

Seeds for Good Soil

J R Dickey

Volume Four

Table of Contents

- 1. More Than Wonderful**
- 2. Like Him**
- 3. Challenged**
- 4. Third Day**
- 5. Days of Noah**
- 6. Timing**
- 7. The Fellowship**
- 8. The Scars**
- 9. Discipleship**
- 10. The Joy of Your Lord**
- 11. Never Stop Trusting**
- 12. At Home**
- 13. Dead Body Walking, Live Spirit Waiting**
- 14. One Perfect Man**
- 15. Thoughts Along a Shady Country Lane**
- 16. The Ugly 'P'**
- 17. God of Peace - Part 1**
- 18. God of Peace - Part 2**
- 19. Know God**
- 20. THE Promise**
- 21. Rest**
- 22. The Twin**
- 23. In One Another**
- 24. Several Amazing Things**
- 25. Curling With Faith**
- 26. Try or Trust**
- 27. Courage in the Fire**
- 28. It's About Time**
- 29. Finishing the Feasts**
- 30. Turning Points – The Fall of Mankind**

- 31. Turning Points - The Exodus**
- 32. Attributes of God – Restoration**
- 33. Rats**
- 34. Touched**
- 35. Help, Lord!**

Chapter 1

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 people, 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 2

Like Him

From the earliest days of mankind's presence on earth, Satan has been working to convince us that God is withholding something from us.

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"
And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden;
"but of the fruit of the tree which [is] in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"
Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.
"For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

(Gen 3:1-5)

The clear implication was that God did **not** want us to be like Him. A lie. Possibly born out of jealousy. For Satan himself **pridefully** wanted to be like God and it cost him:

How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! [How] you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!
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.'
Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit.

(Isa 14:12-15)

But God has always intended just the opposite. We can see that in how He dealt with Adam and Eve as well as what He says about us who believe in His Son:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to [His] purpose.

*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined [to be] conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be **the firstborn among many brethren.***

*Moreover whom He **predestined**, these He also **called**; whom He called, these He also **justified**; and whom He justified, these He also **glorified.***

(Rom 8:28-30)

Notice the past tense above. God knew the outcome from before the beginning. Of course, we didn't. Adam may have thought, 'This is tough, having to work so hard just to live.' That's because God cursed the ground for his sake.

But as we all know, working hard was what Adam and many (if not all) of us need, to develop character and help us appreciate what we receive from the loving hand of God.

Eve learned to invest in her children, teaching them to reverence God and she learned the value of humility. When she was wanting to be like God initially, it may have been for different reasons, but she was indeed, as a result of God's judgement, learning godliness from her Maker.

In fact, most believers, if they were to list God's character attributes would say – Holiness, perfection, kindness, forgiveness, and mercy and these very attributes are those He calls on us to embrace and manifest:

*“For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to **be** your God: ye shall therefore **be holy**, for I am **holy.**”*

(Lev 11:45)

*“And be **kind** to one another, **tenderhearted**, **forgiving** one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”*

(Eph 4:32)

*“Therefore, be **merciful**, just as your Father also is merciful.”*

(Luk 6:36)

That is, He's telling us to **be like Him**. Unfortunately, even as believers we often still don't 'get' Him – we get hung up on the power, the miracles, the radiant glory and we forget the most excellent things – the love, the mercy, the graciousness, that is the 'Who attributes' of His character as opposed to the 'What' attributes.

But that's going to change because we have this promise:

*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, **we shall be like Him**, for we shall see Him **as He is**.*

(1 John 3:2)

There are some who desire godliness or who try to manifest godliness out of pride – to be seen of men. But God wants us to be like Him in love, in mercy, in grace, in humility and so on. This is Who we will see then.

Sin-filled hearts of prideful men can only be impressed with power, radiant glory – that's what knocked down the madman Saul who was seeking to persecute believers:

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."

(Acts 9:3-5)

But humble, broken sinners like Mary are impressed with **Who He is**:

Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"

(John 20:16,17)

You see, He is the radiant glory and the power, but He is also the grace and mercy and love because He's complete, He's perfect and He calls us to be the same:

"Therefore, you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

(Mat 5:48)

And for that to be possible, He had to put on flesh, become one of us, experience the totality of being human and do so perfectly, completely without sin:

*Therefore, in all things He had to be made **like His brethren**, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

(Heb 2:17)

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

(Heb 4:15)

Yes, contrary to the devil's lies, God does want us to be **like** Him, **like** His Son, and that is a **complete**, i.e. **perfect** package deal. How does that happen? Christ in you.

