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Only 17: Broken Laws--Broken Dreams

By Janet Treadway

On a cold, wintry day in November of 1993, my daughter and I experienced one of the saddest days of our life together--a day that will be etched in our minds forever.



JUST WALKING INTO THE FUNERAL HOME and seeing so many teenagers sent a chill through our bodies that matched the cold outside. There must have been at least 200 or more teens in the room. Usually when you see a large gathering of teens it is for a pep rally or party, but not today. They were there to say their final good-bye to their very special friend, Kenny.

As my daughter Michelle and I got closer to the coffin, I noticed Kenny's brother, who survived the accident, and two sisters to the right of his coffin. It only took one look at their faces to see their horror and shock of disbelief that this event was really happening, that their brother Kenny was dead and laying in a coffin.

As I looked over to the left, there sitting on the front row were his parents. I reached out to hug his parents; I was at a loss for words. What could I say that would take their pain away? There were no words that I could reach for, no magic thing that could be said to make everything seem OK. How do you bury your 17-year-old son? How do you let go, and how do you say good-bye to your precious child?

As I looked around the room of sobbing people, old and young, it was clear to me what was going through their minds. The same question was going through mine: Why? Why did this happen to Kenny? He was only 17; he had his whole life ahead of him. Why?

Struggling back from tragedy

Several months later the question of why surfaced once again at my son David's graduation ceremony. At the ceremony, something happened that brought the whole audience to their feet with resounding applause. The applause was for one of the seniors, Brian, who had been in a serious accident a year earlier that left him unable to walk. Brian was determined to walk once again, so he struggled the whole year for this special night. When Brian's name was announced to

receive his diploma, he slowly got up and struggled for a few moments just to get his balance on his crutches.

There was dead silence in the audience as he took his first step forward. It was as if we were all afraid that if we made one sound he would come crashing to the floor. The whole audience was drawn in as they watched Brian move slowly forward, as if they were silently yelling, "Come on, Brian, you can make it!" As Brian reached the front of the room, he reached out and took his diploma. The silence was broken as the audience jumped to their feet with resounding applause.

The applause for Brian went on for a few minutes, because we all felt that unity of sharing in the victory of a young man who had gone through so much the year before. For Brian to be able to survive the accident, get up and walk to receive his diploma seemed to be a miracle.



Perhaps it was a miracle for Brian. But it was also short of what he could have had.

My thoughts went back to Kenny, whose funeral we had attended only a few months earlier. This would also have been the year that Kenny would have received his diploma. He would never experience the pleasure of walking down and receiving his diploma. The question came to mind once again--why? Why did tragedy strike twice? Why did this have to happen to two teenagers who had their whole lives ahead of them?

Kenny's story

Kenny grew up with my daughter Michelle. They played together, started their school years together and were best friends. As a teenager, Kenny had a lot of friends. He had a job and a great relationship with his family. His hobby was rebuilding cars with his dad. But one fateful night took that all away.

Why did tragedy strike twice? Why did this have to happen to two teenagers who had their whole life ahead of them?

Our family moved away when Kenny was 10, so we lost touch with him and his family until that night when terrible circumstances brought us together. One evening while I was watching the late news, I heard that they were searching for a teenager who was in a car accident and thrown out of the car. One boy got out OK, but they were looking for his brother. When they announced his name I was in shock, because I knew Kenny. The next day all hopes of his being alive were dashed when they found him in the river,

tangled up in some weeds, dead.

Kenny had just finished rebuilding a car with his dad and decided to try it out with his brother. As Kenny rounded the curve at 90 miles an hour in a 25-mile zone, he lost control of the car and went over an embankment. The impact from the accident threw Kenny into the river, where he became tangled up in some weeds and soon drowned. Kenny's life was gone, his dreams dashed because of that broken law.

Brian's story

Brian's story was different but with tragic results as well. Brian attended a different school. He was popular in school, had many friends and was very involved in sports. Brian loved basketball and played on the school team. His dream was to become a basketball star. Another one of his loves was skiing, and he belonged to a ski club.

One day instead of going to his basketball practice, he decided to go with some friends to a nearby ski slope. Brian and his friends came to a slope where a sign said, "Don't Ski Here." Instead of heeding the danger sign, they decided to ski there anyway. They pulled the sign up and Brian was the first to go down. He slid into a tree and was severely injured.

