

Seeds for Good Soil

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Volume Two

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Chapter 1

Heavenly and Holy

*"If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you **heavenly things**?"*

*"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man **who is in heaven**."*

(John 3:11-12)

How the spiritual realm operates is a completely different construct than the physical world. Here, the Son of Man is speaking with Nicodemus and He is also in heaven having descended from and ascended to it. This reality is a "**heavenly thing**" according to Jesus. And here's another one:

"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."

Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?"

*Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and **We will come to him and make Our home with him**."*

(John 14:21-23)

Jesus had just told his disciples that upon His resurrection honest believers would know "**that I am in My Father, and you in Me and I in you**."

Now, one of the laws of physics basically states that no two fermions (protons, electrons, etc.) can occupy the same time and space (See Note).

So clearly, He was referring to a **spiritual** unity – we, that is the Son, Jesus, the Holy Spirit Who is in us when we get saved, and each of us – we are in unity, spiritual **oneness with the Father**.

And gloriously, this doesn't happen by way of our trying or efforts. When you love Him and keep His word (hold on to, trust) Jesus said that He and the Father **will come to you and make their residence with you** and of course, when you are saved, the Holy Spirit, by Christ's promise, is already in you so in the end you will be at home with the whole Triune God.

Isn't it mind boggling that our Lord Creator chooses to make each of us as believers His home, His residence. Now, for the present, Paul encouraged us with:

*Who hath also sealed us, and given the **earnest (guarantee, down payment) of the Spirit** in our hearts.*

(2 Cor 1:22)

*...ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, Who is the **earnest** of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*

(Eph 1:13b,14)

God's Holy Spirit is present in us but that's not all. There's more to come.

For that reason, I'm so looking forward to the marriage of the Lamb to the church (Rev 19:7) which will fulfill the mystery of which Paul spoke:

For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

"For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

*This is a great mystery, but I speak **concerning Christ and the church**.*

(Eph 5:32)

Aren't you glad that Christ is eternally good and loving? This is an eternal union, which as far as we know is not offered to the angels and it **may** even be what was behind the plan for man from the beginning:

*Then God said, "Let Us make man **in Our image**, according to **Our** likeness;"*

(Gen 1:26)

You see, in the beginning, the first Adam looked over all the creatures God created, naming them, but none was found that was suitable for his mate. So, God made his mate from his own body.

Could it be that the last Adam (Jesus-1 Cor 15:45) found none of the beings of the cosmos suitable for His mate and thus His Father created His Son's mate, the Church from Christ's body – His body broken for us and His Blood shed for our sins, both of which we take in – i.e. believe.

If so, that would suggest that the fulfillment of making man in "Our image" was not Adam and Eve but rather the Church – the body of believers in eternal submission and perfect unity with the Godhead.

Heavenly things indeed!

Note : In quantum mechanics, the Pauli exclusion principle states that two or more identical particles with half-integer spins (i.e. fermions) cannot simultaneously occupy the same quantum state within a system that obeys the laws of quantum mechanics.

Chapter 2

Torrents

On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.

"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:37-39)

Clearly, the rivers here (also torrents, floods) of living water represent the Holy Spirit, but most believers think of the Spirit as being **received** as in verse 39. However, Jesus spoke of it as **pouring out** of our heart as a torrent or flood. So, it's a gift **to us** and a gift **through us**. Let's consider both these actions to see what we can glean.

One of my favorite passages in the Old Testament speaks to both actions. Let's look at Ezekiel 47:1-12. In this section of scripture, a 'guide' is leading the prophet alongside a supernatural **river** which proceeds out of the **temple**.

Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar.

He brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gateway that faces east; and there was water, running out on the right side.

(Eze 47:1,2)

Remember as we look at this passage that it is prophecy and as such it is **focused** upon the Jewish people even though there is application for all believers. So, the water starts out small flowing from the east gate.

And when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the water came up to my ankles.

(Eze 47:3)

Now a cubit is a distance measurement from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. After 1000 of these cubits the water was ankle deep.

Again, he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water came up to my knees. Again, he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water came up to my waist.

(Eze 47:4)

So, the second set of 1000 cubits presents water that is knee deep and the third set of 1000 cubits presents water that is waist deep. We'll soon see that this water is indeed "living water" thus I suggest that we can glean something from the symbols here – ankle deep could speak to our 'walk', knee-deep could speak to our 'worship' and waist deep could speak to our 'prayer' as the waist is our core and where the ancients considered our inner being to reside. I think this speaks to the progressive influence of the Spirit in the life of the believer, but there's more.

You see, the river at this point is still passable. The 'crosser' is still in control, so to speak. But the guide is not finished.

Again, he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed.

(Eze 47:5)

At this point, after the fourth set of 1000 cubits, the river is over the head of the prophet. He is no longer 'in control' but must swim and go with the flow. I suggest that this could picture the believer being fully submitted, being in **unity with** the river, the living waters.

And I'll suggest a prophetic picture for the Jewish people as well. Cubits can be representative of years in some passages such as Joshua 3:4. In like manner, this passage in Ezekiel mentions 4000 cubits followed by a full immersion in the living waters of the Holy

Spirit. Since it has been about 4000 years since the call of Abram unto today and since we read of a holy anointing seal (the Holy Spirit) coming upon the 144,000 Jews in Revelation 7:3-8, this prophecy **could be** pointing to them.

Whether that's the case or not, there's something here for all of us as well. Jesus spoke of **believers** receiving the Holy Spirit and thereby providing torrents of living waters from within. Ezekiel speaks of a **temple** being the source of a river of living water that starts small and becomes a flood. Is there a connection? Absolutely:

*Do you not know that **you are the temple** of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

(1 Cor 3:16)

*Or do you not know that **your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit** who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?*

(1 Cor 6:19)

So, what's the outcome of this outflow? Life and fruit:

*Then he said to me: "This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are **healed**. And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will **live**.*

(Eze 47:8,9a)

"Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine."

(Eze 47:12)

Living waters indeed!

Chapter 3

Life Food

Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

*"For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives **life** to the world."*

*Then they said to Him, "**Lord, give us this bread always.**"*

*And Jesus said to them, "I am the **bread of life**. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.*

(John 6:32-35)

Bread and water – Jesus showed Himself to be the source of both spiritually. To one group who were Jews He offered the bread of life, but they were so preoccupied with the flesh that His ‘eat My flesh and drink My blood’ lesson freaked them out. Even his carnally minded ‘disciples’ deserted Him. When they thought it meant free food, they said, "**Lord, give us this bread always.**" But in reality, they couldn’t ‘digest’ the truth.

To the second ‘group’ who were Samaritans He offered living water. He started with a woman drawing water at the town’s well:

*Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, "but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting **life**."*

*The woman said to Him, "**Sir, give me this water**, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."*

(John 4:13-15)

Now this woman by the well was, well let's say a little loose in her marital commitments as she had had five husbands and the one she was currently with wasn't her husband. Surprisingly, she had an openness to the truth and perceived that Jesus had divine understanding.

She brought up the topic of Messiah and Jesus told her that He was Him. She was so excited she went to tell the people in town about Him and just left her water bucket at the well.

She said:

"Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"

(John 4:29)

The result was that the whole town came to believe. They drank in the truth for two days and rejoiced in it.

Bread and water or more accurately, the Bread of Life and Living Water - John's Gospel which is where these two stories are found, was written (according to John) so...

*...that you may **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that **believing** you may **have life** in His name.*

(John 20:31)

Important because believing is indeed taking in – it's the eating of the Bread and drinking of the Water. The carnally minded didn't understand that.

The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?"

(John 6:52)

So, what the Holy Spirit is teaching us in this is that it is critical to 'take in' Jesus, to take Him into our souls, our inner man. It's a spiritual lesson! That is to become one with Him so that you don't just follow Him and try to be like Him; living is when you actually submit your whole self to Him. He told us:

*"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood **abides in Me, and I in him.**"*

(John 6:56)

*"At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and **you in Me, and I in you.**"*

(John 14:20)

That does NOT mean you try harder. On the contrary, it means you trust Him absolutely.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me (takes Me in) has everlasting life. I am the bread of life.”

(John 6:47,48)

Selah.

Chapter 4

Burning Hearts

Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

Then their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.

And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"

(Luke 24:30-32)

On the road to Emmaus, two disciples got a ‘Bible study’ from the risen Lord Whom they did not recognize. At the end of the day, they urged Him to stay with them and the verses above show what transpired.

Now there are many lessons here for us but notice the two ‘**openings**’ Christ gave them; He opened their eyes and earlier in the day He opened the Scriptures, and two things happened to them as a result – when their eyes were opened, they **knew** Him. And when He opened the Scriptures, their hearts **burned** within.

Maybe you understand that burning – it wasn’t the ‘translation’ He used; it wasn’t His oratory skill necessarily, but they couldn’t deny what His words did to them or just casually accept what He said. Earlier, they had mocked His apparent ignorance of the recent events concerning their “prophet” from whom they expected ‘Messianic’ outcomes. And yet now, their hearts burned and leaped for joy at what He shared.

Those burning hearts told them this Man was their Savior even before their eyes did.

So, what does this teach us about Jesus? What can we learn about our hearts? What about the scriptures?

Jesus wants us to **discover** Him, to come to a **realization** that grabs our heart. He patiently taught these men truth about Himself from Genesis to Malachi. This was not however a rote Bible school lesson. Discovery and realization are the result of God's Spirit at work and **that's** the **burning** just as with Moses and the burning bush.

We know that this discovery is important because He did something similar with Mary at the garden tomb, with the 'boys' who were fishing on Galilee, with Paul on the way to Damascus. Jesus wants to grab our heart's attention and thereby birth surrender to Him. We need to get this – we're not talking about simply acknowledging Who Jesus is or what He's done – this is full **submission** to and **union** with Him. As with these guys on the way to Emmaus, He's not interested in satisfying our 'messianic' expectations which are usually misguided anyway – just ask John the Baptist.

He wants a **burning heart**. He's looking for a heart filled with joyful **discovery** of Who He is and the solid, everlasting **realization** of His Being. Apart from this 'burning', our hearts simply cannot have that because they are corrupt and carnal – just ask Paul.

Today's churches are at least in some manner teaching their congregants the scriptures, but like Laodicea they are turning out only tepid hearts, not burning ones. Jesus is talked about, but He is not revealed. Why? What's the difference? After Jesus' encounter, these two disciples hurried back to Jerusalem to share the news. After today's 'encounter' at church, the common response is to hurry off to Sunday brunch or the football game.

The difference is the genuine discovery and realization **birthed by God's Holy Spirit**. The hard truth is that even holy words are just words unless they are imparted by the Holy Spirit. There's a huge difference between knowing the Word and being honestly submitted to the Giver of those Words. King David expressed this when he sang:

My heart was hot within me; While I was musing, the fire burned. Then I spoke with my tongue:

*"And now, Lord, what do I wait for? **My hope is in You.**"*

(Psa 39:3,7)

Chapter 5

Where Are the Nine?

There were ten lepers who stood at a distance from Jesus pleading for His help. In response, He told them to go the priest and as they went, they were all healed. However only one of them returned to Christ to praise God and thank Him. The other nine were ‘in the wind’. (Luke 17:12-19)

Thankfulness, especially thankfulness toward God is pretty much an alien concept to the human mind. I suspect that that is because such thankfulness is an integral part of the heavenly experience.

Jesus clearly understood that and demonstrated thankfulness to the Father; not because it was obligatory but because He genuinely was thankful, it is simply a part of His divine character:

*In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, “**I thank You**, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.*

(Luke 10:21)

*Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, “Father, **I thank You** that You have heard Me.*

(John 11:41)

That thankfulness displays a focus on the goodness of God and thus a selflessness. And the good news is that once you are born anew, this attribute of Christ can be your focus as well as you submit your mind to Him (remember, He is in you, and you are in Him – John 15:4). It is the heart of the Psalmist:

*Oh, that men would **give thanks** to the LORD for His goodness,
And for His wonderful works to the children of men!*

(Psa 107 – 4X)

*Enter into His gates with **thanksgiving**,
And into His courts with praise.*

***Be thankful** to Him and bless His name.*

(Psa 100:4)

Conversely, since the beginning, evil men have been existing in a vile darkness:

*because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, **nor
were thankful**, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish
hearts were **darkened**.*

(Rom 1:21)

*“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and
men **loved darkness** rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”*

(John 3:19)

And that’s why Paul exhorted all of us to make thankfulness a part of EVERYTHING
we say and do:

*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord
Jesus, **giving thanks** to God the Father through Him.*

(Col 3:17)

Think of it this way. If you will ‘practice’ this now, when you get to heaven you’ll fit
right in:

*All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living
creatures and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,
saying:*

*“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom,
Thanksgiving and honor and power and might,
Be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”*

(Rev 7:11,12)

Chapter 6

Rejoicing Savior

In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”

(Luke:10:21,22)

Unique things in the scriptures are usually filled with wonderful lessons. Here’s one. “This is the only occasion in the gospels where it is specifically said that Jesus rejoiced. It stands alone.” (Spurgeon)

Geldenhuys says that the ancient Greek word for rejoiced is “referring to exceptional rejoicing and exultation.” Jesus rejoiced strongly; but He also rejoiced deeply (in the Spirit). (Guzik)

And that rejoicing led to a declaration of an amazing truth:

“...no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”

(Luk 10:22)

During His ministry as the “Son of Man”, Jesus labored in a divine anonymity. Only Peter, Martha and a few of the fearful demons declared, “You are the Christ.” But that is why, when Peter declared Jesus as the Christ, he was told:

*“Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, **but My Father** who is in heaven.”*

(Mat 16:17)

And note, that general blindness continued until He rose from the dead and the subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit Who gave people the divine ability to believe, truly believe in Him. In addition, what Jesus said to Peter about the Father revealing the Son is true for each one of us who believes – Father God, God Almighty, **reveals His Son** to all whom He calls:

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.”

(John 6:37)

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

(John 6:44)

Then there’s the other part, knowing who the Father is. Jesus explained:

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; **for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.**”*

(John 5:19)

That is, the Father reveals the Son and the **Son reveals the Father**:

*“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on **you know Him** and have seen Him.”*

Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.”

*Jesus said to him, “**Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father**; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”*

(John 14:7-9)

So, Jesus rejoiced and not only was that rejoicing unique in the Gospels but also in the whole Bible. Check it out. God just doesn’t seem to rejoice, at least **not like Jesus did here**, but there are countless commands and promises for God’s people to rejoice. And

that's understandable even for a lame-brain like me for you see, Jesus, His only Son was slain from before the beginning:

*All who dwell on the earth will worship Him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb **slain from the foundation of the world.***

(Rev 13:8)

So, throughout man's story from Eden until today, I suggest that God has saved His own rejoicing for a feast, a wedding feast:

*And as the bridegroom rejoices over the **bride**,
So shall your God rejoice over you.*

(Isa 62:5b)

This is significant because Christ's bride is a whole city full of saved people -

*I will rejoice in **Jerusalem**,
And joy in My people;*

(Isa 65:19)

*Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the **bride**, the Lamb's wife."*

*And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy **Jerusalem**, descending out of heaven from God,*

(Rev 21:9,10)

And this is when we will all know Who God is, for He will be 'all in all'.

*The LORD your God in your midst,
The Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with **gladness**,
He will quiet you with His love,
He will rejoice over you with **singing.**"*

(Zeph 3:17)

Let me offer this for your consideration. I think Jesus' rejoicing over His beloved disciples was unique because it was a **foreshadow** of the Father's rejoicing over the Bride of Christ with singing and gladness.

"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."

(Rev 19:7)

Sounds like a wedding feast to me! Everyone, Rejoice!

Chapter 7

Stumbling Block

Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd.

And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her.

When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."

Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."

So, he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.

Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people."

And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.

Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things.

*And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to Jesus, saying, "Are You the Coming One, or **do we look for another?**"*

(Luke 7:11-19)

The whole concept of Messiah as revealed in scripture has two distinct characteristics. On the one hand, He is a conqueror and mighty ruler defeating every evil form of opposition. But also, He is a redeemer and a healer, a proclaimer of the gracious good news of salvation – a suffering servant.

So, which is He? He is both, because mankind needs both. We need to be freed from the ruthless death-grip of sin, and we need be freed from the tyrannical death-grip of Satan.

Now, God Almighty chose to accomplish these two liberations Himself by way of His beloved Son. He chose to send Him first as the Healer, Redeemer, Teacher, Sacrificial Lamb and yet the King. And to announce this, He sent prophets with messages such as:

Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14)

Messiah would inherit an everlasting kingdom (2 Sam. 7:12–13; Psalm 89:29; Isaiah 9:7)

Messiah would proclaim good news to the poor (Isaiah 61:1; Micah 3:8)

Messiah would offer physical healing (Isaiah 35:5-6; 42:7-18; 53:5)

Messiah would ride a donkey (Zechariah 9:9)

Messiah would be betrayed (Psalm 41:9; Zechariah 11:12-13)

Messiah would provide atonement for sin (Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Malachi 3:3)

Messiah would be a suffering servant (Isaiah 53)

And all these things we witnessed in the person of the Son of Man/Son of God, Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospels. But this was a stumbling block of sorts too because although what Jesus did in fulfillment of these prophecies was clearly seen, the freedom from sin that He provided is spiritual first in nature and thus invisible, intangible to flesh and blood.