Chapter 3

Challenged

*Though these three men, **Noah, Daniel, and Job**, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD.*
(Eze 14:14)

This verse along with its companion, Eze 14:20, identify three notably righteous men in the Old Testament. For me, one of them is particularly interesting – Job. He is the only man in the Bible for whom we have a recorded challenge by Satan to God:

Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"
So, Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? "Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land."
"But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"
(Job 1:8-11)

And amazingly, God accepted the challenge.

And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person." So, Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.
(Job 1:12)

Why? I'll get to that, but first:

Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house; and a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding

beside them, when the Sabeans raided them and took them away-- indeed they have killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three bands, raided the camels and took them away, yes, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and suddenly a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

(Job 1:13 – 19)

In a single day, Job was devastated. Everything was taken from him including his beloved children. But Satan lost the challenge because:

Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshipped.

And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD."

In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.

(Job 1 20-22)

But Satan wasn't done with Job, and neither was God. Once again, he came before the Lord:

Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause."

So, Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"

(Job 2:3-5)

Challenge number two; and once again, God accepted:

And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life."

(Job 2:6)

And for the next 37 chapters, poor Job suffers intensely:

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!"

(Job 2:9)

His pain was so great that he cursed the day of his birth. On top of that, he was counselled by three 'friends' that his suffering was because of his abundant sin.

One of Job's responses to them concerning God was, *"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him:"* which is a wonderful display of trust, but then he added:

"Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him."

(Job 13:15)

...which was a display of why God accepted Satan's challenge.

As righteous as Job was, God knew that there was something at work inside that needed to change. Not only that, but his trials produced a wonderful hope:

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

(Job 19:25-27)

Repeatedly, Job groans and moans and yet he defends himself and his righteousness to his friends. Then finally, in chapter 38, God speaks directly to him:

*Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said:
"Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?"*

Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me.

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

(Job 38:1-4)

After this God gave him an additional 52 questions that really put Job on the spot and to which he remained silent. Then God finished:

Moreover, the LORD answered Job, and said:

“Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it.”

(Job 40:1,2)

Dutifully, Job answered:

“Behold, I am vile; What shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further.”

(Job 40:4,5)

But God wasn't not done:

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said:

“Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me:

Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified?

Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His?”

(Job 40:6-9)

And He followed with 18 more questions to Job as well as a short lecture on His power.

Job was overwhelmed and saw both God and himself in a new light. He meekly replied:

“I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.'

*"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You.
Therefore, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."*

(Job 42:2-6)

And so it was, after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.

*"Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, go to My servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and My servant Job shall pray for you. For I will accept him, lest I deal with you according to your folly; **because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.**"*

(Job 42:7,8)

So, Job's friends did as God commanded:

*And the LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends.
Indeed, the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.*

(Job 42:10)

What a story! So why did God accept the challenges and allow Job to suffer such anguish? Now, I don't want to say I know because no one truly knows the mind of the Almighty. So, I'll offer an observation.

It would appear like Job felt that he lived a righteous life and so he viewed his tragedy with some humility and some indignation. It also appeared that his indignation grew to the point of declaring, "Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him."

But in the end, his ultimate declaration was:

*"I have **uttered what I did not understand**, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." And, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore, **I abhor myself**, and repent in dust and ashes."*

(Job 42:3)

So, in the end, Job came to the place of sincere **humility** and thus the **true** righteousness that God knew would come forth. So, once again, we have learned through blessed Job, the true nature of our Father – He loves us and is FOR us even when it seems convincingly that He's not.

As believers, we all have a mortal enemy who seeks to demean and destroy us and turn us against the Lord. But God knows us and knows what He's doing in our lives, for this is true:

*And we know that **all things** work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

(Rom 8:28)

Chapter 4

Third Day

Have you ever wondered why Jesus rose from the grave on the third day? Of course, the easy answer is because it was prophesied. But why did God choose three? Is it symbolic of the Trinity's victory over evil, over death? I do think it has something to do with God Himself.

Let's look at the mentions of "third day" in the scripture and see what we can glean:

So, the evening and the morning were the third day.

(Gen 1:13)

This is the first mention and if you look at what happened on the third day of creation, it clearly points to **LIFE**.

Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off.

(Gen 22:4)

Abraham was told by God to go to Mt Moriah and there to sacrifice his son, his beloved son to the Lord. Abraham journeyed there and attempted to fulfill God's command but was stopped by God's Angel at the last instant. This mention then speaks to **OBEDIANCE**.