Brian broke his neck, and the doctors first thought that he would never walk again. Brian struggled with painful therapy for a whole year, not so he would be able to ski or play basketball again, but just so he could take that walk down the aisle to receive his diploma. That ski trip and the decision that Brian made that day changed his life forever.

If we could only realize how frail we are, and see that man's laws as well as God's laws are there to protect us, not make life hard for us!

Broken laws, broken dreams

Why did these tragedies happen? The answer is that laws were broken that changed their lives and the lives of their families forever.

We all tend to think that our lives are indestructible--that we will live forever. We especially think this way when we are young. However, as we get older, experience tells us differently with our frequent visits to the funeral home. The reality that we are only made of dust and will return to dust becomes very clear.

Young people love to take chances and believe they can't get hurt. You have heard people say, "It only happens to other people--it won't happen to me" or "I won't get caught--nobody is watching." "So what's the big deal with traffic laws? Everybody breaks them." "What's the big deal with trespassing? I'm not hurting anyone, am I?"



Many laws seem too strict or unimportant, and we take many of them for granted every day. So what's the big deal? Ask Brian what the big deal is. Ask Kenny's parents what the big deal is, since they will never see Kenny fulfill his dreams. Kenny's family is left behind to pick up the pieces. Laws are there to protect us from tragedies such as Kenny's and Brian's.

Kenny will never be able to experience the joys that we all take for granted. Brian will live with the effects of that decision he made on the ski trip for the rest of his life. Brian and Kenny are only two examples of the many people who are suffering as a result of broken laws.

There are many laws that are put into place by men to protect us and our neighbor from harm, such as speed limits, no drinking while driving and more. There are even greater laws that are commanded by God, for our good. The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, if

obeyed, will give us much happiness and peace of mind. God, our loving Father, pleads with us in Deuteronomy 5:29: "Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!"

Notice what this verse says--that it might be well with you and your children. If we could only realize how frail we are, and see that man's laws, as well as God's laws, are there to protect us, not make life hard for us!

Proverbs 3:1 says, "My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you." God tells us that we will have a long and abundant life if we will keep His laws! Brian and Kenny chose to ignore a law and break it. It is too late for them, but not too late for you.

Strive to take to heart the importance of keeping God's Ten Commandments and showing respect for man's laws. Understand that they are there for your good. Learn from the tragedies of Kenny and Brian, from the effects that come from broken laws, so your dreams will not be broken.

Piggyback

By Robert Berendt

I was touched and inspired watching a father and his young daughter face a challenging quest together.



I RECENTLY HAD AN EXPERIENCE that left a deep impression on me. I was part of a group of nine people that started off on an attempt to climb Ruby Mountain in the Canadian Rockies. Among these nine was a father and his 7-year-old daughter who "really" wanted to climb the mountain.

From our camp, we first had to walk close to 5 miles through a high altitude alpine meadow to reach the south base of the mountain. Once we arrived there, we faced a short but quite challenging climb to get to the lower end of the slope that led to the peak. Once we were on the lower slope, we still had about a mile of uphill climbing on a fairly even, but nevertheless exhausting slope that led to the top of the mountain.

Fading determination

After the first few miles, the smallest legs in the party began to tire and the determination that was there at first began to fade. That was when the saga of the most interesting example of love and determination from the father really began. Our pace slowed and there were pauses to rest and be refreshed. For a little while we all wondered if we could manage the climb before it would be too dark. The father encouraged the little girl, rested with her, challenged her, "bribed" her, made her feel like part of his team, and finally carried her when she could or would go no further.

We left at 9 a.m. and it took close to four hours to cover the first stage of the hike or climb. By about 2:30 p.m. we had finally arrived above the challenging part onto the lower slope of Ruby. Since this was my son and granddaughter, I often was close and heard the exchanges. She did not want to go any further. She did not want to climb the mountain--and always the steady and patient voice of her father encouraged her, challenged her and often he carried her. The father did not seem to get tired or discouraged throughout the whole experience.