Some people can appreciate, accept and enjoy this freedom by faith, which is itself, a gift from God. But ‘New Testament’ faith was not easy for many of the Jews to grasp. They wanted to see, they wanted signs, and they looked for the Messiah to be first the Conquering King. They have always been more inclined to see their Messiah as God is described in:

The God of Israel is He who gives strength and power to His people.

(Psa 68:35)

In **Psalm 110**, we find a direct Messianic reference, “My Lord is a King-Priest, who has a throne appointed by God, a priestly office that no one else has fully occupied, which is to be filled by the King-Priest in perpetuity, with a kingdom and sphere of service that is worldwide.” There is also mention of a complete final victory over every evil form of opposition.

In **Psalm 68**, the King Messiah and his conquering army are accompanied by the tribes of Israel. The Psalmist prays that Zion will be strengthened, and all the Messiah's enemies will be destroyed (vv. 28-35).

"He will rule these nations with an iron scepter and treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty"

(Isa. 63:1-6.)

He is the Messiah, divinely chosen conqueror of all.

The Messiah will come as *"the conqueror that will break the nation's yoke and release her from bondage to other lords"* (Jer. 30:8).

Now back to our opening passage; there are ten resurrections recorded in the Bible and Jesus performed three of them not including Himself. Mind-boggling miracles. Here, in the town of Nain, Messiah showed up as a healer and:

Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people."

(Luk 7:16)

But immediately following this, John the Baptist, tossed the 'wet blanket' on the situation when he sent his own disciples to ask Jesus, *"Are You the Coming One, or **do we look for another?**"*

John, like virtually all of Israel, was apparently looking for the Conqueror, not the Healer, not the Lamb. And of course, God knew that this would be the stumbling block:

*For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, **to the Jews a stumbling block** and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

(1 Cor 1:22-24)

In Samaria, some disciples got offended by the locals when they didn't receive Him.

...when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?"

But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of."

*“For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives **but to save them.**”*

(Luke 9:54-56)

Even Jesus’ inner circle, after all the miracles and teaching they witnessed, still looked for the Conqueror.

So, we can’t fault John the Baptist. His expectation was scriptural, but his timing was wrong. And that’s the way it is with our human expectations. We can know the ‘what’ but the when... we are often impatient and self-willed. Nevertheless, we can’t let it become our stumbling block or our frustration.

We must learn the lesson of trust.

Chapter 8

Tough Crowd

Then He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country."

(Luke 4:24)

Interesting, to say the least, that Jesus said this in his hometown. Just before this He had been baptized by John, driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, and tested by Satan. After those 40 days, He headed north to Galilee and along the way, well let's let the Bible speak for itself:

*Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, **being glorified by all.***

(Luke 4:14,15)

Christ's teaching was an instant hit in the surrounding region but when ...He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up... *as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read.*

The passage was from Isaiah 61:

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor;

He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed;

To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."

(Isa 61:1,2a)

As you can see, it was very ‘up-beat’ and consequently:

*...all bore witness to Him, and **marveled** at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, “Is this not Joseph’s son?”*

(Luke 4:22)

The locals were initially marveling, but Jesus wasn’t there for the ‘strokes’, He proceeded to expose some very uncomfortable truth:

*"... I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; **but to none of them** was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and **none of them was cleansed** except Naaman the Syrian."*

(Luke 4: 25-27)

This really angered his audience there at home. At first they ‘marveled’ but now they contemplated ‘murder’:

So, all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff.

(Luke 4: 28,29)

Wow! Touchy people! But Jesus was giving them a foreshadow of the move of God’s Kingdom. He was basically forecasting that the Lord was going to go where He would be received – to the Gentiles. Consequently, the home towners became a very unwelcoming ‘hood’.

And ultimately, Israel became an unwelcoming nation to the Gospel. And this attitude was not limited to the Son of God but included God Himself for in their hypocritical religiosity, they treated many if not most of God’s messengers the same way.

Among the violent deaths described in the ancient apocryphal accounts of the lives of the prophets are those of Isaiah by being sawn in two, Jeremiah by stoning, and Ezekiel by a similar execution.

And not only Israel, but the whole world was complicit, for the disciples of Christ also experienced this treatment as they carried the message.

Peter and Paul

Both were martyred in Rome about 66 AD, during the persecution under Emperor Nero. Paul was beheaded. Peter was crucified upside down at his request since he did not feel worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

Andrew

He went to the "land of the man-eaters" in what is now the Soviet Union. Christians there claim him as the first to bring the gospel to their land. He also preached in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, and Greece, where he is said to have been crucified.

Thomas

He was probably most active in the area east of Syria. Tradition has him preaching as far east as India, where the ancient Marthoma Christians revere him as their founder. They claim that he died there when pierced through with the spears of four soldiers.

Philip

He possibly had a powerful ministry in Carthage in North Africa and Asia Minor, where he converted the wife of a Roman proconsul. In retaliation, the proconsul had Philip arrested and cruelly put to death.

Matthew

He was the tax collector, and writer of a Gospel ministered in Persia and Ethiopia. Some of the oldest reports say he was not martyred, while others say he was stabbed to death in Ethiopia.

Bartholomew

He had widespread missionary travels attributed to him by tradition: to India with Thomas and back to Armenia, Ethiopia, and Southern Arabia. There are various accounts of how he met his death as a martyr for the gospel.

James

He was the son of Alphaeus and is one of at least three James referred to in the New Testament. There is some confusion as to which is which, but this James is reckoned to have ministered in Syria. The Jewish historian Josephus reported that he was stoned and then clubbed to death.

Simon, the Zealot

As the story goes, he ministered in Persia and was killed after refusing to sacrifice to the sun god.

Matthias

He was the apostle chosen to replace Judas. Tradition sends him to Syria with Andrew and to death by burning.

John

The only one of the apostles generally thought to have died a natural death from old age. He was the church leader in the Ephesus area and is said to have taken care of Mary the mother of Jesus in his home. During Domitian's persecution in the middle '90s, he was exiled to the island of Patmos. There he is credited with writing the last book of the New Testament--the Revelation. An early Latin tradition has him escaping unhurt after being cast into boiling oil in Rome. (thanks, Christianity.com)

Does this sound like a 'walk in the park' message? Clearly, the answer to that depends upon the condition of your soul. Fundamentally, the Gospel is all about the mind-boggling love of God as demonstrated in Christ and if your heart is in the right place so to speak, you know that. But if you know that, you're going to live like that, and just like Jesus Himself:

*Yes, and **all** who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*

(2 Tim 3:12)

Yep, ALL of us that live that way will come to know this. But...

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

(Rom 8:35)

... in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Rom 8:37-39)

Chapter 9

More Than Wonderful

Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean."

Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed."

As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.

And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once, and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction.

(Mark 1:40-45)

At the time of this miracle, there was nothing more socially vile and abhorrent than a leper. Being contagious and unclean persons, lepers were supposed to isolate themselves from others, demonstrate their impurity and warn people of their illness. For this poor man to approach Jesus and get close enough to be touched, he could easily have been stoned to death or at the very least driven violently out of town.

Now, Jesus could have simply spoken the cure as he did with the centurion's servant or even with Lazarus being raised from the dead. But:

*Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and **touched** him, and said to him, "**I am willing; be cleansed.**" (v41)*

And the leper's first statement together with Christ's response tell us something more than wonderful about the character of our Savior and our God. You see, to touch the man would have immediately made Jesus "unclean" but His perfect purity could not be tainted; rather, it overwhelmed the leprous man with divine virtue, cleansing him completely.

And the "more than wonderful" part is that He didn't just heal the man but **took upon Himself** his illness as in:

When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, (Isa 53:4) saying: "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses."

(Matthew 8:17)

Think about this – Jesus was pure of heart, perfectly pure; and He was also sinless, absolutely sinless. Jesus went everywhere doing good, blessing, healing, teaching. As the Son of God, the God Man, He perfectly matched the prophetic picture of the Old Testament sacrificial spotless lamb but even more than that, He reached out to this poor diseased man – He reached out to us. He touched us in our filthy wicked hearts. Our hearts? Yes, you see:

"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."

(Matthew 15:9)

That's what He does when He saves you, and when that happens, just as with this leper, you are instantly made clean, perfectly clean, no residue. And the kicker is that you are thenceforth clean because **He took your filthiness, your sins and disease on Himself.**

That's just like the Old Testament goat that was taken out of the camp into the wilderness:

"Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send [it] away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man."

***"The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land;
and he shall release the goat in the wilderness."***

(Lev 16:21,22)

You see, contrary to modern 'theology', Jesus wasn't just a good man, wasn't just a prophet, wasn't even just a Savior; the power of His love and purity was so great that He did all that we could see with our eyes that was miraculous AND what we couldn't see - He carried all of our sin (and its consequences) with Him to hell (where it belongs).

So, as you can understand, He's not just wonderful; He's **more than wonderful**. He's our everlasting and ever-loving Savior.

Chapter 10

Rats

Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.

(Matt 26:56b)

I think we all have admiration for the devotion of the apostles of Christ. I mean they all died as martyrs of the faith. But these folks weren't apostles; not yet. They were disciples (learners). You see, Christ was not yet risen from the dead; the Holy Spirit was not yet given to them. So, in the darkness, as Jesus' enemies were assaulting Him, they deserted Him like rats fleeing a sinking ship.

I'm not really intending to be 'tough' on them; I'd have done the same thing and so would you. It was God's divine plan:

*"Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd,
Against the Man who is My Companion,"
Says the LORD of hosts.
"Strike the Shepherd,
And the **sheep** will be **scattered**;*

(Zech 13:7)

And Jesus knew it was going to happen:

*Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me
this night, for it is written:
'I will strike the Shepherd,
And the **sheep** will be **scattered**.'*

(Mark 14:27)

For more than three years, people had gathered around Jesus; they loved His words, His works. They even praised Him as He entered Jerusalem for the last time:

*Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:
“Hosanna!
‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’*

(Mark 11:9)

But God **intended** to isolate Him. To make Him forsaken by all, even His Father. Maybe you’ve felt that way as well. Now, we’ve been conditioned to think that the most ‘godly’ people gather the largest crowds, suffer the least and have the most notoriety. Those are the ones you’ll likely see at important events and honored among the very important people.

But in reality, the most godly people tend to be those who know first hand rejection, isolation and forsakenness; Jesus identifies with them, not the popular, not the powerful, not the pompous.

In fact, through all the isolation, torture, brutalizing and death by crucifixion, Christ never ‘played the victim card’ so to speak. Just the opposite – with His heart fixed on God, He never blamed God for His trials; He even forgave US all. Unfortunately, today’s believers are so soft and clinging to comforts, that when something dire happens they blame God and play the abused victim, even walk away.

Now, not everyone behaves this way, but many do because we aren’t edifying each other in the faith. Many of us don’t even know how. Sorrow of isolation is honest, but anger at God is dishonest and simply reveals the influence of Satan’s lies. Jesus, Himself was a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” but He never blamed His Father.

We need to recognize when our brothers are broken or alone and with understanding compassion, love and comfort them, encouraging their faith. That’s what Jesus did there on the shore of Galilee after His resurrection, specifically with Peter. Although He was the victim of victims, the ultimate victim of all time because He was faulted for all our sins. But He never acted like a victim because He knew He was the Victor, the Victor over death and He used that status to minister mercy and grace to Peter.

Jesus will tell you – forsakenness is NOT the end of the story, not when your trust is in Him.

Chapter 11

Touched

When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret and anchored there. And when they came out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, ran through that whole surrounding region and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard He was.

*Wherever He entered, into villages, cities, or the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His garment. **And as many as touched Him were made well.***

(Mark 6:53-56)

There's something very interesting and instructive for us here. In our previous devotion, we looked at a dear woman who had for twelve years endured the plague of an issue of blood and had tried to get healed by numerous doctors; at least she had spent all her money to no avail. Because of it, she was likely a social outcast, alone and emotionally broken. Then, one day, she heard the noise of a large crowd and learned that the teacher, Jesus was there.

Somehow, in her heart, her inner being, she knew, she just **knew** that if she could get close to Him, just touch His tassel, the tassel on the hem of His garment, she would be healed. Yes, it was superstitious; yes, if she told anyone, they would think she was nuts. But she was an outcast; there was no way the teacher would speak to her, let alone heal her. So, she had to try.

Her disease was so embarrassing; she knew she stunk, and as she pushed her way to the proximity of Jesus, her goal was in sight. She could see the tassel, but He was on the move, following the leader of the synagogue. She may have reached out more than once, being pushed aside by the crowd. But, at last, as she bent way down, she gently touched... and Boom! Something wonderful happened. There was no noise, but she knew, she

just **knew** her prayer was answered. She knew the bleeding had stopped; the odor disappeared.

And Jesus stopped too. There was confusion among the disciples and the crowd as Jesus said, “Someone touched Me.”

But His disciples said to Him, “You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, ‘Who touched Me?’ ”

(Mark 5:31)

What did she touch? The word used in the Greek for “hem” referred to a tassel, but in two accounts, Jesus specified “Me”. That is, Christ knew she had contacted **Him**, His inner being, not simply His garment. He explained,

“Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from Me.”

(Luke 8:46)

And furthermore,

*He said to her, “Daughter, be of good cheer; your **faith** has made you well. Go in peace.”*

(Luke 8:48)

Now, this is a difficult concept for some, even some translators. How do you touch the inner person of Christ? How can anyone touch the spiritual deity of the Creator? How did she touch Him? Jesus clearly sensed it as He perceived power or virtue going out from Him.

Many times, Jesus touched others; but this is the first time anyone had truly touched Him and He immediately noticed. He didn’t scold her or shy away but encouraged her to be cheerful and revealed the answer to our questions.

Now faith is not tangible, and you cannot manufacture it so many of the people in that crowd in all likelihood left with the impression that she was healed because she touched the tassel – the magic tassel. And word spread far and wide, “Just touch His tassel!” We can fairly safely presume this because not long after, the scene described in our opening verses transpired.

Everyone brought their sick friends and/or loved ones and they all just wanted to touch the hem (tassel) on His garment. Kudos to those who translated this passage in Mark; I think they sensed what the Holy Spirit was saying and used “Him” instead of “it” because just like the woman who was sick for twelve years, the ones

who **touched HIM** were healed and as we just came to understand, that was because of their faith in Him.

And thus, it is today as well. As Paul wrote:

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for **everyone** who **believes**, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is **revealed** from **faith to faith**; as it is written, "**The just shall live by faith.**"*

(Rom 1:16,17)

Salvation is truly the ultimate healing – trusting and consequently touching the Savior – by faith alone.

Chapter 12

Help, Lord!

I've written on the following lesson before many years ago, but the Lord put it on my heart to re-address it. It's all about how we approach the Lord in our time of need. There's a story recorded in all three of the synoptic Gospels – Jesus had just left the area where He had cast out a legion of demons from one or possibly two plagued men. In response, the residents of the area had insisted that Jesus depart. But here on the other side of the sea, crowds welcomed Him.

As He and His disciples negotiated their way through the crowd, a ruler of the local synagogue (i.e. an important man) came to Jesus and:

...he fell down at Jesus' feet and begged Him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter about twelve years of age, and she was dying.

(Luke 8:41,42)

Of course, Jesus responded and followed the man, but the crowd thronged Him. In the midst of this scene:

...a woman, having a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any, came from behind and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped.

And Jesus said, "Who touched Me?" When all denied it, Peter and those with him said, "Master, the multitudes throng and press You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?' "

But Jesus said, "Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from Me."

*Now when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before Him, she **declared to Him in the presence of all the people the reason she had touched Him** and how she was healed immediately.*

And He said to her, "Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace."

(Luke 8:45-48)

Now, both these folks had great faith in Jesus for healing, but their needs were very different, and their approaches were as well. The man was a ruler of the synagogue; almost by definition, he was a leader in the community and probably wealthy. He approached Jesus head-on. People may have even just gotten out of his way. He fell at Jesus' feet and begged for help.

The woman was penniless, and her condition made her 'unclean' and a person to stay away from; no man would touch her and if she ever had a husband, he was almost certainly long gone. She was desperate, broken, isolated and or forsaken and without any means. She approached Jesus from behind, hiding in the throng. When she got close enough, she bent or stooped or fell to the ground to touch the hem of Christ's garment.

Immediately, her flow of blood stopped and so did Jesus. Spiritually, she had touched the Creator – it had shocked her, surprised Jesus and it gave her new life.

But as desperate as her situation was, surely the ruler of the synagogue felt the same or even more so. Those of you who have lost a child can relate – there is no greater pain, no greater catastrophe to a parent.

One of the gospel accounts tell us that when they finally did get to the ruler's home, the people gathered there basically said, "It's too late." And some even ridiculed Jesus. What an enormous, crushing challenge this must have been to the faith of the man. Jesus knew this and He said, "*Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well.*"

In a few moments, Jesus raised her from the dead showing plainly that the man did indeed have faith, and Jesus gave his little girl new life.

Irrespective of your life's circumstances, rich or poor, leader or loser, exalted or expelled, if you come to Christ, He will respond to you. You may actually touch Him from behind or worship Him before His face and He will respond.

But importantly, we must notice, both these dear people had faith, faith in the Lord. There was no ‘show’, no pretense, no act. You may think that this disqualifies you but hear me on this, faith is not something you work up; it is a **gift** from God:

*For by grace you have been saved **through faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is **the gift of God**,*

(Eph 2:8)

Study this carefully, salvation is indeed a gift, but it is the ‘**indirect**’ gift from God. The **direct** gift is **faith** for **new life, faith in the finished work of Christ**. It is the same gift, the same faith God gave to the man and woman in this story – faith for new life – new life in, through and from our amazing Lord Jesus. So, if you lack faith, **ask** God. Peter knew this principal as he healed a lame man, and it led to his declaration at the temple:

*“And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the **faith which comes through Him** has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.”*

(Acts 3:16)

I suspect that few if any of us are ‘giants’ of faith but even small faith is meaningful:

and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

(1 Cor 1:27b)

For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.