And Laban was told on the third day that Jacob had fled.

(Gen 31:22)

Jacob had spent many years in the deceitful, oppressive world of Laban. Then he decided to go home to his father's house in the promised land. This mention then speaks to **ESCAPE FROM BONDAGE**.

Now it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males.

(Gen 34:25)

Dinah had been taken captive, raped and then her brothers brought **VENGEANCE UPON THE EVIL**.

Now it came to pass on the third day, [which was] Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants.

(Gen 40:20)

Joseph, who is a prophetic type of Christ, was imprisoned in Egypt, the prophetic type of the world. During that time, two of Pharaoh's servants were imprisoned with him. Soon, they both had dreams that Joseph interpreted for them – the butler was to be released but the baker got death. This speaks to divine **JUDGEMENT** (symbolically) that happened on the third day.

Then Joseph said to them the third day, "Do this and live, for I fear God:

(Gen 42:18)

If you remember the story of Joseph, you know that his brothers heartlessly sold him into bondage and slavery, and he was taken to Egypt. After his miraculous rise to virtually supreme power, his family was forced to journey as well to Egypt to obtain food due to a severe famine. He recognized them but they were clueless about him. In their eyes, he was the PM of all Egypt second only to Pharaoh.

Now, Joseph wanted to test them, so he was tough on them and threw them in prison for three days, then on the third day he brought them out and let them all go except the most violent brother Simeon. He told them to bring back their youngest brother. This mention speaks to **TESTING AND MERCY**.

Now, there are other mentions which speak to **AWESOMENESS OF THE ALMIGHTY, HOLINESS, PURIFICATION, A COVENANT OF PEACE, AND REDEMPTION**. But this last verse is a powerful prophecy:

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

(Hos 6:2)

Clearly, this speaks to the **RESURRECTION** and note that it is in the plural. Hosea was praying for Israel, so this speaks to Christ, His church and the Jewish people as well. So, you can see that "third day" has some powerful linkage to the overall plan of God. As such I think Christ rose on the third day because that is in total harmony with the rest of scripture and proclaims loudly Almighty God, Lord of All, Three in One, Holy, Holy, Holy.

Chapter 5

Days of Noah

When asked about His return, Jesus said:

“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.”

(Mat 24:37)

In other words, the conditions of the world before the coming of Jesus will be like the conditions of the world before the flood:

- Exploding population (Genesis 6:1).
- Sexual perversion (Genesis 6:2).
- Demonic activity (Genesis 6:2).
- Constant evil in the heart of man (Genesis 6:5).
- Widespread corruption and violence (Genesis 6:11).

(Thanks to David Guzik.)

As many forms of perversion are pressed upon us from the media and the government, in schools, from ‘doctors’, even in some churches, we must remember that we were told it would happen. So, what about those days of Noah? Let’s take a look at Genesis:

*Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the **sons of God** saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves **of all whom they chose**.*

(Gen 6:1,2)

*There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the **sons of God** came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.*

(Gen 6:3)

*Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that **every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.***

(Gen 6:5)

*The earth also was **corrupt** before God, and the earth was filled with **violence**. So, God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for **all flesh** had corrupted their way on the earth.*

(Gen 6:11,12)

The phrase **sons of God** clearly refers to angelic creatures when it is used the three other times in the Old Testament (Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:7). The translators of the Septuagint translated **sons of God** as *angels*. Those ancient translators clearly thought **sons of God** referred to angelic beings, not to people descended from Seth.

Jude 6 tells us of the “*angels who did not keep their proper domain but left their own habitation*”. Jude goes on (Jude 7) to tell us they sinned “*in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh*”. Here in Genesis 6, as in Sodom and Gomorrah, there was an unnatural sexual union.

We can deduce *why* Satan sent his angels to intermarry (either directly or indirectly) with human women. Satan tried to pollute the genetic pool of mankind with a satanic corruption, to put something like a genetic virus to make the human race unfit for bringing forth the *Seed of the woman* — the Messiah — promised in Genesis 3:15.

Every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually: This says a lot. It means there was no aspect of man’s nature not corrupted by sin. If you look at crimes per 100k, it would appear that it is relatively stable but that’s an intentional deception as the total crimes have tracked with the total population which has more than tripled worldwide in the last 70 years.