Patiently and lovingly he spoke with her: "You take 100 steps and I will carry you for 100 steps--we will be a team," he stated.

At one point, I encouraged my son to go on ahead and I would stay behind with his daughter. He said he would keep trying and maybe she would change her mind. I realized that he sensed that it had become very important that she complete the climb. This was no longer just a mountain we were climbing, it was an event in her life that would have a great impact.

Patiently and lovingly he spoke with her: "You take 100 steps and I will carry you for 100 steps--we will be a team," he stated. I noticed that her 100 steps usually were only about 20 and then Dad would bend down and "piggyback" his daughter for a while.

Race to the top



While progress seemed slow, the top of the mountain actually got a lot closer. Soon three older children that were with us reached the top and called down that they had arrived. It was about 5 p.m. The 7-year-old ran the last 200 feet up the mountain. She made it! Then we all enjoyed the spectacular view, the sense of accomplishment and success in meeting this challenge. We also felt the presence of God in the awe that the view inspired.

The little girl changed. She was full of life and energy. She was helping us take video pictures and shared our lunches. On the descent, the little legs had renewed energy. To my amazement my granddaughter walked all the way down the slope, clambered down the challenging portion and walked the remaining almost 5 miles back to camp without once asking for a "piggyback" ride. She had changed. All the efforts of the father had been rewarded. It brought tears to our eyes as we recognized the value of the struggle.

The spiritual mountain

In Isaiah 63:7-9 we read about God the Father working with His children. He too recognizes the benefits that His children will have after climbing the spiritual mountain He has set before them. He too promises never to leave us (Hebrews 13:5-6) and that He will help us. He too has carried His children "piggyback" when they could go no further. He too exhibits endless patience and love.

Isaiah writes that when Israel was "afflicted" He too was afflicted. Just as this human father suffered with all the tears and cries of the child, God the Father also empathizes with us--yet insists that we complete the climb. God knows that the benefits of reaching the top are worth every bit of suffering that we may experience. Paul stated that he counted nothing he lost to be as

important as attaining the goal (Philippians 3:8-11). In Romans 14:4 Paul shows that God helps the weak and we too are to learn that lesson.

Mankind has been created to become like God. That is a very high mountain and we are not able to climb it alone. God knows the way. He knows the suffering and effort that is needed. He is a loving Father who is determined that His children will reach the top.

There is only one way to climb a mountain. One starts at the bottom and slowly, sometimes painfully, works toward reaching the top. Steps may have to be retraced; rests will need to be taken. Refreshment is needed. Encouragement and support are requirements for the journey. The Bible says that even Jesus was made "perfect" by what He suffered (Hebrews 2:10).

All the efforts of the father had been rewarded. It brought tears to our eyes as we recognized the value of the struggle.

We all know that building strong bodies and developing character are both dependent on enduring suffering and pain. Setting the will, fighting both fatigue and the urge to quit, not always taking the easy road--all of these, and more, are the steps we must take to reach the top of any mountain.

Isaiah 40:9-11 gives great hope to those who are struggling. God is likened to a shepherd who carries the lambs. God also knows that we must be willing to exert our own effort. We must take our "100 steps." It is good for us to do this. We benefit in so many ways, but often we simply do not grasp what has happened.

My granddaughter was without doubt the first 7-year-old girl to ever climb this mountain. The fact that she needed help from a loving father takes nothing away from the fact that the end result was a change in her. I hope the change will be lifelong, and that a bond was forged between father and daughter as they shared the joy and the suffering.

God knew this all along. We too are experiencing a strong bond being formed between us and our Father. We too share the joy and suffering with our Father.

One day, we will stand on the peak of the spiritual mountain. We will know it was worth the climb. We will also be changed (1 Corinthians 15:52). Let us set our feet on God's path with confidence. Let us look to Him for strength and let us do our part with appreciation and gladness.

Saying Good-bye to Our Family's Barn

By John McClain

Watching our family's barn being torn down was an emotional experience. It takes so much more to build than to tear down.



OLD BARNS DOT THE LANDSCAPE in farming communities. Even in Bible times barns and storehouses were essential for storing the crops. Often the barn was built before the house. That is a biblical principle found in Proverbs 24:27, which says: "Make it fit for yourself in the field and afterward build your house." In fact, my dad remodeled the barn before he remodeled the house, because the barn was used for the dairy operation and therefore was profitable. We didn't make any money from the house.