(2 Cor 13:4)

Just come to Jesus; He won’t turn you away.

Chapter 13

Perspective

Undoubtedly, God preserved the stories we read in the scriptures for many reasons. Of course, we have prophecy, admonition, instruction, history, praise and light or guidance pertaining to our relationship with the Lord and how we live.

But by design, the stories leave you with a ‘moral’ or lesson that depends upon your spiritual perception. Now, truth is truth but the lesson that touches you most deeply for any given story is the one you relate to. Here’s an example:

Many of us recall the story in Daniel chapter six – Daniel and the Lion’s Den and herein are many lessons for us including courage, faithfulness, the power of God, etc. But if you had to identify one ‘take-away’, what would it be?

Let’s review the story in summary – Daniel was one of three top advisors to the king, Darius, who admired Daniel deeply and was considering a promotion for him to be his ‘number one’. This infuriated Daniel’s peers, and they plotted to undermine him. They looked for any fault with which they could accuse him but finding none decided they could only attack his faith. They knew that Daniel prayed to God every day and so they tricked the king to sign a binding law that made praying to any god (note the small ‘g’) or man other than the king would be punished by death in the lion’s den.

Of course, this probably flattered the king, and he thoughtlessly signed the decree after which it could not be changed. Well, if you know the story, you know that Daniel was unphased by the new decree; he continued to pray daily to God – no rebellion. He just kept doing what he always did and that’s what his enemies were counting on. They nabbed him in the act and came before the king and said:

And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king’s decree:

“Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den

of lions?” The king answered and said, “The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter.”

So, they answered and said before the king, “That Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.”

(Dan 6:12,13)

Now, when Darius heard this, he probably slapped himself on the forehead and began trying to find a loophole for Daniel. But the ‘bad guys’ told him:

“Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed.”

(Dan 6:15)

So, he reluctantly gave the command to throw Daniel into the den of lions but spent the whole night fasting and without sleep and in the morning rushed to the lion’s den. He cried out:

“Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”

(Dan 6:20)

Daniel responded:

“My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you.”

(Dan 6:22)

So, Darius was elated, Daniel was cool, but Daniel’s enemies were in hot water. Daniel was pulled out of the den and all the other advisors who devised the scheme, along with their families, were thrown into the den of lions and were crushed before they even hit the ground.

So, what’s the moral of the story? One friend of mine told me, “You don’t want to cross God.” And he’s right but there’s another:

*Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So, Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, **because he believed in his God.***

(Dan 6:23)

The other moral of the story is ‘you can trust God’. You see, the first one is for the bad guys so to speak. The second is for those of us who believe and love God.

To confirm this principal, let’s look at one more story. Jesus was in Jerusalem once again teaching. Suddenly, a group of men – Pharisees and scribes – approached dragging a woman with them. Shoving her to the front, they said:

“Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?”

(John 8:4,5)

They cared nothing for true righteousness, for it was evident that they carefully arranged both the adulterous act and her arrest. They claimed that **this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act** — yet they did not bring the guilty *man* before Jesus. It’s possible that the man was one of them, and they simply used the woman as a weapon or pawn in their conflict against Jesus. – Guzik

You may remember the story. Jesus simply stooped down and began writing in the dust. I picture Him getting on eye level with the terrified woman. Meanwhile the religious mob continued to question Jesus hoping to get Him to say something they could use to accuse Him.

For a while He said nothing, but then He stood up, thus establishing eye level posture with the accusers. Then He uttered His judgement:

“He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.”

And again, He stooped down and wrote on the ground.

(John 8:7,8)

Immediately, the crowd started thinning as the oldest of them vacated the scene followed by others until only the woman was left along with Jesus:

When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

(John 8:10,11)

So, what's the moral of this story? Again, it depends upon how you view God.

The religious accusers wanted Jesus to 'side with Moses' or go against the Law and dismiss the incident. In either case, they were ready to execute the woman (and Jesus) because their view of God was as a harsh and terrible judge, intolerant of even the slightest misdeed. They also thought their own misdeeds were, well, not so bad.

But Jesus manifested the perfect understanding of His own Father showing Him to be just but also loving and merciful. So, the first moral might be, "Don't sin cause God's gonna catch you." And the second moral might be, "God loves you. If you confess your sin, He is faithful and just to forgive you for your sin and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness."

The earliest Greek manuscripts of the Gospel of John do not include this story of the woman caught in adultery. In fact, church fathers and others do not mention the story until the twelfth century. They thought that the passage reflected a lax view on adultery. The church has historically had an easier time understanding a righteous standing before God because of good behavior than a righteous standing based on faith and trust in Him alone. It's still the same way today.

Both morals are true but one speaks to the person who believes in God but doesn't really think of Him as loving. The second speaks to those who not only believe but totally love and trust Him.

Thus, it is with many of the lessons we have in the Bible. Perspective is absolutely influential.

Chapter 14

Division

*When the morning stars **sang together**,
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?*

(Job 38:7)

Now, this verse is the Lord speaking to Job. At the conclusion of his tribulation, God chided him, saying:

*“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?
Tell Me, if you have understanding.”*

(Job 38:4)

So, from this, we can gather that at some point in the ancient past, ancient ancient past, all of God’s creation was in unity, a joyful unity.

But something happened that God doesn’t give us a lot of information on. One of His created angels called Day Star or Lucifer became rebellious and was cast out of the heavenly realm:

*“How you are fallen from heaven,
O **Lucifer**, son of the morning!”*

(Isaiah 14:12a)

For you have said in your heart:

*‘I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;
I will also sit on the mount of the congregation
On the farthest sides of the north;*

*I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,
I will be like the Most High.'*

(Isaiah 12:13,14)

He wanted to be “like the Most High” and to rise above the angelic host.

Lucifer was certainly a glorious angel. Yet, there came a time when despite all his beauty and glory, he departed from the heart of God by wanting to exalt himself above his peers. Instead, the heart of Jesus says, “The status of equality with God is not something to hang on to. I will let it go. I will give up My reputation, be a servant, live humbly among men, and even die an excruciating and humiliating death.” (Philippians 2:5-8) When Lucifer departed from this heart, he fell from glory. – David Guzik

Jesus told His disciples that He witnessed this event:

And He said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”

(Luke 10:18)

Lucifer became prideful and lifted up in his heart:

*“You were the seal of perfection,
Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.*

*You were in Eden, the garden of God;
Every precious stone was your covering:
The sardius, topaz, and diamond,
Beryl, onyx, and jasper,
Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold.
The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes
Was prepared for you on the day you were created.*

*“Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;
You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor;*

(Eze 28:12b – 17a)

Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty: Satan’s sin was prompted by pride. With a swelled heart, drunk on his own sense of beauty and splendor, he made himself an opponent of God, because God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5). -- Guzik

“It is a strange paradox that nothing makes a being less like God than the urge to be his equal, for he who was God stepped down from the throne of his glory to display to the wondering eyes of men the humility of God.” (Grogan)

In Revelation, Lucifer/Satan is referred to as the dragon:

*And his tail drew the **third part of the stars of heaven** and did cast them to the earth: And the **dragon** stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.*

(Rev 12:4)

*And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the **dragon**; and the **dragon** and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.*

(Rev 12:7,8)

*So, the great **dragon** was **cast out**, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was **cast to the earth**, and his angels were cast out with him.*

(Rev 12:9)

Now, it seems that these passages span a great deal of time and culminate at the end of this age, but the point is not the chronology but rather the **division** Lucifer/Satan brought to the cosmos.

Why did Lucifer rebel? Perhaps because he rejected God’s plan to create an order of beings made in His image (Genesis 1:26), who would be beneath the angels in dignity (Hebrews 2:6-7a; 2 Peter 2:11) yet would be served by angels in the present (Hebrews 1:14; 2:7-8; Psalm 91:11-12) and would one day be lifted in honor and status above the angels (1 Corinthians 6:3; 1 John 3:2). Satan wanted to be the highest among all creatures, equal to God in glory and honor, and the plan to create man would eventually put men above angels.

If this is the case, it explains well Satan’s present strategy against man: to obscure the image of God in man through encouraging sin and rebellion, to cause man to serve him, and to prevent the ultimate glorification of man. -- Guzik

Also, from these Revelation verses, we can gather that a third of the stars (i.e. angels) were drawn into Satan’s sin. It’s possible that they were the “sons of God” who had sexual relations with the “daughters of men” before the Noahic flood. (see Gen 6:2,4) In doing so, they crossed over or left their own abode:

And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day;

(Jude 1:6)

All this background is simply to set the stage for a principal point – sin, and in particular, the sin of pride originates, undergirds and promotes all of the harmful division in creation. It was first found in Lucifer when it blackened his being, and he infected both angels and men with it.

Mankind chose to rebel against his Maker and ever since has been awash in pride, thoroughly immersed in its toxicity and stench. Consequently, we have absolutely no comprehension of the harmony and unity of His kingdom.

Division is in the spiritual realm and in the physical. We see it in wars, violence, divorce; it's between nations, between family members, between religions, between sects and between people in general everywhere, all the time.

But God's plan is to eliminate division with perfect oneness just as at the beginning:

*... and not for that nation only, but also that He would **gather together in one** the children of God who were scattered abroad.*

(John 11:52)

*... having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might **gather together in one all things in Christ**, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth—in Him.*

(Eph 1:9,10)

Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.

For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.

The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted.

*Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, **that God may be all in all.***

(1 Cor 15:24-28)

Chapter 15

What Does It Take?

*Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. For as yet **they did not know the Scripture**, that He must rise again from the dead.*

(John 20:8,9)

Now, I don't want to be too hard on Peter and John but it kind of mystifies me that they could follow Jesus for over three years and still "*not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.*"

I mean Jesus repeatedly told them:

*And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and **after three days** rise again.*

(Mark 8:31)

*And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the **third day** he shall **rise again**.*

(Mat 20:19)

*And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the **third day** he shall **rise again**.*

(Mark 10:34)

*And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the **third day** he shall **rise again**.*

(Luke 18:33)

*Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of
sinful men, and be crucified, and the **third day rise again**.*

(Luke 24:7)

He was so vocal about it that even the chief priests told Pilate:

*“Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver
said, ‘**After three days I will rise**.’”*

(Mat 27:63)

But you might think that perhaps they didn’t hear Him, or maybe they thought He was telling them another parable, or maybe they just couldn’t believe Him. But, whatever the case, they could have referred to the scriptures which say:

*For You will not leave my soul in Sheol,
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.*

(Psa 16:10)

And

*Come, and let us return to the LORD; For He has torn, but He will heal us;
He has stricken, but He will bind us up.*

*After two days He will revive us; On the third day He will raise us up, That
we may live in His sight.*

(Hosea 6:1,2)

Commentator David Guzik writes about this latter passage:

In the prayer, there is a shadowy prophecy of Jesus’ resurrection on the **third day**. The context supports this wonderfully; on the cross Jesus was **torn** and **stricken** for our sake, yet He was also gloriously raised up **on the third day**.

So, I’m at least a little bit curious, “What were they thinking?!” I mean they witnessed Jesus raise several people from the dead – Lazarus, the 12-year-old girl, the son of the grieving widow.

Nevertheless, it didn’t ‘click’. Jesus’ own words, over and over, didn’t do it; the Old Testament scriptures evidently didn’t do it; His previous miracles didn’t do it. You just have to scratch your head and wonder, “What does it take for these disciples, these ‘learners’ and followers to believe?!”

And then, of course, I look in the mirror and I see my own stubborn heart. Apart from the miraculous power of **God's Spirit**, we are all caught, or should I say entangled in the web of carnal disbelief and thus we treat Christ casually, even rudely like Simon the Pharisee in Luke chapter seven. It is **God's Spirit** who brings us to faith and trust, who plants its seed in our being and who guides us and teaches us and inspires us. Without Him, we won't get it; it won't click.

Even the empty tomb won't do it. And so, it is with the shallow religious practices of today. They put on a show so to speak; they can talk about the Spirit, about Christ's resurrection, new life and so on but really, it's mostly about attendance, budget, liturgy – business. Pastors are usually simply managers of the business. But a single word spoken by the Lord can change it all – your mind, your inner being, your entire life, just as with Mary – alone, broken-hearted, probably disillusioned:

Then the disciples went away again to their own homes.

But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down [and looked] into the tomb.

And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."

Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing [there], and did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher).

(John 20:10-16)

A single word from Jesus turned dear Mary from a weeper to a worshipper. Of course, it was a spirit-filled word as are all the words from Christ. In an instant, she was no longer feeling alone or forsaken. Her Maker, her Love, her Redeemer was clearly alive.

And thus, Jesus is with you today if the Spirit opens your eyes, your soul to see. He's alive forever. When John saw the empty linen graveclothes, he believed. That's what it took for him. Peter had to be forgiven, that's what it took for him. Mary had to hear her name spoken by her Lord, that's what it took for her.

What will it take for you? Where will God's loving finger touch you? His Spirit knows you and will truly open your heart to honest belief and trust when you let Him. It doesn't matter how long you've followed or listened or labored if you still lack honest life-changing belief. Don't be satisfied with the 'empty tomb'. There's more! Don't be satisfied with shallow religion. There's more!

There's a risen, vibrant, glorified Son of God, Jesus Who, like with Mary, is right behind you desiring you to look into His loving eyes and realize His grace.

Chapter 16

... of Life!

Ah, Life! From the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation, it has some 870+ mentions (depending on version). In the Old Testament, it is primarily an adjective used to **describe** something while in the New Testament it is one of two feminine nouns used to **identify** either the physical or spiritual (eternal) life.

But in both Testaments, Life is coupled with various **sources** which show that it is multi-faceted in its character. And since it is of utmost importance to us, I'm going to examine these sources and what they say about the spiritual (eternal) **quality** of Life and then we'll consider the **ultimate** nature or source of Life.

*And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the **breath of life**; and man became a living being.*

(Gen 2:7)

Man was created, not evolved, from the earth – the dust of the ground. First, God shaped the body and while it was still lifeless, He breathed into it the breath of life. The word for breath is also translated spirit or inspiration. Thus, the dust was enlivened **by the spirit** and man became a living being or soul. So here, at the beginning, life for mankind came from the breath or **Spirit of God** and it should be noted that this **life** is the **connection with God**.

Next:

*And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The **tree of life** was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

(Gen 2:9)

Even in the beginning, there was a distinction between life and **eternal** life (which was available via the tree of life – see Gen 3:22) and it was always a choice. There was/is more to life than just living. It's important for us to note that before the disastrous 'serpent event' in which Adam and Eve ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil they never ate of the Tree of Life. We know this because when they were evicted from the Garden, God specifically barred them from that tree:

*“lest he put out his hand and take **also** of the tree of life, and eat, **and live forever**”*

(Gen 3:22)

In their state of sinless innocence, they could have eaten from it and lived forever, joyful and in God's presence. But Adam's sin of willful rebellion cost us all, and in mercy, God did not allow them afterwards to eat of the Tree of Life and live forever in the state of being dead, disconnected from the Lord.

So, from the beginning, man knew life (and death) but never the quality of **eternal** life. How appropriate it is that another 'tree' would present to mankind both death and life, again a choice – the cross of Calvary:

*“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a **tree**.”* -- Peter to the chief priests

(Acts 5:30)

Unlike the Garden of Eden, all men may freely approach this Tree of Life and choose to accept its fruit – eternal life. That choice takes faith.

Next:

*You will show me the **path of life**;
In Your presence is fullness of joy;
At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

(Psa 16:11)

Yes, there is a path of life or most accurately, a **Way of Life** and that Way is a Person, Christ:

Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?"

*Jesus said to him, "I am the **way**, the truth, and the **life**. No one comes to the Father except **through Me**."*

(John 14:5,6)

So that path or way is not a road that you follow to a destination. It is a **person** who is Himself the One through whom you come to God. It's not His introduction to the Father you need; it's Him. You must be **in Him and He in you**:

*"At that day you will know that **I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.**"*

(John 14:20)

The Way is the source of Life, eternal Life for the Way **reconnects** you to the Godhead:

*"And **this is eternal life**, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."*

(John 17:3)

*And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and **we are in Him** who is true, **in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.***

(1 John 5:20)

Next:

*For with You is the **fountain of life**; In Your light we see light.*

(Psa 36:9)

Life is not sedate. A fountain is a springing forth which reminds us of Jesus' own words:

*"but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But **the water that I shall give him** will become **in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.**"*

(John 4:14)

Life that comes from the fountain that Jesus plants in us springs forth, it erupts from the Spirit of God within us. Note that both here and in heaven Jesus gives it to those of us who thirst for it freely:

*And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the **water of life freely** to him who thirsts.*

(Rev 21:6)

Next:

*And Jesus said to them, “I am the **bread of life**. He who **comes** to Me shall never **hunger**, and he who **believes** in Me shall never **thirst**.*

(John 6:35)

Jesus is Life, He gives Life and He **sustains** Life forever. In Him, there is no lack, no need, no hunger or thirst.