Moral depravity: According to a recent Gallup poll, 54% of Americans say the state of moral values in the country is “poor”—a record number. Some 83% say they believe morals are in decline. They aren’t alone: Survey data from a study published this week in *Nature* suggest that people in more than 60 nations share a general sense that people are less moral now than they used to be. The study, based on more than 12 million surveys administered to people around the world between 1949 and 2021, argues that people have felt this way for at least 70 years.

Evil thoughts continually: Overall, recent data shows that the U.S. experienced its largest-ever recorded annual increase in homicides in 2020, compared to 2019, according to statistics from the FBI. The homicide rate rose nearly 30% in 2020 and increased again by 5% in 2021.

Now, I could go on and on, but we all know that these stats are only the tip of the iceberg. We have all seen how addiction to technology produced tools and media have isolated us and mutated our thinking. We are all revved up, angry and impatient, utterly and totally self-absorbed.

I've lived, worked and or traveled in almost 40 countries and I can tell you, these things are more or less ubiquitous. Our societies do resemble those described in scripture as being in Noah's day.

Chapter 6

Timing

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.

(John 11:5,6)

Then Jesus said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless, let us go to him.”

(John 11:14,15)

Now, most of you know this story. Jesus knew this little family of two sisters and a brother, and He cared deeply for them. The incident is the seventh miracle of John’s Gospel.

Why did He wait?

There’s a theory out there; it goes possibly, Jesus waited four days because He knew the Jewish superstition of that day that said a soul stayed *near* the grave for three days, hoping to return to the body. Therefore, it was accepted that after four days there was absolutely no hope of resuscitation. Clearly, this theory is conjecture – it comes from the ‘tradition of Ben Kaphra’ which is traced to about 200 years **after** Calvary and could easily have been invented by the Jews in response to their inability to explain Christ’s resurrection – i.e. that He wasn’t really dead.

So, I’m definitely **not** inclined to buy into the Ben Kaphra theory but it is obvious that Jesus was attuned to the timing of this miracle. He specifically waited two days after He heard the news and arrived on the fourth day after Lazarus died. The text makes it clear that He cared intensely. The delay was not the result of apathy.

In fact, He was definitely not apathetic -He cared so much “*He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.*” (John 11:33) “The verb rendered ‘groaned’ is an unusual one. It signifies a loud inarticulate noise, and its proper use appears to be for the snorting of horses. When used of men it usually denotes anger.” (Morris)

It means that Jesus wasn't so much *sad* at the scene surrounding the tomb of Lazarus. It's more accurate to say that Jesus was *angry*. (Gusik)

So, He cared and He arrived exactly when He intended. In John's Gospel there are three times when someone dear to Jesus asked Him to do something (see also John 2:1-11 and 7:1-10). In each of these three cases, Jesus responded in the same way – He waited. But this is the time He waited a specific amount of time.

Why the wait?

Clearly, the Lord does things on His schedule, not ours. He rode into Jerusalem on the donkey, hailed as King exactly on time, on "this your day" (see our lesson of that name.) When he knew Lazarus was dead, He waited two days and when He raised him from the grave, it had been four days.

Now, as I prayed about this and asked the Lord for insight, He reminded me of the verse:

*"But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a **thousand years**, and a **thousand years** as one day."*

(2 Pet 3:8)

And thus, I wondered if the reason for the delay was a picture, a prophetic picture. I'll explain and you can decide if you agree or not.

Jesus waited two days after He knew in the Spirit that Lazarus had died. Now Laz was someone Jesus loved but He waited two days before responding.

Now, the name Lazarus means "who is helped by God" and this is amplified by the following verses:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present **help** in trouble.

(Psa 46:1)

Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to **help** me, O LORD.

(Psa 70:1)

O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my **help**.

(Psa 71:12)

Help me, O LORD my God: O save me according to thy mercy

(Psa 109:26)

Happy is he that has the God of Jacob for his **help**, whose hope is in the LORD his God

(Psa 146:5)

Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will **help** thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. ... For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will **help** thee.

(Isa 41:10,13)

Could this be a picture of Christ waiting for about 2000 years to help Israel? To raise them from the dead so to speak as in Ezekiel 37? Of course, that passage portrays the rebirth of the nation as a whole so what about their **resurrection** at the “end of days” as spoken in Daniel 12?

If you consider the Jewish or Hebrew people beginning with Abram and accounting for the time until the present day you have around 4000 years or four prophetic days. That is, you can link both the two days and the four days to the raising of Lazarus which could picture the raising of the Jewish people – see Dan 12:2,3,9,10,13.