The barn and the farm have been in our family for 200 years. I have lots of memories about the barn, some pleasant and some not so pleasant.

Let's take the pleasant ones first: playing in the haymow, building hiding places among the bales of hay and straw, feeding the baby calves with milk in a bucket, watching men paint the metal roof with silver paint in the summers, filling the silo next to the barn when all the neighborhood teens worked together to haul the wagon-loads of chopped corn from the field to the silo.

The less pleasant ones included: milking the cows twice a day, feeding the cattle in the mangers, cleaning the stables every day, and then each spring hauling out the manure pile which had accumulated behind the barn.

Saying good-bye to the barn

Last summer Dad had the barn torn down because it was too expensive to repair, it was no longer used to store crops or for dairy cattle, and there were taxes and insurance on the building. Dad could not bear to watch it fall down from neglect and decay, as happened on neighboring farms, so he had it dismantled. The wood was all salvaged and reused.

Watching the sturdy old barn come down was an emotional experience. And reflecting on it has made me think of the quality of the workmanship needed to build and the quality of workmanship

to tear down. There's a clear comparison between constructive work and constructive words, between building up a structure and building up each other, between building an edifice and edifying people.

The story of building the barn

To build the barn, it took careful planning. It took lots of preparation to gather and prepare the materials. The timbers did not come from Home Depot. They were hewn by hand, one chip at a time from trees that grew on the farm. That took hundreds of hours. Some of the timbers were 40 feet long and still straight after all these years. The nails were hand made, tapered and square-shouldered.

The barn was old when Dad was a kid and he is in his 90s. It was still square and tall after more than 150 years of weathering and faithful service. All the joints were cut by hand and were held together by hardwood pins, which had been driven into place. The siding was Michigan white pine, which was now black with a silver cast from long exposure to the weather. It had never been painted.

We can do a lot of wrecking with our deeds. We can wreck in a day or two what took years to build.

The stones of the first floor exterior walls were replaced with cement blocks when I was 10 years old. The barn had survived many storms and three tornadoes that I know about. One tornado picked up the structure intact, tore off the roof, then set the rest of the barn back on the cement block walls.

To erect the barn took teamwork from many men to set the structural pieces upright and to fasten them all together. It was 40 feet by 60 feet by 40 feet high at the peak of the A-frame gable ends.

It also took the teamwork of many women to feed the men who worked on the barn. Barn raisings must have been wonderful events, which built up the people who built up the barns.

The destruction crew

But the barn came down in just three short days with a crew of three men and a few tools: crowbars, chain saws and an extendible boom forklift.

The old barn fought the destruction crew every step of the way. It was still strong after all those years, which was a testament to the quality of the materials and workmanship.



The whole family found it to be a very sad emotional experience to watch. Several times I felt like shouting for the men to stop the destruction. They removed the siding first. There stood the bare frame with the roof still intact. The roof came off in sections in a brutally ugly procedure. I did not stay to see them cut the joints to remove the timbers as each of the four vertical racks were lifted and laid on the ground to be cut apart.

Ironically, 30 days after the barn was dismantled, we heard about a new federal government program to preserve old barns...to help farmers keep their barns. The program is called "Barn

Again." It provides money for maintenance so that the barns do not have to have "Chew Mail Pouch" on the side or "See 7 States From Rock City" on the roof. But it was too late for Dad's barn.

So what lessons are there for you and me from my ancestors who built the barn and the strangers who tore it down? What about the quality of workmanship for building compared to the quality of workmanship for destruction?

How can we compare building a structure to building relationships with other people in our lives?

Here is a poem I found years ago that makes the first comparison.

Which Are You?

I watched them tearing a building down,
A gang of men in a busy town,
With a ho-heave-ho and a lusty yell
They swung a beam and a sidewall fell;
I asked the foreman: "Are these men skilled,
And the men you'd hire if you had to build?"
He gave a laugh and said, "No indeed!
Just common labor is all I need.
I can easily wreck in a day or two
What builders have taken a year to do!"