Next:

*Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the **light of life**.”*

(John 8:12)

Jesus knew who He was/is. He completely understood what he offered to mankind. It was **in Him** – Life – and for us, it was unlike any radiance we knew:

***In Him** was **life**, and the life was the **light** of men.*

(John 1:4)

Next:

Yes, He is Life, He gives Life, He sustains Life and He rewards Life:

*Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will **receive** the **crown of life** which the Lord has **promised** to those who love Him*

(James 1:12)

Next:

And finally, there is a record in heaven of those who have this Life:

*“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the **Book of Life**; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.”*

(Rev 3:5)

So, this is **Life**. It comes from the Spirit, the Tree (Cross), the Way, the Fountain, the Bread, the Light and the Crown but ultimately, it's Jesus, it's all Jesus.

*For the law of the **Spirit of life in Christ Jesus** has made me **free** from the law of **sin and death**.*

(Rom 8:2)

I hope that all of you are **Living** in His Light!

Chapter 17

Living Waters

On the last day, that great [day] of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.

"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet [given], because Jesus was not yet glorified.

(John 7:37-39)

Some passages of scripture just ‘stick’ with you. I’ve thought about these for some 53 years or so and they still mystify and motivate me. At this time, the Pharisees were actively trying to kill Jesus, yet here He is in Jerusalem amid a very large crowd, and He stands to cry out, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."*

What did He mean? Who was/is thirsty? What is this living water? And how does it flow out of someone’s heart (inner being) as rivers (or floods)?

Of course, if you read verse 39, you note that He spoke concerning the Spirit. But how many people do you know (unsaved) who seek the Spirit of God? Probably close to zilch. Yet Jesus announced this as if many or even most were actively seeking.

The woman by the well in John chapter four got a lesson in living water also and when she heard some of the benefits, asked Jesus to give her some. So really, Jesus was giving the temple crowd the same invitation that He gave to the Samaritan woman. But unlike the Samaritans who warmly welcomed and believed in Christ, the Jews in this crowd just disputed with each other.

It seems that the living water didn't interest them. Now, you may think that they had no idea what living waters meant. Maybe so, but anyone who had read/heard the book of Jeremiah in the synagogue would have heard this:

"For My people have committed two evils:

*They have forsaken Me, the fountain of **living waters**,*

And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water."

(Jer 2:13)

So clearly, they had a history of forsaking God and His living waters. They've had no thirst for it. David Guzik says, "Thirst is not anything in itself; it is a *lack* of something. It is an emptiness, a crying need." And he adds, "To come to Jesus and to drink was essentially to put one's faith into Him; to trust in, rely on, and cling to Jesus for both time and eternity."

So, what is the person who thirsts spiritually looking for? What do they sense that they lack? Purpose, love, life, consolation, understanding, truth, wisdom,... many possibilities. I'll suggest that anytime a person senses that they are missing, lacking something **inside**, not money or power or any fleshly thing; but rather, they are missing something in the heart, they are thirsty.

Of course, many people are never thirsty like this because they live completely 'in the flesh' and they chase after the fleshly things ferociously.

So, we understand who Jesus was addressing, who are the thirsty. What about this living water? If it is going to quench a spiritual thirst, it has to be spiritual in nature. I'm convinced it is simply the Holy Spirit just as we see described in Ezekiel 47:1-12.

In this passage, the prophet was brought to the 'house', that is, the temple. Most scholars consider this passage as pertaining to the millennial period yet among other things, it speaks of the sanctifying work of the living water of God's Spirit. This mighty, life-giving river is a miracle in and of itself. It starts as a small rivulet flowing from south of the altar of sacrifice and without any tributaries becomes a deep uncrossable river.

The altar points to the shed blood of Christ and thus His gift of salvation – righteous standing before God. But the stream, the flowing water (literally living waters) speaks of the Holy Spirit. It's a small rivulet to start with and typifies the deposit of God's Spirit made in our hearts upon salvation.

But Ezekiel is led down this rivulet's path for a thousand cubits and is escorted across it. It's larger now, and the water comes up to his ankles. In like manner, as we follow the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, we are led to 'walk the talk' – ankle deep so to

speak. The Holy Spirit exerts His influence and begins to change us, and our walk is refreshed in His living waters.

Next, the prophet is led another 1000 cubits further downstream and again crosses it. Here, it is knee deep which speaks of humble worship and prayer. As we grow in submission to the Lord, sincere worship and communication with Him become increasingly refreshing, cleansing and Spirit-led activities.

After this, Ezekiel is brought another 1000 cubits and again across the river which is now up to his waist. The mid-section of the body was always considered by the ancients as the seat of the soul, the inner man. As such, this pictures the disciple's life as progressing with the Lord to the point that he/she is surrendering the thoughts and intents of the heart to the Holy Spirit. As David prayed *"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord..."* (Psa 19:14)

Finally, he is brought another 1000 cubits and being led into the river, he finds it uncrossable – over his head. Here, he is purely 'in the flow' -- submerged. His guide brings him back to shore where he now finds the banks filled with fruit-bearing trees. The river heals and brings life wherever it flows.

At some point, full surrender, absolute emersion in the living waters is going to happen in the life of every true disciple of Christ – maybe here in this life, but absolutely in heaven. That's because the Spirit, given by Jesus to each believer, abides in you and you in Him. Whether or not you realize it, the Lord is living in you as one, in perfect unity. In God's eyes, you're perfect. Don't faint. What He sees is Christ living out His life, expressing Himself in you and through you:

"At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you."

(John 14:20)

The living water gets deeper and deeper to the point where its current is uncrossable and that is the point at which we see its life-giving force. Participating in God's holiness gets to be more and more of a 'current' in the life of the sincere follower of the Son of Man. Every action, every word, every thought fully submitted to its 'flow' is life-giving and healing. You don't cross it anymore; you can only go with it.

As you can see, this 'flow' is a flood and that's how it comes from the innermost being of the sincere believer; it overflows.

Chapter 18

The Eviction

So, He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

(Gen 3:24)

The first eviction. The language indicates that it was forceful. And the follow up made it clear that there was no coming back to Eden and especially to the tree of life for God placed at least two powerful angels and an impassable flaming sword to guard the way.

The word used for this eviction is also used to describe a woman who is divorced, and this is really what happened – mankind was divorced, disconnected from God.

“Evil can be undone, but it cannot 'develop' into good. Time does not heal it. The spell must be unwound...” — C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*

Two angels (cherubim) brings to mind the garden tomb:

*But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept, she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw **two angels** in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.*

(John 20:11,12)

And a flaming sword brings to mind our glorified Christ:

*He had in His (Christ) right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a **sharp two-edged sword**, and His countenance was **like the sun shining** in its strength.*

(Rev 1:16)

So, as you picture these two angels in Christ's empty tomb, one at the place where His head had lain and the other at the feet, recall the image of the mercy seat that rested upon the ark of the covenant. There, we would have seen as well, two angels (Cherubim) at either end facing each other. Between them was where the presence of God communed with Moses and Joshua.

Thus, we can see that the empty tomb of Jesus representing that Christ had risen, signified also that communion/connection with God was restored.

The sword reminds us of the **Word of God**:

*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged **sword**, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

(Heb 4:12)

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the **Word was God**. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*

(John 1:1-3)

*By faith we understand that the **worlds were framed by the word of God**, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.*

(Heb 11:3)

So, at the 'end of the beginning', the first Adam was evicted from paradise and prohibited from the tree of life but just as we pointed out, the imagery points to the empty tomb and the Word of God. And that wonderfully illustrates the grace and truth of God shown in Jesus Christ:

For of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

(John 1:16, 17)

You see, there on the border of Eden, the fiery sword (symbolic of the Law) barred the way to the Tree of Life but when the living Word of God yielded up His spirit on the tree of death, angels that once barred the way then showed that the tomb was empty, that

Christ had risen, that the way into the presence of the Almighty and Life itself was open, restored.

And upon Christ's death, to announce this, God Himself tore open the veil of the temple from top to bottom:

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; ...

(Mat 27:51a)

How could He be more clear – the way to Life, once barred was now open; the way to true fellowship with God, once disconnected was now reconnected and forever established in Jesus Christ; the flaming sword of the Law was fulfilled when its truth was combined with the holy grace of God in His Son. The angelic guardians became angelic greeters.

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!

Chapter 19

God's Talents

(Matthew 25)

None of us wants to be like the man who told his lord, “*Lord, I knew you to be a hard man,...*” and consequently buried his talent. Driven by hubris and/or a drastic misperception, he did nothing with his talent.

Now, in the parable that Christ told, the lord doled out talents to three men, each according to their ability or literally power (inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature, or which a person or thing exerts and puts forth – ‘dunamis’ in the Greek from which we get dynamite in English).

The first man was given five talents, and he says he ‘traded’ and obtained another five. The word ‘traded’ is more appropriately translated ‘worked with’. The second man was given two talents, and he said that he had ‘gained’ two more. In the scripture, this word usually means to gain **any one** i.e. to win him over to the kingdom of God, to gain one to faith in Christ. For example:

*And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might **gain** them that are under the law;*

*To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might **gain** them that are without law.*

*To the weak became I as weak, that I might **gain** the weak: I am made all things to all [men], that I might by all means **save some**.*

(1 Cor 9:20-22)

So, it would appear that the trading (i.e. working) and gaining which the two first men experienced had to do with furthering the kingdom of God while the third grumbler was simply a 'pew potato' so to speak.

But it is key to understand that this working and gaining is NOT by human effort. It is entirely God's Spirit at work in us and through us:

*So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, **but God who gives the increase.***

(1 Cor 3:7)

And their results were in contrast to the 'pew potato' for you see, the third man was:

*...not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, **grows with the increase that is from God.***

(Col 2:19)

But hear me on this. This is NOT a lesson on 'church' growth; this is about body of Christ growth, both on an individual and corporate basis. And it is always, always **the increase that is from God** not man, **not** human effort or schemes or business models or anything conceived by or for the flesh.

So, what is this increase? More pew potatoes? Louder 'worship'? Bigger donations? More satellite congregations? Let's see what the scriptures say:

*And may the Lord make you **increase** and abound in **love** to one another and to all, just as we do to you,*

(1Thes 3:12)

*Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and **increase the fruits of your righteousness,***

(2 Cor 9:10)

I'm very much inclined to see these talents as God's Holy Spirit working and gaining in each of His children except of course for the one that was buried in the earth. These are NOT human talents like music, speaking, or other skills. Take heart, all of you who can't sing or dance or orate. PTL!

You may not even see your increase of talents or should I say treasure:

*Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have **treasure in heaven**; and come, follow Me."*

(Mat 19:21)

*"Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a **treasure in the heavens** that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys.*

(Luke 12:33)

So, every sincere believer who listens to the voice of God's Spirit in their inner being (all day, every day, any where) and obeys is like the two who increased their talents; it's the in-dwelling, the communing and the obedience that results in the increase. But the 'spudster' just buried his talent. He separated himself and had nothing to do with it (Him).

Chapter 20

The Greatest

Jesus came as a teacher. Of course, He came first to be our Savior, but what He did during His entire public ministry was teach. Of course, He was a healer and prophet and other things as well but foremost, He **showed** Himself to be a teacher, and his followers were called disciples which means “learners”.

And He practiced a perfect style of teaching which we can also see throughout all of scripture – that is, every lesson contained more than what was obvious on the surface. It/They required you to think, to engage and ponder to really understand.

And there were some things that His ‘learners’ just didn’t seem to learn or at least let sink in. Nevertheless, Christ was so patient with them. I’ve been a teacher, and I know it’s tempting sometimes to just say, “What are you doing in this class?” But Jesus didn’t do that.

One thing the boys just couldn’t let go of or understand was this notion of **greatness**. Of course, greatness or being the greatest can apply to earthly things such as size or age or intelligence or talent or fame, etc. And it seems like they were always arguing amongst each other who would be **the greatest**; clearly, they weren’t learning what God wanted them to learn from observing and hearing Jesus. We read that even near the end of His earthly ministry He said,

*"But he who is greatest among you **shall be your servant**."* -- Jesus

(Mat 23:11)

Because, over and over again, they disputed with each other:

But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest.

(Mark 9:34)

Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest.

(Luke 9:46)

Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest.

(Luke 22:24)

James and John even approached Jesus and asked to be **enthroned** on His left and right in His kingdom. Wow.

But they couldn't agree with each other because they were not considering the display of Christ before their very eyes. At one point, they came to Him with this perplexing issue:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

*Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, **unless** you are converted and become as little children, you will **by no means enter** the kingdom of heaven.*

*"Therefore, whoever **humbles** himself **as this little child** is the **greatest** in the kingdom of heaven.*

(Mat 18:1-4)

Now, to be fair, every human being is tangled up in this issue – greatness or being the greatest. We either strive for it or think we deserve it or think we absolutely do not. In all cases, its specter haunts the human psyche, and the flesh taunts us with it as well.

Politicians revel in it, celebrities revel in it, preachers revel in it, everyone except one – the child. No, not teens, but little children. And it's absolutely critical to 'get it', to understand why. Jesus told the boys that they weren't even **in** His kingdom yet and they wouldn't enter unless they changed, fundamentally changed. They had to become like little children.

It's the same message He gave to the 'teacher of Israel', Nicodemus. To him, He said, "You must be born again" or literally, "procreated from on high". Here, He clearly implied that the needed change was humility. Without humility, they could not enter, in fact they could by **no means** enter the kingdom of heaven.

So, we can conclude that being born again requires humility. Doctrine won't do, neither curiosity nor education nor birthright nor donations nor affiliation nor... It's childlike humility and that's key to the whole issue of greatness in heaven because its antithesis, pride, is the foundational sin of humanity.

Which means that you simply cannot enter by any effort of your own because everything, everything will be polluted by pride somehow. It takes a divinely originated change in you that you can ask for but never accomplish on your own.

And then comes the 'kicker'. Jesus finished with:

*"Therefore, whoever **humbles** himself **as this little child** is the **greatest** in the kingdom of heaven."*

(Mat 18:4)

Humility is the key to conversion, the key to entrance and the key to greatness in the Kingdom. According to human perception (which is fouled by sin), it's the opposite of what we would expect.

In addressing the 'boys' during one of their disputes on greatness,

*... He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last **of all** and **servant of all**."*

(Mark 9:35)

Now, this was not a warning of discipline but rather a promise of experiential training. Who is the greatest in heaven? God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit.

Are you hearing Him?

Chapter 21

More on Hope

I just have to write some more about hope. It is just so important to those of us who believe. Here are just a few scriptures to consider:

Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

(Romans 5:5)

Literally, “disappoint” means dishonor so basically what this first phrase is telling us is that hope, that is, the expectation or anticipation of coming good, will not let us down. But how interesting that this is because God’s love has been (note the past tense) poured out in our spiritual core by His Spirit who lives there with us in unity. Hope comes through and satisfies our blessed expectation because love is in abundant supply in us. Hope and love work together in perfect harmony.

*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope **by the power of the Holy Spirit.***

(Romans 15:13)

John told us in his epistle that God is love and here Paul adds that another attribute of God is hope and because our Maker is infinite in His attributes, hope abounds, and this abundance is the work of His Spirit in us as is the blessed filling of joy, peace and trust.

You see, hope and trust are tightly linked to one another in the Lord:

*For You are my **hope**, O Lord GOD; You are my **trust** from my youth.*

(Psalm 71:5)

*Blessed is the man who **trusts** in the LORD, And whose **hope** is the LORD.*

(Jeremiah 17:7)

*This hope we have as an **anchor of the soul**, both sure and steadfast, and which enters **the Presence** behind the **veil**,*

(Hebrews 6:19)

In this verse, although the writer of Hebrews is using a picture of the Hebrew temple, the truth applies to both Jew and Gentile believers. Herein, the power of hope is described. The veil is the name given to the two curtains in the temple at Jerusalem, one of them at the entrance to the temple separated the Holy Place from the outer court, the other veiled the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. The latter one was torn apart by the hand of God from top to bottom upon the death of Jesus. As such it symbolized that the way to approach the Almighty was from that moment on, open. The veil separated us from God until Christ, Who carried all our sin, died. Thus, the veil served also a type or picture of our flesh which continues, in futility, to oppose our unity with God's Spirit.

Also note that hope is the anchor of our soul. It tethers us securely to the Lord and with it, we enter His Presence at the moment of salvation and enjoy His Presence even now.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy **has begotten** us again to a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*

(1 Peter 1:3)

Even as God Almighty gave life to Jesus and raised Him from the grave, so also, He has birthed us with Him to literally an eternal expectation of coming good (that's the living hope). That means that in Jesus, we will never stop expecting or anticipating more and more goodness. Eternity is filled with God's goodness.

And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

(1 John 3:3)

Don't misunderstand here; you **cannot** purify **yourself**. It is **the hope in Him** that purifies you. It's the same hope, given by God's Spirit, that Jesus had/has in the Father. You have it too.

So, as you can see, the hope in scripture is NOT the same word hope we so casually toss around today. It's a God-word, an Almighty-word and with it we hold to a forever anticipation of coming good.

Chapter 22

The Leaven of the Pharisees

Then Jesus said to them, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.”

(Mat 16:6)

At first glance, you might think that this lesson from Jesus to His disciples was a stand-alone thing. Like many of His analogies, they didn’t understand it at first and assumed it was alluding to their failure to bring along bread on their journey.

“Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up?”, Jesus asked.

