the cross, and who rose again from the dead. You will be glad to be able to say to him, "Lord, give me your peace." His peace, like a mighty river, flows into the heart of all those who ask for it.

This is also true of the most difficult moment of our life, the moment of our death. How will you react when your hour comes? No one in the world will be of any help to you then. You will have to let go of the hand of the person you cherish most in the world. How will you get through?

You will have to appear before the living God. Are you going to come before him with all your sins? When we can grasp the strong hand of the Saviour and say to him, "You have redeemed me by your precious blood, you have forgiven all my sins", we can die in peace.

Is it worth being a Christian? Let me list all the benefits I gain from walking with God:

- peace with God;
- joy in my heart;
- love for God and for my neighbour (so that I even love my enemies and all those people who get on my nerves);
- comfort in times of trial (so that each day is bright, even in the midst of suffering);
- the assurance of eternal life;
- the presence of the Holy Spirit;
- forgiveness of my sins;
- patience...

Oh, I could go on for a long, long time!

My heart's desire for each one of you is that you may come to experience all these wonderful things for yourself and thus find true happiness.

Editor's note:

This seminar, held on June 19, 1966, at Sassnitz on the island of Rügen, was Wilhelm Busch's last one. The following day he suddenly died of a heart-attack. Thus, after many years of faithful service, the Lord called his servant to his heavenly reward. This last sermon was a fitting conclusion to his life and ministry.