And I thought to myself as I went my way,
Which of these roles have I tried to play?
Am I a builder who works with care,
Measuring life by the rule and square?
Am I shaping my deeds to a well-made plan,
Patiently doing the best I can?
Or am I wrecker, who walks the town,
Content with the labor of tearing down?

--*Author unknown*

We can do a lot of wrecking with our deeds. We can wreck in a day or two what took years to build. And you know what? We can do even more wrecking with our words. In minutes we can seriously damage or destroy a relationship that took years to build up.

Each week I drive past the office of a local wrecking company. Their sign reads: "Big or small, we wreck 'em all."

What are we doing? Are we building up with our deeds and words, building an edifice and edifying, or are we wrecking and tearing down?

Paul gave several instructions in his first book to the Thessalonians about how to live. In verse 11 he sums up the first 10 verses of chapter 5 this way:

In minutes we can seriously damage or destroy a relationship that took years to build up.

"Therefore, comfort each other and *edify* one another, just as you also are doing." In other words, build up each other. Don't wreck your relationships. Edify. It is such an important principle that Paul wrote similar instructions to the Romans, Corinthians and Ephesians.

Dad's old barn lasted through several lifetimes. Our close relationships should last for our entire lifetime, and they can last if we build them up or edify with our words and deeds, if we are "patiently doing the best we can."

Let's be builders, not wreckers. It takes more skill, but look at the wonderful results. As Paul also told the Romans, "Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another" (Romans 14:19).

Can we build it? Yes, we can.

Our "Little House on the Prairie" Thanksgiving

By Mike Bennett

No football. No turkey. No pumpkin pie or heat or water. A mildly challenging Thanksgiving reminded us of daily life in the past, and of all we have to be truly thankful for.



SNOW REALLY IS BEAUTIFUL, and was a bit of a novelty for our girls, both born in sunny Southern California. By the time our first Thanksgiving after moving to Northern Idaho arrived, some of the novelty was already fading. Not that it wasn't exciting to have four feet of snow and to break in the snow shovels on the driveway. And even more exciting to climb up a makeshift ladder to prevent the roof of the manufactured home from caving in.

Our rental home was in a beautiful, secluded setting, miles from any town but just one house away from a gorgeous little lake, now freezing over. The house sat in a group of summer homes that shared a common well. Both the well and all the appliances in our home (including the furnace) were powered by electricity. So when the power went out in our area that Wednesday

before Thanksgiving, we were very quickly plunged back into the dark ages--or at least the "Little House on the Prairie" days. No heater, no lights, no stove, no water!

But we still had the phone, the car--and Wal-Mart.



"Mike, we lost power!" Becky called me at work to tell me. We didn't know how long it would be out considering the ice storms to the south of us and the holiday. Since Becky's parents were visiting us for Thanksgiving, we decided I'd better drive to the new Wal-Mart before coming home. We needed some way to create some heat, to cook and melt snow for water. Having been out of work the previous summer, I couldn't afford a backup generator. A little propane

burner/heater would have to do.

What a way to welcome Becky's parents! Thankfully, they are hardy and easy-going people, giving and forgiving.

We made it through that Wednesday night without freezing or starving, but we were really hoping the power would be restored in time to cook the Thanksgiving turkey! That little propane burner just wasn't up to that job!



Unfortunately, the power didn't come on that Thanksgiving morning or afternoon. Without a stove there would be no turkey, no stuffing, no pumpkin pies. We dug through the defrosting freezer and found some chicken we could cut up and cook over the burner.

It definitely wasn't what's considered a traditional Thanksgiving in America today, but it drew us closer to the Pilgrim forefathers who are remembered as originating the day. After a devastating winter, the Pilgrims were very thankful to have survived and to have enough food to celebrate.

And so were we. That year we were very thankful that my wife's father suggested shoveling the roof, since a summer home two houses away did collapse under the weight of the snow. We were thankful that her parents made it to our new place in spite of the ice storms that made driving treacherous and closed roads south of us. We were thankful to have a place to live, to have a paycheck, to have food and to be reminded of the things we generally took for granted, like water, heat and lights.