(Mat 16:9,10)

I imagine them looking at each other like deer in Christ’s headlights. After a gentle rebuke:

Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

(Mat 16:12)

As we can see, Jesus’ warning was about leaven as a picture of the religionists’ doctrine. He didn’t warn them about the religionists themselves but their teaching – why? And why leaven? In the scriptures, leaven is always a picture of sin.

Was He just saying that their teaching was in error or sinful? I think it is more than that. You see, leaven, which is normally used in bread, has a characteristic that we should keep in mind here.

Leaven is what is placed in bread dough to make the bread rise. It is placed in the dough and spreads throughout the entire lump. As it 'rots' the dough, it gives off gas and puffs up the lump. And that is the picture Jesus wanted them to consider – the doctrine of the religionists puffs up – makes one prideful. Religious knowledge alone is indeed a 'heady' trip so to speak.

Paul echoed this when he wrote:

"We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know."

(1 Cor 8:1,2)

And then in the verses immediately following Christ's lesson on leaven, we find an example of what he meant:

When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

So, they said, "Some [say] John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed [this] to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

"And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

(Mat 16:13-19)

Yes, Peter nailed it with his Son of the living God answer and may have felt pretty puffed up by the response Jesus gave him. Clearly, he had gotten his special insight from God, but insight alone, even insight from God was not the ‘brass ring’. Jesus demonstrated this to him. I say that because in the very next passage we read:

From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

(Mat 16:21-23)

Evidently, Peter got so puffed up he was now rebuking his own Master, voicing the very words of Satan. Wow!

Dear friends, if you’re a believer, it’s **not what** you know that matters most, it’s **Who knows you**. Even scriptural knowledge as good as it can be, if it is not accompanied by a sincere surrender to Christ’s grace, that is, for the present, His indwelling Spirit, can act as a leaven and just puff you up.

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees because doctrine alone doesn’t save, even God-given insight. It is faith/trust in the risen Son of God – that means sincere relationship, real love, genuine on-going submission to Him. And remember, this faith/trust is also the result of **God’s grace**.

Chapter 23

A Future and a Hope

A friend of mine once asked me what my favorite word was in the Bible. I knew immediately; I said, “Hope”. He then asked me to describe this hope, and I had to think. I told him, “It’s not the wimpy word that we hear thrown around like, “I hope so.” Or “There’s really not much hope.” Or “Hope you can make it.”

The hope I think of is an atomic bomb compared to these little firecrackers. My hope anchors me to the Son of God as He lives His life out in me, in my soul. This hope is like His yoke and His cord of love as He both plows patiently in my heart-soil and draws me like a Shepherd with His sheep, in and out of His own being - His own sheepfold. He draws me in for deeper fellowship and He draws me out for ministry. This hope is His gift as is His trust and the two work in perfect harmony; trust knows, and hope expects.

The prophet Jeremiah, speaking to the rebellious house of Israel both in the homeland and those carried away to Babylon warned of terrible judgements that were on the way because of their rebelliousness. Sadly, he could not identify a single penitent man in nearly 50 years of preaching to them.

Speaking of those in Jerusalem, God told the prophet:

“Behold, I will send upon them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil.”

And He added:

“And I will persecute them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be removed to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse, and an astonishment, and an hissing, and a reproach, among all the nations whither I have driven them:”

(Jer 29:17,18)

Sounds severe, doesn't it. But God wasn't simply punishing them, He was disciplining them in order to get them to **wake up** spiritually. You see, we would think, 'God's really mad at them.' And in fact, you may think or expect God is mad at you.

But God doesn't think like that; He doesn't think like us. He says,

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

(Isaiah 55:8,9)

Here's how He thinks:

*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a **future** and a **hope**.*

(Jer 29:11)

Now in the original language, it appears that this verse says, "a **hope** and a **future**" but be that as it may, it is this **God-given hope** that draws us on into a wonderfully glorious **future** with Him. Let's consider this future.

Literally translated, this word for future means an end and that makes sense since it implies an end goal or something worth hoping for and for us as believers it's an awesome future – eternal life in the glorious presence of our Savior, a mind-boggling heavenly city filled with people who actually love God and love each other, a new body made for eternity and so much more.

So, when the whole world is going to hell around you and you're taking punches in the gut and kicks in the butt figuratively, understand that there is a reason, a lesson, an Almighty God who can and will deliver you when you honestly turn to Him. Don't get caught up in the mindless groupthink of evil men who always hate and blame God for what they bring upon themselves. Just set your mind on Him for His thoughts toward you are of peace and not evil. If you will submit your life to Him, He will give you a future and a hope.

Chapter 24

Sin and Death

I mentioned in an earlier article that I suspect that something akin to a genetic factor might be involved in the transgenerational nature of sin. I don't want to 'pound that table' too hard because sin is first spiritual and then physical. Nevertheless, it's interesting to note that Jesus was, as we know, sinless and he was born of a virgin. A legitimate question is, was the virgin birth necessary for His sinless condition? Does the sin we are born with transfer by way of the man?

Remember, David said:

"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me."

(Psalm 51:5)

Spiritually, that would make sense since it was Adam who God held accountable for disobedience:

*Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the **transgression of Adam**, who is a type of Him who was to come.*

(Romans 5:14)

This occurred to me as I was considering the lineage of Jesus given to us in both Matthew chapter one and Luke chapter three. Matthew looks forward in time from Abraham to Joseph, Mary's betrothed while Luke looks backward in time from Jesus to Adam to God. Both lineages, of course, include David but then there's a difference for it was David's son Nathan whose lineage brings forth Mary and it is David's son Solomon whose lineage brings for Joseph. But keep in mind, Joseph was NOT Jesus' father, God was.

Now, it could be that the Holy Spirit's impregnating Mary caused Christ to be sinless; that's probably the case. But it may be also that though Mary, like all of us, had sin, she did not **transfer** sin to Jesus' body. Perhaps it was both. That determination is WAY above my 'pay grade'. Whatever the case, Christ was born perfect, sinless, and He maintained that all the way through the cross. Hallelujah!

Now, as many of us learned in high school biology, when humans mate, the woman's XX chromosomes combine with the man's XY and as it turns out we have a recently revealed problem therein. That's because the Y chromosome is decaying and has actually already decayed 97%. Yes, I said 97% and this is clearly an existential threat.

For with no more Y chromosome, no more men and the human race disappears.

"Despite their shared evolutionary origin, extensive genetic decay has resulted in the human Y chromosome losing 97% of its ancestral genes while gene content and order remain highly conserved on the X chromosome. Five 'stratification' events, most likely inversions, reduced the Y chromosome's ability to recombine with the X chromosome across the majority of its length and subjected its genes to the erosive forces associated with reduced recombination." – Nature, Published: 07 February 2020

"The Y chromosome is a fundamental component of male biology. It carries the SRY gene, which triggers the development of male characteristics, including the formation of testes and the production of male hormones. This genetic marker is unique to males, passed almost unchanged from father to son, allowing researchers to trace paternal lineage across generations. Its stability has made it a valuable tool for studying human ancestry... The Y chromosome is not just about sex determination; it also plays a role in male fertility. Certain genetic conditions linked to the Y chromosome can affect a man's ability to father children, underlining its importance in reproduction... If the Y chromosome were to vanish without a replacement mechanism, it could threaten the survival of men and, by extension, the human species."—The Times of India, Aug 28, 2024

"As men age, some of their cells lose the very thing that makes them biological males—the Y chromosome—and this loss hampers the body's ability to fight cancer, according to new research from Cedars-Sinai Cancer. " – Cedars-Sinai Jun21,2023

Of course, with the disciplined training of evolution, scientists predict it will be some 4 - 11 million years till extinction happens but when you understand that mankind hasn't been around evolving for millions of years, the timeline of this degradation is radically different.

I'm convinced that this degradation is the direct result of sin. You see, as the Bible has told us, the wages of sin is death and with this information we witness that it is not only death for the individual but death of the entire species.

*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ
Jesus our Lord.*

(Romans 6:23)

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(Rev 22:20)

Chapter 25

Choose Life!

Perhaps the most basic of our responsibilities ever since our creation has always been – choice. The Most High created a beautiful garden and placed our original ‘parents’ there and implicitly presented to them – choice. Two trees; one gave life, and the other brought death.

You all know the story. Eve made a choice and Adam made a choice. The choice that doomed us all to die was Adam’s. You see, Eve was deceived by the serpent, but the Bible tells us that Adam was not deceived.

Effectively, he chose Eve. He chose fellowship with her over fellowship with God, or he chose to disobey God along with her or he chose to die with her. Whatever the case, he chose Eve. And later we discover that he never chose life – before his fatal error, he never chose to eat of the tree of life. Afterwards, God prevented that to protect them.

How could the original perfect, sinless man make such choices? Whatever the reason, it set the stage for thousands of years of death, destruction, misery, grief, darkness – doom. I’m inclined to believe it possibly instituted a genetic change that has been passed from generation to generation. Whether or not that is the case, we know it brought a spiritual detachment from the Almighty.

And though the disastrous effects were transgenerational, they were also immediate. They lost the ability to perceive correctly good and evil; for the first time, they had pride and fear of their Creator rather than fellowship. Living became difficult, for the creation was cursed for the sake of mankind.

Later, as mankind became fatally vile and violent, **God Himself chose** to begin again with the godly man, Noah who chose to obey God fully. After the devastating flood, mankind again declined into vile and abominable practices, so **God chose** to begin again with the godly man Abram who chose to fully obey God.

Do you see a pattern? As we might expect, Abram/Abraham's progeny became warped in their beliefs such that they, at first opportunity, in Moses' absence, built a golden calf idol and danced in worship around it. In response, God was ready to start again when Moses stood in the gap if you would, and God mercifully waited.

However, in giving Moses the Law, He told the people to make the right choice:

*"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, **choose life**, that both you and your descendants may live;"*

(Deut 30:19)

But unfortunately, mankind perpetually makes bad choices. Even when we suffer terribly for those choices, we still come back to them over and over and over. Just look at history. And of course, God knew this would be the case from before the beginning for as He had planned, He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus to provide the real answer – He paid the price for all our sin and left us with **one final choice**. Choose to accept His gift of Life, choose to accept Him.

So, as you can see, God repeatedly presents to man this one thing – choice. Of course, He looks as well for the consequent obedience or submission to His will as well but understand, those things are His doing, His work, the action of His Spirit in you. You can't take the credit.

Most people don't get this. The effects of mankind's first choice have been 'hard-wired' into our psyche so that we are convinced that to rise above our meager existence we must strive, we must work to be 'like God'. Either we crave rebellion as a form of coping with this drive, or we crave to be considered noble, good, better. But both of these drives are fueled by our original sin, pride, which resulted from our original choice.

Many people ask, "So what is our part?" The answer – choice.

You see, choice is not just wanting or wishing or even willing. Those things are essentially passive. Making a choice is an active mental/spiritual engagement that is like taking the first step in the direction. That's the one thing God requires. Choose Him, choose Christ, choose Life.

Am I overly simplistic? Maybe, but the 'final choice' is the key to which God unlocks faith/trust in Him and eternal life. Afterwards, your life, your service, your everything is first His choice.

A final note on this. Although the ‘final choice’ is indeed a one-time event for each of us, choice itself continues to be an ongoing reality, for moment by moment, God wants us to learn, to grow, to produce good fruit, and thus He continually allows us to choose to obey Him and submit to His will.

This brings us to the dichotomy that Paul realized in Romans chapter seven when he wrote, *“For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.”* And, *“But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.”* You see, even after the ‘final decision’, your dead flesh is still ‘hard-wired’ by Adam’s original choice. The good news is that your soul is joined in one with Christ, His Holy Spirit and even the Father. You are no longer to **identify** with that dead body:

*Likewise, you also, **reckon** yourselves to be **dead** indeed **to sin**,
but **alive** to **God in Christ Jesus** our Lord.*

(Romans 6:11)

*Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are
passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

(2 Cor 5:17)

That is, you have a **new identity**.

Yes, you are still housed, temporarily, in that dead body; and that dead body still acts out, but when it does, you simply confess to God that you momentarily stopped trusting Him (that’s sin) and because your identity is no longer that dead body but rather it’s your living soul which is one with Christ, He forgives you and cleanses your conscience from all unrighteousness.

Yes, choice is a wonderful responsibility and privilege. God doesn’t want robots, He desires children and wonder of wonders, if you’re saved, **He chose you**.

Chapter 26

Growth

The whole of scripture from Genesis through the New Testament is filled with references to growth. Jesus even explained spiritual growth in one of his many parables to his disciples:

*“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was **sown in his heart**. This is he who received seed by the wayside.*

(Matthew 13:19)

Here, the heart is shown to be like the soil on which the seed, or Word of God, is planted. Depending upon the conditions of this heart-soil, the seed will bear fruit or not. Herein, only the soil that is broken up and deep and weed free yields a crop.

As Christians, we desire to please the Sower of the Seed and bear much fruit, but without understanding the Word of the Kingdom, we can mistakenly focus on trying to bear ‘fruit’ by eliminating sin in our own strength/efforts. We neglect the fact that upon the cross of Calvary ALL sin was paid for in full.

Here, the Greek word for heart means the central core, physically and spiritually, of any person. With the unsaved, it is only deceitful and desperately wicked. With those who are saved, it represents both the dead fleshly heart and the living soul. Now, when the wicked heart, with hard or shallow or rocky ground receives the Word, the thoughts, the misunderstandings it creates are those that tell us we need to ‘be like God’ and they push us to try, try, try to do that; but did you know that there is only one individual in the Bible that made the confession of that obsession? It was Satan. He said:

*I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will
be **like the most High**.*

(Isaiah 14:14)

So clearly, that aspiration, though it may sound noble, is anything but. What God is looking for from the good heart-soil is understanding, humility and obedience/submission all of which are the gifts of His Spirit. Christ demonstrated this for us:

*Let this **mind** be **in you**, which was also **in Christ Jesus**:*

*Who, being in the form of God, **thought it not robbery** to be **equal** with God (He didn't 'try', He trusted):*

*But **made himself of no reputation**, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:*

*And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became **obedient unto death**, even the death of the cross.*

(Philippians 2:5-8)

Which takes us back to the notion of seeds and good soil and fruit because Jesus also said:

*"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into **the ground** and **dies**, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain."*

(John 12:24)

So, you see, pleasing God means death to self, death to that deceitful heart and thus an abundance of good spiritual fruit:

*But the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness (or faith), gentleness, self-control.***

(Galatians 5:22,23a)

So, God is very much into growth. He's into the growth of His Seed in your heart which will bear fruit for all eternity. You want to please Him?

*...grow in the grace and knowledge of **our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ***

(2 Pet 3)

and...

*speaking the truth in love,... grow up in all things **into Him who is the head—Christ***

(Ephesians 4)

A friend of mine likes to say, “Stop trying and start trusting.” Amen. That’s God’s work in you and the growth He desires. It bears the good fruit of love. Paul put it this way:

*We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting,
because **your faith (trust) grows** exceedingly, and the **love** of every
one of you all **abounds** toward each other,*

(2 Thes 1:3)

Chapter 27

Thinking

Has it ever occurred to you that there is something that you're doing all the time? Every moment of every day it is with you. Even when you sleep, you can only slightly escape it and then when you wake, there it is again. Sometimes, it's superficial; sometimes it's profound. It's your thoughts, your thinking, your mind and/or heart.

It is the engine or energy of your actions and your speech. And from the beginning, it has been the target of our enemy for at the very moment of her interaction with the serpent, Eve and then Adam were changed in their thinking and trapped by sin. Ever since, mankind's thinking has been twisted, prideful, turned inward and completely futile.

There are a couple of important terms we read about in the Bible – heart and mind. They are similar and definitions of the two overlap somewhat, but you can consider the heart as the “inner man”, the once – living spirit of man that has been corrupted unto death by sin while the mind is the soul, the self, and when saved, the living part of each person.

Because of sin, the heart of mankind is a treacherous thing. The prophet Jeremiah wrote:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”

(Jeremiah 17:9)

Jesus spoke of this very clearly:

*But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you **think evil in your hearts?**”*

(Matthew 9:4)

*"For from within, **out of the heart of men**, proceed **evil thoughts**, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man."*

(Mark 7:21-23)

Now, God's word enlightens us concerning our thinking and ultimately gives us hope. Let's consider (think) about what it has to tell us.

*"As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a **loyal heart** and with a **willing mind**; for the LORD **searches all hearts** and **understands** all the intent of the **thoughts**. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever.*

(1 Chron 28:9)

OK, let me emphasize first that no one is born again by a simple intellectual assent to the grace of God. If you are a child of the Most High it is His gift to you, accomplished by His Holy Spirit birthing in your soul triumphant faith/trust in what Christ did for you – forgiveness, life and union. We commonly say that it's matter of the inner man not simply the head.

When sin entered mankind's existence in the garden of Eden, our spirit, which God had created, died. That is, it was separated from God. After that point, (and prior to Calvary) our soul which came about by God's Spirit breathing life into a lifeless body, was left with the dominant influence of the flesh:

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground (i.e. his flesh) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (i.e. his spirit); and man became a living being (literally, soul).

(Gen 2:7)

The Bible does not talk about **saving** the **spirit** of man (though it mentions prior to Jesus, lifting up or retaining the spirit of man); rather, it says that Christ saved our **souls**. That's because when we are saved, His Spirit takes up residence in us, in our soul.

In Chronicles, we see that David told his son, Solomon, that God wants both our heart and mind. That's because your thoughts originate from both places – the 'dead' part of you, the heart, and the living part of you, the mind/soul.

***I, the LORD, search the heart,
I test the mind,
Even to give every man according to his ways,
According to the fruit of his doings.***

(Jeremiah 17:10)

Now, the thoughts of the heart are vain or futile:

*The LORD knows the **thoughts of man**,
That they are **futile** (coming from the word meaning emptiness or
vanity; figuratively, something transitory and unsatisfactory).*

(Psalm 94:11)

But possibly as a foreshadowing of the 'work' of salvation, Proverbs declares:

*Commit your works to the LORD,
And your **thoughts** will be **established** (that is, to be firm, be stable).*

(Proverbs 16:3)

Fortunately, and contrary to us, God's thoughts are absolutely pure, perfectly and eternally pure:

*"For **My thoughts are not your thoughts**, Nor are your ways **My ways**,"
says the LORD.*

*"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways **higher** than
your ways, And **My thoughts than your thoughts**."*

(Isaiah 55:7-9)

*For I know **the thoughts that I think toward you**, says the LORD, thoughts
of **peace** and not of evil, to give you **a future and a hope**.*

(Jeremiah 29:11)

And He knows our thoughts, good and bad:

*You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.*

(Psalm 139:2)

I say good and bad because even though we are saved in Christ, God has temporarily left us in a body of 'dead' flesh; and both our new living soul as well as our dead

fleshly heart are sources of our thoughts. I suggest that this is to teach us humility which will be to our benefit in heaven. And until we are there, we do battle spiritually with the dead flesh simply because it is incongruent with our new life as it tries to poison our thinking.

Now the battle is the Lord's – He is our shield, our defense, our 'high tower' and the unbeatable victor Who uses these battles to teach us many things:

*For the **weapons of our warfare** are not carnal but **mighty in God** for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, **bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...***

(2 Corinthians 10:4,5)

This obedience is not obedience **to** Christ but rather the obedience **of** Christ – the obedience He **displayed** to us in obeying the Father's will all the way to the cross, to the grave and to the throne of heaven – submitted, perfect, humble obedience.

And Paul wrote of this battle even in his own life:

*But I see another law in my members (the flesh), warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, **with the mind I myself serve the law of God**, but with the flesh the law of sin.*

(Romans 7:23-25)

With all this in 'mind', the scriptures leave us with hope and guidance concerning our thoughts:

*And **do not be conformed to this world**, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind** (the work of God's Spirit), that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

(Romans 12:2)

*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but **in lowliness of mind** (honest, Godly humility) let each esteem others better than himself.*

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

(Philippians 2:3, 5-7)

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

(Colossians 3:2)

Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

(1 Peter 1:13)

And the good news is that in thinking (or being) this way, you gain perfect peace:

*You will keep him in perfect peace,
Whose **mind** is **stayed** on You,
Because he **trusts** in You.*

(Isaiah 26:3)

Chapter 28

The Glory of God

I have become fascinated by the topic of God's glory. For years, I thought I knew what it was (or sort of knew) but recently I've realized it is just so much more. Let's look at what the scriptures have to say about it.

First, there is the manifestation of the glory of God which we can recognize:

*The **sight** of the **glory** of the LORD was **like a consuming fire** on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel.*

(Exodus 24:17)

This and many other scriptures show us that God's glory is like a brilliant light which illuminates:

*The (heavenly)city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the **glory** of God **illuminated** it. The Lamb is its **light**.*

(Rev 21:23)

*"The sun shall no longer be your **light** by day,
Nor for brightness shall the moon give **light** to you;
But the LORD will be to you an everlasting **light**,
And your God your **glory**.*

(Isaiah 60:19)

But then there's also its sanctifying (or purifying) power:

*"And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle **shall be sanctified by My glory**."*

(Exodus 29:43)

And there are the promises of God concerning His glory:

*“but truly, as I live, **all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD—**”*

(Numbers 14:21)

*The glory of the LORD **shall be revealed,**
And all flesh shall see it together;
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”*

(Isaiah 40:5)

And gloriously (no pun) there are those things we read concerning our Lord Jesus Christ:

*“And now, O Father, **glorify** Me together with Yourself, with
the **glory which I had with You before the world was.***

(John 17:5)

*“For the **Son of Man will come in the glory** of His Father with His angels,
and then He will reward each according to his works.*

(Matthew 16:27)

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was **transfigured** before them. His **face shone** like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.

(Matthew 17:1,2)

And we learn that the glory of God gives life. (Spoken to Martha concerning her dead brother Lazarus whom Jesus rose from the dead):

*Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that **if you would believe you would see the glory of God?**”*

(John 11:40)

*So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is **raised in glory.** It is sown in weakness, it is **raised in power.***

(1 Cor 15:42,43)

And then there's the glory of God that concerns us as believers in Christ. Jesus spoke to the Father:

"And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one:

(John 17:22)

And Paul wrote to the believers:

*Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was **raised** from the dead by the **glory** of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

(Romans 6:4)

When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

(Col 3:4)

Before Calvary, the glory of God was too much for a man to behold and live. Ask Moses:

*Then Moses said (to the Lord), "I pray You, show me Your **glory**!"*

And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of Yahweh before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."

*But He said, "**You cannot see My face**, for no man can see Me and live!"*

Then Yahweh said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock;

*and it will come about, **while My glory is passing** by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by.*

*"Then I will remove My hand, and you shall see My back, **but My face shall not be seen.**"*

(Exodus 33:18-23)

But **after Calvary**, because of the grace of God in the person of Jesus Christ, it's the **opposite** – the Glory of God in the face of our Savior is exactly what we need to live:

*But we all, with **unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord**, are being **transformed** into the same image from **glory to glory**, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

(2 Cor 3:18)

*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, **who has shone in our hearts** to give the **light** of the knowledge of the **glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ**.*

(2 Cor 4:6)

And perhaps the most wonderful thing about God's glory, for us, is that in heaven we get to **receive** it and also to **release** it back to Him:

*and when the Chief Shepherd appears, **you will receive the crown of glory** that does not fade away.*

(1 Peter 5:4)

*Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, **the twenty-four elders** (representing believers) **fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:***

*"You are worthy, O Lord, To **receive glory** and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."*

(Rev 4:9-11)

This is fascinating because it is usually the Lord who is giving or shining forth His glory, but here in the heavenly scene, it seems like He receives glory. Who does this? I suggest that it is coming from those who cast their crowns (of glory) before Him in acknowledgement of His ultimate worthiness.

I know this is a lot of information so let me summarize. God's glory illuminates with radiant brilliance. Wherever it exists, it sanctifies, while the Blood of Christ purifies, which is awesome because He promises to fill the earth with it. It's this light, this Glory that we 'walk' in:

*But if we **walk in the light** as He is in the **light**, we have fellowship with one another, and the **blood** of Jesus Christ His Son **cleanses** us from all sin.*

(1 John 1:7)

*For you were once darkness, but now you are **light** in the Lord. **Walk** as children of **light**.*

(Ephesians 5:8)

And then there's Jesus and with Him the glory of God is expressed in even more wonderful ways. He asked for and received the most indescribable glory that He had shared with the Father before the creation, before time, existed. The Bible says that that Glory raised Him from the dead.

He also shared that Glory with us who believe specifically to bring us into the same unity with Him that He and the Father know – a total perfect union. That Glory gives us life, newness of life and makes us new creations and scripture tells us we can witness it/Him **transforming** us into the **glorious** image of our Savior.

You might think a lot of this sounds like the Holy Spirit and there is indeed a very strong connection because it is the Spirit that works with and enables us to behold God's Glory – just ask Stephen:

*But he, being full of the **Holy Spirit**, gazed into heaven and saw the **glory of God**, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,*

(Acts 7:55)

So, as you can see, the Glory of God seems to be a nexus of sorts for the light, the life, the power, the sanctifying, the worship, the people and more. I encourage all of you to learn more.

Chapter 29

Child of God

You know one of the main arguments supporting abortion is for a woman to say, “It’s my body; it’s my health so I can do what I want.” Now if that were true, I’d see no incongruity but it’s blatantly false. By definition, pregnancy means there is more than one person involved. There are two or more people occupying one body and abortion terminates the life of the innocent child.

Having said that, I don’t intend to make this about abortion but rather about procreation and the awesome parallel we see spiritually when someone is “born again” or literally “procreated from on high”. I’ve spoken before on this wondrous process and if you heard it, you may remember the part on gestation which precedes expulsion.

Gestation is the longest part of the procreation process – 38 to 42 weeks for humans; during this time, a fertilized cell becomes a zygote, then a morula, then a blastocyst, then an embryo, and then a fetus. The zygote contains all the genetic information needed to become a baby. It’s truly amazing to consider that this is how the Son of God came into the world:

*And the angel answered and said to her, “The **Holy Spirit** will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.*

(Luke 1:35)

Mary, impregnated by the Holy Spirit, carried Christ as a zygote, then a morula, then a blastocyst, then an embryo, and then a fetus and delivered her baby in a feed trough. And though that is wildly amazing, there is a spiritual process going on in you right now, if you are born again, that mirrors this very process.

When you are born again, Christ places His Holy Spirit IN you and He unites with your dead human spirit, giving new life – you become a new creation, a spiritual zygote so to speak and the spiritual gestation continues until the moment you are set free, gloriously free, from your sin-filled corpse. Jesus told Nicodemus about this when He said:

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

(John 3:6-8)

Recall, before He died on the cross and rose again, Jesus told His disciples:

"A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also."

*"At that day you will know that I am **in My Father**, and **you in Me**, and I in **you**."*

(John 14:19,20)

That's because after He rose, He gave them the Holy Spirit:

So, Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

(John 20:21,22)

So, like the pregnant mother, as a believer, your body carries another one spiritually – you, in utter union with Christ, His Holy Spirit and Father God. How amazing is that!

And your spiritual gestation period is all in God's control – it may be a day or many decades. And when you are born into Heaven, what a joyous freedom you'll know as a Child of God.

Chapter 30

Healing the Soul

Most of us know some about the life of King David. One of the things I've always appreciated about him is his confidence, his trust in the Lord. We remember his trust when he ran at the giant Goliath with only a sling shot and a stone. We can learn from him about trust at his low points – slobbering before a foreign king thus pretending to be insane, looking at the devastation of the town Ziklag where his family and the families of his men were kidnapped and the men were ready to stone him. We are impressed with his trust as he is forced to flee Jerusalem with his own son, Absalom seeking his life.

So many events in his life were clearly tests of his trust in his Lord but all of them were 'outside'. And of course, we all face outside circumstances that challenge us similarly. But the greatest exhibition of trust we witness in David's life is one dealing with his soul.

His very being was being destroyed, his soul was sick and he knew it. The turmoil of illness put him in a sickbed and whether real or imagined, he seemed to have enemies all around. It's possible that this was the fall-out of his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and that some of the enemies were Ahithophel, his once trusted friend and advisor, and Absalom, his son who wanted the throne.

Whatever the case, we read in Psalm 41:

*I said, "LORD, be merciful to me;
Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You."*

(Psalm 41:4)

Notice that he understood why his soul needed healing; it was due to sin. He also recognized that his sin was against the Lord. And this is critical for all of us to understand. Sin attacks the soul and brings spiritual (and physical) disease. Then, notice that as he asks for healing, he confesses his sin. The Bible tells us:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(1John 1:9)

As long as the King was silent about his sin and his wounded soul, his condition worsened:

*When I kept silent, my bones grew old
Through my groaning all the day long.*

(Psalm 32:3)

But as the Holy Spirit, which the Bible tells us never left David, reestablished his trust, he became confident of his wholeness, his completeness in God for he claims:

*As for me, You uphold me in my integrity,
And set me before Your face forever.*

(Psalm 41:12)

That word integrity means completeness and implies innocence. And being set before the Lord's face forever is eternally enjoying His favor.

So, we can see that David's life, his words are given to us not simply as history but for our learning – the Spirit in his life is teaching us to trust, to confess to God our sin and to be upheld in completeness and to be set in His beautiful presence forever.

Chapter 31

Ransom

*And forgive us our **sins**,
For we also forgive everyone who is **indebted** to us.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.”*

(Luke 11:4)

Notice the connection between sins and debt. A couple hundred years ago, a common notion about God was that He was angry with all of us and that He was ready to ‘blast’ us. The fear of that drove many to become believers and to adhere strongly to a religious lifestyle. More recently, a common notion about Him is that He is loving and forgiving. Acceptance of that has led many to become believers and to adhere to a loosely religious lifestyle. I know I’m being overly simplistic but..

The question all people struggle with is, “Who is God?” “What is His Name or nature?” Is He the One Who deals out the judgements we read about in the Old Testament or the One Who graciously sent His only begotten Son to die in our places?

You can get either impression if you overly focus your reading of the scriptures in one part of the Bible or the other. This is especially true when you don’t have God’s Holy Spirit in your heart because He is the One Who teaches us.

It is **not** folly to desire to know Him, but it is folly to think you can know Him entirely. He tells us:

*“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are **My ways** higher than your **ways**,
And **My** thoughts than your thoughts.*

(Isaiah 55:9)

Now, when we become sincerely born again in Christ, He gives us the precious gift of His Spirit in our inner being to abide in us and for us to abide in Him – it's not just a familial relationship that results but a **unity** with the Lord. Fortunately, His Spirit is gentle. Thus, He nurtures in us a willingness on our part to submit to His wisdom and ways. The more we do that, the more unity we experience.

So, what about the question? The answer is that we can know some things about Him from His Word, His Son, His Spirit like He is love, He is truth, He is life, He is holy, He is perfect, He is just and righteous, He is forgiving, He is patient and longsuffering, He is good, He is merciful, He is all-knowing, all powerful and eternally existent. On and on it goes.

Hopefully you get the picture that His revealed nature is completely wonderful and infinite in far more ways than we can comprehend. So, the God of the OT **is** the God of the NT and **is** the Almighty perfect creator of everything seen and unseen.

Having said that, let me admonish you - don't get caught in the mindset that tells you God wouldn't do such and such because He is love or that God would never be merciful to me because He's truthful and just. We mustn't try to box God into the limitations of our human intellect. The good news is that you can, as His child, always ask and expect forgiveness and **trust** Him.

I think some theologians have their learned heads on backwards so to speak. They read in scripture, in clear black and white:

*"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a **ransom** for many."*

(Mark 10:45)

In fact, Matthew records the same thing. And in the book of Hosea:

*"I will **ransom** them from the power of the grave; I will **redeem** them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from My eyes."*

(Hos 13:14)

And still they deny the Gospel, they deny that Jesus was a **ransom** – but that's because they jump to the assumption that the ransom was paid to Satan. Wrong thinking!

This is why I started with the big question of 'Who is God?' Part of His revealed character is that He is **just** and **righteous**; He is Holy and He is indeed angry with **wickedness**:

*God is a just judge,
And God is **angry** with the **wicked** every day.*

(Psalm 7:11)

You see, all the way back in Eden, as mankind embraced sin and turned away from God, God saw the tragic consequences that brutalized His children. In addition, every wicked act offends His holy character and trashes His lovingkindness. Consequently, God ordained that the wages of sin is death. That is, as we sin, the wage we OWE or the debt we owe, is our lives.

Now, understand, no one owes a life to Satan, the debt is owed to God but it is a debt, a ransom, that only He Himself could redeem. So much of God's character is all about **redemption**.

Back in the garden of Eden, mankind 'forfeited' his property rights. In willful rebellion against God, he effectively forfeited his soul and became the servant of sin. From that point, Satan was given a sort of stewardship and only a very specific price and time of redemption could apply to that property. The price of redemption was one sinless man, an Adam for an Adam, so to speak.

We learn more about this in Revelation 5:

*And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" And **no one** in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.
So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.*

(Rev 5:1-4)

As the Apostle John is watching, a scroll is in **God's** possession. What could possibly be in this scroll that's so confidential and so important? No one in the created order, seen or unseen, can open it or even look upon it. As he describes it, there are seven seals upon it and writing both inside and on the outside of it.

Some have suggested that this is the title deed to planet earth and initially that sounds good, but there's a problem with that – the earth is already the Lord's forever. Psalm 24:1 says, "*The earth is the LORD'S, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.*" For this reason, I think there's a better explanation.

In the book of Leviticus 25:25 – 31, we find a very interesting law laid down by God pertaining to **redemption**. In short, if someone loses possession of his land, he can redeem it from the new owner at the appropriate price. If he that lost the property is too poor to redeem it, he must wait till the year of Jubilee at which time it will once again become his possession. However, there's a different rule for houses in walled cities. If someone loses possession of this type of property (i.e. manmade) and cannot redeem it within the allotted time (one year) because of poverty or indebtedness, that property forever becomes the property of the new owner. It can never be redeemed again.

All that is to say that this is a picture! The land, the earth, is redeemable, but that which pertains to man can only be redeemed by the appropriate price within the specified time.

When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, one of the temptations included this man-made property. In Luke's account:

The devil led Him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to Him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So, if you worship me, it will all be yours."

(Luke 4:5-7)

Jesus did not contest this point; He simply refused to worship him.

Therefore, I submit that this scroll in the hand of God represents the encumbered inheritance of God's people (the Hebrews) and all the kingdoms of man whom God would redeem for the price of one sinless man. Of course, John wept bitterly, for when he learned that no one was found worthy to take and open the scroll, it meant that this inheritance would forever become the stewardship of Satan – eternally unredeemable.

From Revelation Five:

But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to lose its seven seals."