Most of all, we were thankful for God's blessing of family and the time we could spend together enjoying each other's company. Though what we experienced was just a minor inconvenience, it was a reminder of what our ancestors faced and of what many people around the world face daily. It made more real the stories we'd read by Laura Ingalls Wilder about the hardships of prairie life in America, especially *The Long Winter*. We could relate a little more to that winter when the Ingalls were without wood and had to bundle hay in order to have something to burn for heat.



With that reminder, we were truly thankful when the power came back on the next day and we had a belated turkey dinner. With heat, water coming from the tap, delicious food and family around, it was a wonderful feast.

In tribute to Laura Ingalls Wilder and her wonderful books, we will always remember that as our "Little House on the Prairie" Thanksgiving.

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

Don't Stand on Your Head!

By Larry J. Walker

A recent cellular phone commercial shows a man hanging upside down. This metaphor of our modern world goes all the way back to the first century, when the apostle Paul showed that the truth could turn things around.



YOU HAVE PROBABLY SEEN the cellular phone commercial that shows a man casually watering his lawn, suspended upside down in mid-air. This humorous scene is meant to depict the confusion over the claims of so many different cell phone companies.

A similar scenario confronted Paul and Silas as result of their preaching in Thessalonica, when some of the disbelieving citizens referred to them as those "who have turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). Of course we know that it was the accusers who, like the man in the commercial, were upside down in their thinking.

An upside-down world

We still live in an upside-down world, where many of the customs we take for granted are different from, even contrary to, the teachings of the Bible. Sadly, most people, like the man in the commercial, seem to have become comfortable with this posture. Many even offer violent resistance when exposed to the truth, like those described in Acts 17.

In contrast to those in Thessalonica, some in Berea were praised for their response to the new information Paul was preaching. The Bible commends them for two things: 1. They were open-minded and receptive, rather than closed-minded and resistant. 2. They "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

How about you? What is your response to new information? Are you like the man in the commercial, comfortable and content with your life, even though some of your beliefs may not be supported in the Scriptures? Are you like the religious zealots in Thessalonica who angrily resisted the truth as a threat? Or are you like the Bereans, who "were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so"?

For the past few years, I have been writing articles in a column for pastors in my local newspaper about the Holy Days mentioned throughout the Bible. These days, although originally given to the ancient nation of Israel, were observed by Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul and the early New Testament Church. I have also written many articles pointing out that the traditional holidays of mainstream Christianity are not mentioned in the Bible. We have also run similar articles in *Virtual Christian Magazine*. Our purpose is not to put down the beliefs of anyone, but to share with readers exciting new information that can lead to greater understanding of the plan of God. Though new to many today, the information has been in the Bible for centuries.



A reason to rejoice

Discovery of new truth should be exciting. During the reforms at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, they and other leaders of the nation of Israel rediscovered the Feast of Tabernacles as result of an intensive search of the Scriptures (Nehemiah 8:13-15). They restored the practice and celebrated the Feast with "very great gladness" (Nehemiah 8:16-18).

The command to "rejoice" is fundamental to observing this festival, which celebrated the blessings of the fall harvest in the new land (Deuteronomy 16:13-15). The Israelites also stayed in temporary dwelling places during this festival as a reminder of their living conditions en route to the Promised Land (Leviticus 23:40-43).

Foreshadowing future events

So what does that have to do with us today? The apostle Paul explained that this and other festivals foreshadow important future events in the plan of God (Colossians 2:16-17). This is why

he and the original Church continued observing these festivals and Holy Days (Acts 18:21; 20:16; 1 Corinthians 5:8).

It is also why I have been keeping these days for the past 40 years. I am presently the Festival coordinator for the Feast of Tabernacles in Bend-Redmond, Oregon, sponsored by the United Church of God, and we have recently enjoyed another exciting festival. This celebration rejuvenated those attending with a wonderful vision of God's promised Kingdom (Matthew 24:14; Revelation 11:15; Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:6-9).

More information about these Holy Days is available in our booklet, [God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind.](#)

We still live in an upside-down world, where many of the customs we take for granted are different from, even contrary to, the teachings of the Bible.

Perhaps this sounds a bit upside down to you. But we invite you to check this information out. I think you will find it interesting. The booklet, and the festivals it talks about, show how Jesus Christ will turn the world right-side up.