(Rev 5:5)

The mighty Lion of Judah was found worthy – the resurrected, glorified Son of God, Jesus Christ. He paid the debt we all owed/owe. It's wholly a past tense situation for the honest believer. For everyone else, the debt, though paid by Christ, is as yet fully burdensome because of disbelief.

So, who received this ransom? Did Satan get 'paid off'? **No!** His so-called stewardship taken from Adam was stripped away by the blood of Christ and with that sacrifice **God the Son paid God the Father**. God's justice was satisfied, and the devil was condemned, not enriched.

In fact, the Psalmist spoke of the futility of man trying to redeem his brother but note Who would receive the ransom:

*None of them can by any means **redeem** his brother, nor **give to God a ransom** for him—*

(Psalm 49:7)

So, in heaven, we read that the redeemed sing to the Lamb:

*And they sang a new song, saying:
“ You are worthy to take the scroll,
And to open its seals;
For You were slain,
And have **redeemed us to God** by Your blood
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
And have made us kings and priests to our God;
And we shall reign on the earth.”*

(Revelation 5:9,10)

Chapter 32

My God, My God

*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?
Why are You so far from helping Me,
And from the words of My groaning?*

(Psalm 22:1)

Words of David and more importantly, words from Christ. This prophetic psalm just explodes with meaning concerning our Messiah and it opens abruptly with this startling cry. He doesn't cry out "God, God" but rather "My God, My God". His sense of forsakenness thunders in His heart as the One with Whom He has had intimate relationship from eternity past is separated from Him.

Did Jesus not know? Was it hidden from Him as part of His incarnation, his human condition? Did He know and yet the shock, the reality, the meaning – did that erupt into this heart cry?

We don't get the impression that the weight of all mankind's sin for all time – His "groaning", was as disastrous to Him as was the turning away of the Father.

Jesus knew that He was born for this. He spoke of it often. He wept in the garden bloody tears, but He continued on. He bore the lashes; He bore the mockery and beating; He bore the cross and the crucifixion. He bore it when all men – His friends, His disciples, His relatives – forsook Him.

But His Father? How cataclysmic is that "Why".

How many of us have cried out in a similar fashion as truly minor echoes of this blast that resounded throughout the cosmos and perhaps throughout all time.

Was this a point in which He could not see the ‘other side’? The Bible tells us, “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross...” What did He hold on to as He let go of His life?

Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me.

They gape at Me with their mouths, Like a raging and roaring lion.

I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me.

My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death.

For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet;

(Psalm 22:12-16)

Demonic attack is described as bulls and lions and dogs encircling. His strength, His heart has melted. The congregation, the throng of the wicked enclosed Him; they pierced Him.

Still, He never surrendered His trust:

*But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me;
O My Strength, hasten to help Me!*

(Psalm 22:19)

And finally, at a point only the Father knows, the heart of Christ knew:

You have answered Me.

(Psalm 22:21b)

So, when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

(John 19:30)

And ultimately Jesus knew His forsakenness was temporary, and because He held on to His trust, He could lay down His life and with that He saved us all:

*For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor
has He hidden His face from Him; But when He cried to Him, He
heard.*

(Psalm 22:24)

When your own “Why?” rings out, never stop trusting. God hears you. He loves you
and He will deliver you. Jesus proved it.

Chapter 33

What Are You Looking For?

We can read in several places that the disciples bickered amongst themselves about who would be the greatest in the Messiah's coming kingdom. John the Baptist preached that He would bring fiery judgement (Matthew 3:12). Even Gamaliel reminded the chief priests about men who tried to form militias to take down the Roman rule (Acts 5).

It seems that the prevailing perception of the coming Messiah was as a violent and overwhelmingly powerful leader – I mean, who else could throw the Romans out? But Jesus preached to love your enemies and turn the other cheek; do good to all men.

But to be fair, the Jewish people got their mistaken impression from the scriptures. For example:

*Behold, the day of the LORD is coming,
And your spoil will be divided in your midst.
For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem;
The city shall be taken,
The houses rifled,
And the women ravished.
Half of the city shall go into captivity,
But the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city.*

***Then the LORD will go forth
And fight against those nations,
As He fights in the day of battle.
And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,
Which faces Jerusalem on the east.
And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two,
From east to west,
Making a very large valley;***

*Half of the mountain shall move toward the north
And half of it toward the south.
Then you shall flee through My mountain valley,
For the mountain valley shall reach to Azal.
Yes, you shall flee
As you fled from the earthquake
In the days of Uzziah king of Judah.
Thus the LORD my God will come,
And all the saints with You.*

***And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the
people who fought against Jerusalem:***

*Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet,
Their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets,
And their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths.
It shall come to pass in that day
That a great panic from the LORD will be among them.
Everyone will seize the hand of his neighbor,
And raise his hand against his neighbor's hand;
Judah also will fight at Jerusalem.
And the wealth of all the surrounding nations
Shall be gathered together:
Gold, silver, and apparel in great abundance.
Such also shall be the plague
On the horse and the mule,
On the camel and the donkey,
And on all the cattle that will be in those camps.
So shall this plague be.*

(Zech 14:1-5,12-15)

So...

when the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem in A.D. 70 a mistaken assurance from prophecies like this made the Jews utterly confident that the Messiah would return from heaven and wipe out the Roman armies surrounding Jerusalem. They could not see that the Messiah must first be rejected and the nation brought to repentance as Zechariah mentioned in 11:12-

13 and 12:10.

--David Guzik

The result was the near-obliteration of the Jewish race and eradication from the land of Israel. You see, what we look for, even from scripture if we receive the message only **selectively** based on our own desires or expectations, can lead us astray. We absolutely must listen to all of God's Word and keep our own 'context' out of it.

Now, I am absolutely looking for the physical return of Jesus Christ; once for the rapture and resurrection and then again to destroy the REAL oppressor of humanity – Satan and his unholy spawn.

But there are many, many people today who are confused and are confusing others so adherence to sound doctrine is more important than ever. Many are only attempting to gather a crowd and build their own ministry by claiming special understanding of prophecies.

In this age, it is oh so very important to seek God fervently for His help in discerning the truth from the deception. To truly know the truth, first, be born anew in Christ, be led by His Holy Spirit and be in fellowship with others who are 'like-minded'. Study the scripture such that you 'live in the pages' so to speak and obey it-that is obey Him.

Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; "nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."

(Luke 17:20,21)

The Pharisees 'lived in the pages' of scripture but they were blind to the truth because their own agendas. The word "observation" in the verse above implies hostile questioning and "within you" is better translated "in your midst" or "among you".

Jesus told the Pharisees that their hostile, doubting eyes were unable to see or receive the kingdom of God... The kingdom of God was among them because the King was among them. – Guzik

So, what do we look for? You may wonder if the conditions are ready in the present day for the revelation of Jesus, both in delivering His people and judgment upon a world that rejects Him. Along with Guzik and other Bible scholars, we can say this confidently: The Bible describes certain political, economic, spiritual, social, and military characteristics regarding what the world will be like before His return. It is fair to say that the conditions exist today, and the stage is set.

Chapter 34

Something Sudden

There's something wonderfully sudden when we recognize and accept Jesus Christ as God's Son and our Savior. The Old Testament has many instances of sudden judgement, but the New Testament shows us over and over the sudden realization of the Son.

I believe that's because you can't just grow into being a Christian – not the born-again kind. You can't 'back into' it rationally or approach it cautiously. You must be 'touched' or empowered so to speak to see Him by the Spirit of God. Even Christ's disciples had no clue, no real understanding of Jesus, His Words, His mission or His identity until after they were empowered by the Spirit.

And this suddenness is always about Jesus:

Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!"

Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

(John 1:47-49)

Nathanael's world was suddenly rocked by the first words he heard from Jesus because he truly 'heard' Him.

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put

my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!"

Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand [here], and put [it] into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

(John 20:24-28)

Thomas had listened to Jesus for years, but he became disillusioned and angry when he was 'left out' or so he probably thought. After that, he had to touch the scars, but the result was sudden and lifelong.

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest

and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

As he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It [is] hard for you to kick against the goads."

So, he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord [said] to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

(Acts 9:1-6)

Saul, later called the Apostle Paul, was an outright enemy of Jesus and everything He stood for. He persecuted the first believers ardently until the light of Christ knocked him to the ground and empowered him to see the Lord in His glory. In Paul's own account, he says:

*“Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, **suddenly** a great light from heaven shone around me.”*

(Acts 22:6)

Now, it may not happen to you exactly the way it did for these guys. But the truth is that until the Holy Spirit empowers you to desire, recognize and receive Jesus, you will at best be religious. But don't fret – you can ask for that empowering!

*“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the **Holy Spirit** to those **who ask Him!**”*

(Luke 11:13)

Jesus told Nicodemus, the ‘teacher of Israel’ about this suddenness:

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

(John 3:3-6)

Now, “born again” is literally, “procreated from on high” and though procreation itself is not necessarily sudden, the final part which we call birth is sudden.

So, why all this focus on suddenness? Is that really the big deal? No, it's just that God wants our attention. Spiritual **growth** is not sudden but rather requires patience, but the pre-requisite spiritual **birth** is. You see, the big deal is the **change**, the new life, the new creature, the new relationship with God.

And we who believe should be aware that something very sudden is on the horizon for many if not most of us:

*Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be **changed**--in a **moment**, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

(1 Corinthians 15:51,52)

Yes, spiritual birth brings spiritual change, and the day is coming in which Christ will complete the change to include all our being – soul, spirit and body! Hallelujah!

Chapter 35

The Invitation

So, in my last post, I concluded with the invitation of John 14:6. That's because it is Jesus Himself, the Way, the Truth and the Life, Who lives in all of us who are saved graciously. And as a consequence, we are His church, His bride. He loves us purely and eternally, and we love Him.

Now you may attend a religious institution periodically or regularly or you may work in some fashion to help those who do, and you may think I'm 'down' on these institutions. Not so. If you are born again, we are all part of His family and my heartfelt desire is for all of us to intimately relate to our Lord, to know His heart and voice, to grow and revel in His presence together.

We must learn to abide in Him, submit to Him, not week by week or day by day, not even hour by hour but moment by moment. His life is not on-again, off-again. His life, His Spirit, does not share you with the world. This is the danger of religion. When we gather, He is in our midst, individually and corporately. Buildings, denominations, liturgies, are irrelevant – not necessarily bad, just irrelevant and they can get in the way of the learning.

We need each other and we need to gather but we need to know Him more than anything else.

You can think of the invitation like this – God's Spirit brings us to the **Way** and in this Way we learn and come to understand the **Truth**, but what He wants is to bring us fully into His **Life**, His perfect, pure, eternal Life that is in His Father, Himself and His Spirit.

So, the compromise with the world that we call religion is, as you can see, a poor substitute, stuck within the confines of the compromise. As believers, we need to enter and abide in Jesus. He is real, He is uncompromising, He is Himself the Invitation and the only way to relationship with God.

Chapter 36

The Great Compromise

I'm convinced that one of the reasons the Church as a whole today is so 'shallow spiritually' is because we have compromised with the world on the whole notion of ecclesia (ekklesia). Our "churches" are trapped in this routine, this compromise. Pastors are trained to maintain the compromise rather than to pastor. They learn to speak to a crowd and manage the business. Worship is emotional entertainment that may elate but is focused on the worshipers and not the One worshipped.

The whole way 'church' is practiced today is evidence that we don't even recognize the compromise and that we are blind to the possibility of anything other than the compromise. Author Chip Brogden penned some thoughts that echo my own. Presented below are parts of his essay "Escape from Churchianity".

An intellectual Christianity is what Organized Religion brings. It cannot impart Life. What do I mean by an intellectual Christianity? It is the ABC Gospel. Perhaps you have heard it. Salvation is obtained in three easy steps: "A" stands for "admit you are a sinner"; "B" stands for "believe on the Lord Jesus to save you"; and "C" stands for "confess Jesus as your personal Savior." What is wrong with that? Simply this: there is no Life there. "ABC" will not save us. With "ABC" there is no encounter with Jesus, Who alone is Life. There is only an intellectual acceptance and affirmation of what is presented as "Three Easy Steps". I believe this, I say that, and that makes me a Christian, right? No, it just makes you religious. There are many people who "get religion", but they don't get Jesus.

Organized Religion can bring doctrine, teaching, and belief. Some of it may be morally excellent and good. Some of it may even sound Biblical, like "Three Easy Steps". Nevertheless, Organized Religion cannot impart Life. Why? Because it has

no Life to give. Jesus Christ is the Life. And Jesus does not live within the matrix of Organized Religion.

The Church, the Lord's Ekklesia, is the synthesis of individuals who have the Revelation of Jesus and have come to Him to receive Him as their Life. Here is where the confusion begins. We glibly use the term "church" to describe things which are not The Lord's Ekklesia. A building devoted to religious meetings is called "the church". Attending a religious meeting is called "going to church." Hearing a good message or good music during the religious meeting is called "having church" (a popular tune says, "crank up the music, let's have church!"). Becoming a member of the non-profit organization which owns the building devoted to religious meetings is called "joining the church". Taking responsibility as the founder or being voted in as the director of the non-profit organization which owns the building devoted to religious meetings is called "pastoring the church". Making additions to the building devoted to religious meetings or to the membership list of the non-profit organization which owns the building is called "church growth".

But the reality is that everything which makes up the Ekklesia is spiritual, and thus, it is invisible to the naked eye. It is non-corporeal. It cannot be measured by dollars and statistics.

This invisible Life is the characteristic of the Ekklesia. When you can capture the wind in a bag then you can stuff Christians into a building and call it "church".

So, from our vantage point here on earth, Organized Religion can be easily seen, felt, touched, experienced, quantified, denominated, characterized, categorized, analyzed, and explained. We can chart its progress and hang the data up on the wall, point to it and say yep, we've got this many million converts here, and this many million members there. Church growth is up (or down), we collected this many billions of dollars last year, and in relation to the rest of the world's religions we rank number whatever. We've got this many thousands of churches in this part of the world, we have this many thousands of pastors and Christian workers, and we've translated the Bible into this many different languages.

Meanwhile, what drives the Real Church, the Ekklesia, is invisible, spiritual, ethereal, in the world but not of the world, hidden, veiled, hard to describe in terms we can understand.

If God would grant you a moment by His side and allow you a fleeting glance at His Church you would at once understand what a pitiful substitute we have in Organized

Religion. There is no vanity so deep as religious vanity, nothing more sickening and diametrically opposed to the heart and ultimate purpose of God.

And we who are in Christ Jesus ARE seated with Him in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6).

In his book *Mere Christianity*, author C.S. Lewis wrote: "...the Church exists for nothing else but to draw (humankind) into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time."

Christ **loves** His Church relentlessly. When He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life" He referred to His infinite and eternal being and offered it as an invitation. Don't be trapped in the compromise of churchianity; live in the moment by moment vitality of life in, with, through our mighty Savior.

Chapter 37

What's In It for Me?

And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"

"For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?"

But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

Then Peter said, "See, we have left all and followed You."

(Luke 18:24-28)

A rich man, intrigued by Jesus, asked what he could do to 'get into heaven'. He was confident in his moral conduct and told Christ as much. But Jesus gave him a challenge:

"You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

(Luke 18:22)

This was a curveball, in the strike zone, that the seeker couldn't hit. He shuffled away, or so I imagine, sorrowful. This is where we have picked up. Jesus followed up with those who could hear with the camel statement making it clear that riches are a hindrance to entering the kingdom of God, a seemingly impossible hindrance.

And a whole lot of sermons, good teachings, have launched off from this. But again, I want to look at a different aspect of the event. To the Jewish mind of the time, being rich

and successful meant the best seats in the synagogue, shoulder-rubbing with the religious elite, and virtually guaranteed hearty welcome at heaven's door.

Peter, and presumably the rest of the disciples, were shaken. They exclaimed, *"Who then can be saved?"*

Jesus answered with a truism that no Jew would dispute, *"The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."* But this was utterly insufficient for Peter; he seemed to be focused, along with the rest of the disciples, upon the fact that they were just not seeing what they expected to see, what they hoped to see, from the Messiah.

They loved Jesus and they wanted heaven, but if even the rich were kind of going hitless (pardon my baseball analogies) and they themselves were basically penniless – well:

Then Peter said, "See, we have left all and followed You."

(Luke 18:28)

The unspoken but clear implication was, "So then, what's in it for us??"

Now, Jesus knew his heart. These guys were thinking about the expected riches and positions of importance in the Messiah's new kingdom. But Christ graciously promised:

"Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life."

(Luke 18:29,30)

So, we cannot help but think that this promise must have refocused them on Christ and His mission. But that does not appear to be the case. Just following this "What's in it for me?" questioning, Jesus tells them what's coming, what to expect:

Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished."

"For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon."

"They will scourge [Him] and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."

(Luke 18:31-33)

Wow! If the camel-needle talk alarmed them, this forecast surely brought a freak-out, right? Nope.

But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.

(Luke 18:34)

They were clueless. I suggest that the ‘what’s in it for me’ mindset, which pollutes every human mind, caused them to miss it. They were blinded by their own self-focus. And this blindness continued even through the crucifixion.

This so common among believers today as well – people in the pulpit and people in the pews. Sincere followers, but who are expecting something other than that which Jesus promised:

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”

(Matthew 16:24)

Today’s Churchianity is all about pleasing the ‘what’s in it for me?’ perspective. It is self-focused.

The disciples needed to see Christ crucified, resurrected, and to receive the Holy Spirit in order to start understanding; Thomas had to touch the scars. We all need the same thing spiritually. As long as we keep asking “What’s in it for Me?” rather than “What’s Your Will, Lord?” we won’t understand the beauty and wisdom of our God.

Chapter 38

A Thought on Thanks

Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off.

And they lifted up [their] voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

So, when He saw [them], He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on [his] face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.

So, Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where [are] the nine?"

"Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?"

And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

(Luke 17:12-19)

I was raised in a 'different time'. I was taught to always show appreciation for others kindness and that's the way I raised my own kids. Now, there are still people who have this ethic but increasingly I hear from others that this thankfulness is not so common anymore.

In Jesus' day, if you had leprosy, you were treated as a non-person. You were shunned and despised. Of course, there was no cure so as your disease progressed, your body rotted away and became terribly disfigured, and you mostly hid from the rest of the world. It's hard to conceive of just how horrible your life would have been. Perhaps those children who are sold into sex slavery and the endless horrors therein could relate. My heart breaks for them.

Now, none of Christ's encounters were by chance. He headed through Samaria for a reason, and it may have been to meet this small group of desperate people plagued with leprosy. As I read the above verses this morning, the part that caught my attention was, "*And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.*" It was a test of their faith and a testimony to the priest(s).

I wondered; did it happen suddenly or gradually? Did it happen to one and then another and another or to all of them simultaneously? Did they shout for joy or cry? Did they dance together or run off in different directions? Did some just sit down and pray?

There was only one of them that came back to thank Jesus. What does that say? Christ was clearly surprised and probably disappointed.

I suspect that few of us have had to deal with this plague of leprosy but many of us, myself included, deal with the plague of indifference to God's goodness at times.

Now, and I'm sure you've seen this for yourself, indifference to God's goodness is sometimes accompanied by a sense of prideful entitlement. Perhaps it's just the natural regression of the 'disease'. Sick minds and dark hearts develop when people are unthankful.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,... because, although they knew God, they did not glorify [Him] as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

(Romans 1:18,21)

But thankfulness is the natural condition of the hearts filled with God's Spirit. The Psalmist declared:

*To the end that [my] glory may sing praise to You and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will **give thanks** to You forever.*

(Psalm 30:12)

*Enter into His gates **with thanksgiving**, [And] into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, [and] bless His name.*

(Psalm 100:4)

Speaking of Christ, the apostle Paul wrote:

Thanks [be] to God for His indescribable gift!

(2 Corinthians 9:15)

And in the midst of God's judgements upon devil-ruled planet we call earth, the twenty-four elders in heaven who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God,

*saying: "We give You **thanks**, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.*

(Revelation 11:17)

And speaking of heaven, those closest in proximity to God are continually offering heartfelt worship, saying:

*"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom,
Thanksgiving and honor and power and might,
Be to our God forever and ever.
Amen."*

(Revelation 7:12)

You see, the **disease of indifference** is born out of **pride**, the pride that all dark hearts are controlled by, and even enlightened hearts have to continually overcome by trusting in God's grace and goodness.

As we have read, all ten lepers had the faith to be healed but only one welcomed God's light into his heart and became thankful. He was healed physically AND spiritually – I bet we'll see him in heaven.

Chapter 39

Where Are You From?

It is so sobering to think that you could be so mistaken in your assumptions as to believe that heaven's door will be open to you and then you hear from Jesus, "I do not know you...". Then you step back and claim, "But we ate and drank in your presence..." all to no avail.

Here are the warning verses:

*"When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, **where you are from**,'*

"then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.'

*"But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, **where you are from**. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.'*

(Luke 13:25-27)

I've taught many times from these scriptures about the need for us to know Jesus. Not just know about Him but **know** Him.

But there's more, and Jesus mentions it twice for emphasis – "where you are from." This word **where** can refer to a place or to a condition or origin or source even author. You see, where you are from spiritually, is directly related to whether or not Jesus knows you.

If you are born again, by God's Spirit, you are **from Him**. He is your origin or source. He is your Father. It's not a matter of the condition of your flesh. Jesus once told the Jews:

*"You are of **your father the devil**, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."*

(John 8:44)

They were so proud to be of the lineage of Abraham; so, this truly upended their world. At heaven's doorway, eating and drinking with Him didn't make the cut; hearing his teaching didn't do it either. If He knows where you are from – your Source, your Origin, your Author even – then He could say, "I know you."

The Jews at the time truly thought their goodness, their guarantee of salvation was their flesh, their lineage. But even Paul who claimed to be a super-Pharisee said:

*"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) **nothing good** dwells;..."*

(Romans 7:18a)

Friend, if you are not sure that you are born again by faith in Jesus, do not continue with a false and deadly assumption of eternal life. It's all based on **where you are from** – who is your Father; not church attendance, not good deeds, not people you know. Surrender your heart, your will to God's Spirit. Ask Him to forgive your sins, for the faith to always trust in Him.

Even Pontius Pilate knew how important this notion of origin was:

Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify [Him], crucify [Him]!" Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify [Him], for I find no fault in Him."

The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."

*Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "**Where are You from?**" But Jesus gave him no answer.*

(John 19:6-9)

When you know you are from the Lord, you can know that He knows you.

Chapter 40

Heaven's Lost and Found

“for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

(Luke 19:10)

God ‘lost’ something many, many years ago. Now, He always knew where it was and actually, He ‘let it go’ as an essential part of His grand plan. As we consider the three parables Jesus taught concerning this, you may have always thought they were about evangelism but I’d like to see them afresh and with a desire to know our LORD.

I along with many others have used these lessons to teach about God’s patience, His desire to find the one who is lost and that’s all valid. But we need to understand some things first – in each one, someone or something is lost and in each one someone searches or waits patiently to find what is lost.

The lost are you and me, and in fact, all of mankind. The One who searches is Jesus. Let’s look at each parable and consider the lesson(s). First, there is a lost sheep. Roaming the hills, searching for good pasture and clean water, a shepherd knew each of his flock and developed an attachment to them individually and as a group. Now, Jesus said:

"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?

"And when he has found [it], he lays [it] on his shoulders, rejoicing.

"And when he comes home, he calls together [his] friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'

(Luke 15:4-6)

So, he's got 100 sheep, and one wanders off. He leaves the 99 to go after the one who is lost but where does he leave them – in the wilderness. His total focus is on the one. Oh, he loves the 99 and presumably has an under-shepherd to care for them in the wilderness, but our lesson is that he is consumed with caring about the lost one.

And what does he do when he finds it? Does he smack it with his rod or staff? Does he kick it and yell, "You stupid sheep!" No. He carries it on his shoulders, absolutely delighted and he celebrates with friends.

Jesus sums this tale up:

"I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance."

(Luke 15:7)

This story is about JOY, the joy in heaven. And the joy, there, over one person repenting of his/her sins exceeds the joy over the faithful 99. Why is that? Hang with me – I'll tell you why.

So, then Jesus follows with another parable:

"Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds [it]?"

"And when she has found [it], she calls [her] friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!'"

"Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

(Luke 15:8-10)

Now a shepherd with his sheep speaks of responsibility and caring while this woman and her coin(s) speaks of something valued. She lights a lamp, sweeps the house and searches diligently. Again, as with the first parable, when she finds the lost item, she rejoices with her friends.

And again, the repentance of one and the consequent joy in heaven is described. Then, for the third time, Christ brings home the lesson with the well-known parable of the prodigal son:

Then He said: "A certain man had two sons.

"And the younger of them said to [his] father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls [to me].' So he divided to them [his] livelihood.

"And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.

"But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.

"Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

"And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him [anything].

"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

'I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,

"and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants." '

"And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

"And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put [it] on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on [his] feet.

'And bring the fatted calf here and kill [it], and let us eat and be merry;

'for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

(Luke 15:11-24)

This parable displays repentance, compassion, forgiveness and relationship. Now, the first two tales gave us the perspective of the searcher – Jesus. This one shows us the familial perspectives of the lost son and the gracious father. But in this parable, like the first two, there is rejoicing when the one lost is found.

And there is more to this story because there is someone who is not joyful:

"Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

"So, he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.

"And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.'

"But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore, his father came out and pleaded with him.

"So he answered and said to [his] father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends.

'But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.'

"And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.

'It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.' "

(Luke 15:25-32)

While the whole household is dancing and joyful, there is still one sourpuss. The other son who was angry because of self-righteousness. He claims that he has never transgressed. But his transgression, which is more serious than his brother's prodigal living, is that he thinks he is worthy of his father's grace. This is the treachery of religion – it despises the father's goodness and envies those with true relationship.

You see, the father's all about demonstrating his profound love for the lost. He doesn't love the faithful but self-righteous son any less but the joy of heaven, the joy of the Lord is His redemption, His reconciliation because it show everyone His character. Heaven rejoices more for the one lost who is then found because that ultimately demonstrates the gracious loving character of our God. That is what makes heaven joyful for all of us who are there.

The faithful son could rejoice along with everyone else but chooses to be in a funk because his faithfulness he attributes to himself so he is stuck in funkville.

Friends, we need to get this down. It's all about our Lord – His goodness, His work, His will, His grace, His love, His mercy and forgiveness, all of it, everything! It's for Him, by Him, to Him and we get to join Him in joy if we recognize this. Rejoice!

Chapter 41

Faith That Doesn't Fit

We learn a lot about the character of God by watching how Jesus acted with those who didn't fit in. You have to realize that the Jewish society of His day was utterly steeped in the notion of who was considered 'IN' and the who was 'OUT' – who was accepted and privileged and who was not included, considered filthy or supremely insignificant.

In Luke chapter seven we meet two people who were definitely on the outside; one a gentile soldier and the other a “sinful” woman. It's also an interesting setting, that is, Capernaum, for although Jesus did many miracles there, He also condemned the place (Matthew 11:23) for their lack of true repentance.

And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die. So, when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant.

(Luke 7:2,3)

A centurion was a Roman officer in charge of 100 soldiers. If anyone was an outsider to Jewish society, it was a Roman, a gentile, and indeed a gentile who was a part of the oppressive army that dominated the nation.

But this centurion, being very much attached to one who served him, when he heard about Jesus, sent some of the Jewish elders (the 'IN' crowd) to plead for Christ's help. Of course, this was more than a little unusual; it was amazingly unusual, mind-bogglingly unusual, even scary unusual.

And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, "for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue."

(Luke 7:4,5)

Nevertheless, they genuinely implored Jesus on behalf of the officer noting that he was deserving and why. Did they really believe it or were they scared that he could order his men to tear down the synagogue and more if rebuffed? Can't say.

And we should note that Jesus said on another occasion, to a gentile woman, begging for help for her child, that to help her would be inappropriate saying:

"It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

(Matthew 15:26)

Meaning that His mission and ministry was to the Jews, not the gentiles (not yet).

So, this request could easily have gone south, so to speak, but:

...Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. Therefore, I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

(Luke 7:6-8)

To say that this kind of behavior from a roman officer was unexpected would be an understatement; it was amazingly unusual, mind-bogglingly unusual, even scary unusual. But how did it affect Jesus?

When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"

(Luke 7:9)

There are only two occasions in all of the Bible that say Jesus marveled. This is one. Christ marveled at great faith from an "OUTsider" and as a result:

...those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick.

(Luke 7:10)

And then there was another occasion in which Jesus dealt with “OUTsider” who was actually inside a Pharisee’s home.

Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee’s house and sat down to eat.

And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that [Jesus] sat at the table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil,

and stood at His feet behind [Him] weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears and wiped [them] with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed [them] with the fragrant oil.

(Luke 7:36-38)

Jesus was attractive, like a magnet, to OUTsiders. Here, a woman who was morally repulsive to Simon the Pharisee entered his house at great risk and put on a display of love and humility that was amazingly unusual, mind-bogglingly unusual, even freakishly unusual.

I’m inclined to believe that she did not go in intending to wash His feet with her tears but, on her knees, finding Him accepting of her, she broke forth in tears. His love was unexpected, and she wept. Then seeing that His feet were wet, she used what she had, her hair, to wipe them and she kissed them in humble admiration and thankfulness. Then she used her costly fragrant oil on the spots that would soon be pierced with a stake to the cross.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw [this], he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman [this is] who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."

(Luke 7:39)

The INSider was offended. In his cold, hardened heart, he saw nothing to be impressed by.

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, say it."

"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.

"And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"

*Simon answered and said, "I suppose the [one] whom he forgave more."
And He said to him, "You have rightly judged."*

Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped [them] with the hair of her head.

"You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in.

"You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil.

(Luke 7:40-46)

The rudeness of the INsider was exposed.

"Therefore, I say to you, her sins, which [are] many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, [the same] loves little."

Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

(Luke 7:47,48)

The faith of OUTsiders doesn't fit in the established religious order. INSiders only approve of other INSiders:

And those who sat at the table with Him (the other INSiders) began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

(Luke 7:49,50)

The centurion's faith made Jesus marvel and this woman's faith brought His blessing. You see, Jesus is deeply affected by the unusual, crazy unusual faith of the OUTsiders and He responds to their need. This is what we learn – religion is all about 'coloring inside the lines' while Jesus is all about real (even if unusual) faith and love. The former does not displace the latter.

Chapter 42

Doubting Has Consequences

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

(James 1:6)

So much has been written about faith, but this verse is really about doubt and its consequences. The one who doubts the Lord has himself no stability, no foundation. He/she rises and falls over and over and is easily influenced by the “prince of the power of the air”:

And you [He made alive], who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

(Ephesians 2:1-3)

Let's see what we can learn from some notable characters in the scripture who experienced doubting the Lord and the resulting consequences. Of course, we all know about Adam and Eve because we all are living (or dying) with those consequences but let's fast forward to Moses and Aaron. In the book of Numbers we read:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

"Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals."

So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him.

*And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock;
and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for
you out of this rock?"*

*Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and
water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals
drank.*

*Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe
Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you
shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."*

(Numbers 20:7 – 12)

Moses, in anger, doubted the Lord about speaking to the rock. Instead, he hit it twice. His anger caused him to doubt that just speaking to the rock would cause water to come forth. You see, earlier, at Horeb, God had instructed him to hit the rock and the water that the people needed would come out. There, he obeyed, and the miracle occurred.

And his obedience had hallowed or honored the Lord because this event was indeed a picture of Christ, our Rock, being struck at God's command on Calvary and spiritually out poured the gracious water of Life that we who believe in Him have received.

But this second time, Moses was supposed to speak to the Rock, just as we pray, for Christ suffered ONCE.

*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might
bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the
Spirit,*

(1 Peter 3:18)

So, Moses and Aaron blew it and dishonored God. Of course, they probably did not understand the prophetic message that they messed up but that was secondary; their doubt and consequent disobedience was the primary issue and as a consequence, they both died on mountain tops before the people entered the promised land behind Joshua.

Wow. Bummer. Moses had labored for 40 years to bring his people across the Jordan. But doubt has its consequences. I'm speechless.

And speaking of speechless, let's fast forward again to a dear old priest, Zacharias who after a lifetime of service as a priest was picked to burn incense to the Lord. Now, he and his wife Elizabeth were quite elderly and childless. This was a disappointment to be

sure and a humiliation to Elizabeth. However, it was God's time, a time that the nation had waited for, and prayed for, for many hundreds of years. It was Messiah time and time for His forerunner.

As Zacharias was going through his duty with the incense, a mighty angel appeared to him in the temple. Here's what transpired:

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife [was] of the daughters of Aaron, and her name [was] Elizabeth.

And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

And when Zacharias saw [him], he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years."

And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings.

"But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."

(Luke 1:5-13,18-20)

Wow. Bummer. Zacharias doubted God's messenger and goes speechless for nine months. Yes, doubt has its consequences. Kind of gives you a sinking feeling, huh?

But let's fast forward again to a boisterous, confident fisherman, in his element – that is on the water. Peter and his cohorts were in their boat and the sea was rough. Jesus had stayed behind, or so they thought. Suddenly, they saw someone WALKING ON THE WATER.

Here's the story:

Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.

And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.

But when he saw that the wind [was] boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

(Matthew 14:25-30)

Yes, Peter actually walked on the water. He must have been elated, excited to the max. But he took his eyes off Jesus, and being freaked out by the wind, he doubted and started to sink.

Wow. Bummer. It was miracle-day for Peter, but it turned into an extra helping of humble pie. Doubt has its consequences.

But with God, consequences are not necessarily the end. In fact, we often see Him showing amazing compassion and grace. Consider Peter:

And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

(Matthew 14:31)

Jesus did a one-arm curl and Peter was saved from drowning.

Consider Zacharias:

So, they made signs to his father--what he would have him called.

And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John."

So, they all marveled.

Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue [loosed], and he spoke, praising God.

(Luke 1:62-64)

And furthermore:

... Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

"Blessed [is] the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people,

And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David,...

(Luke 1:67-69)

And much more.

Zacharias named his son John just as the angel had instructed and suddenly, he could speak. His son became the greatest of all the prophets and his own prophecy is one of the longest in the New Testament.

Consider Moses:

Moses actually did make it into the promised land – on the mount of transfiguration.

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.

And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

(Matthew 17:1-3)

Isn't God gracious!

The point is, sure, doubting does have its consequences. We should never ever doubt our Creator and Savior. However, when our God deals with us, we can trust Him to be merciful and gracious when we repent.

A friend of mine says unrighteousness is simply not trusting God. I think he's right. Let's repent, moment by moment, if necessary, of our distrust and doubting our Father in heaven. Remember:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(1 John 1:9)