So, I suggest that if indeed we see the second coming of Christ in the not too distant future, it could be that He waited to help Lazarus in order to picture and to fulfill prophecy concerning God’s good will for Israel. What do you think?

Chapter 7

The Fellowship

I've been leading a small group of newer believers and we're going over foundational lessons on our mutual faith. The other day, one of them posed an honest question. I'll tell you what it was and how I answered. We were discussing why Jesus and only Jesus could pay the debt for all our sins. I've written about that in another posting entitled One Perfect Man. Anyway, he asked, "Why didn't God the Father just come Himself?" Good question.

I answered, "He did," and talked about the wonderful mystery of the Trinity, three in one and I also mentioned how Jesus responded to the disciple Philip when he 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 14:8,9)

But something happened yesterday, when I was 'at the altar'. I was contemplating the love of God and He reminded me of something very, very special to me personally because He shared it with me not long after my youngest son went home to be with Him just two days after his 17th birthday. In the depths of grief, I heard Him say to me, "Now we share a very special fellowship – the fellowship of suffering."

Paul wrote something similar, speaking of Christ:

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;"

(Phi 3:10)

But I knew that it was God the Father, Abba, Who had spoken to me. And, it struck me yesterday that sending His Son was a demonstration of the greatest love ever.

I remembered that when Gabriel was on the verge of passing that I earnestly asked God that, if possible, could He take me instead and Abba showed me that knows that sentiment.

So yes, God was present in the Son – it's called the Incarnation - so He did come Himself. Jesus was fully God and fully man. But all the cosmos knows that in sending Jesus, His beloved Son to suffer and die for us, God demonstrated a love for us that was only equaled by Christ's love for Him. It is a love above all loves indescribable and eternal.

If you have lost a child, you may relate to this and if not, I hope you'll believe me when I tell you that God loves us more than we can ever imagine not because of us but simply because it's Who He is.

Chapter 8

The Scars

You know, Jesus, after His resurrection, kept His scars, the piercings in His body. We know that because of what He said to Thomas who at first doubted His resurrection.

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)

Of course, we know He didn't have to keep those scars. He chose to do so. Clearly, we see in the scriptures that after His resurrection, He had the ability to appear any way He chose. For instance, on the road to Emmaus or on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

But why? What's the purpose or picture?

The Old Testament spoke of them:

For dogs have surrounded Me;

The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me.

*They **pierced** My hands and My feet;*

(Psa 22:16)

*“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they **pierced**. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.*

(Zech 12:10)

These and other scriptures pictured that Christ would be crucified but why **keep** the scars?

To answer this, we need to dig some more into the OT law and history. First, we need to review the story of Passover. You remember that as the Hebrew people were about to be delivered out of Egyptian bondage and slavery, they were instructed by the Lord through Moses and Aaron to kill a lamb – to each family a lamb – and to place its blood on the two door posts and the cross beam above.

Of course, most of us are aware that this preceded the judgement of death of the firstborn that came on all of Egypt and where the blood was placed and the fact that it was from a spotless lamb pictured the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary Who saved us all from eternal death. The blood was placed on the doorposts as a **picture of the Cross** – where His body was pierced. Go ahead and read Exodus 12 for the details.

Then turn to Exodus 21:

“If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out by himself.”

*“But if the servant plainly says, ‘I **love** my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the **doorpost**, and his **master** shall **pierce** his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.”*

(Ex 21:2-6)

What this shows is that the servant who paid the debt owed to his master, if he chose to remain connected to his family and in service to his master would choose to be pierced and to make that linkage crystal clear, that piercing took place in the same place as the Passover lamb’s blood – on the doorpost. And it was a **scar** that he **kept** as a sign of his commitment.

In the same way, Jesus, who said he came in the form of a servant (Lu 22:27), paid our debt of sin. Being pierced for us because He chose to remain connected to us and to forever be in relationship/service to our Father, thus He sits at the right hand of the Almighty. And He kept those scars as a sign of His commitment, an eternal commitment. Hallelujah!

Chapter 9

Discipleship

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.”

“Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

(Mat 7:13,14)

We need to understand that this life as a sincere Christian **disciple** has two parts outlined clearly by Jesus; first, we are **saved by faith** in Jesus, that is, His death on the cross that paid for our sins, His resurrection from the grave that proved His sacrifice was acceptable to Almighty God and His ascension to the throne of God where He is seated at the right hand. Second, we then **live by faith** in Him; following and thus learning and learning and still learning to look to Him at all times – to develop increasing trust in Him in all circumstances.

The first part secures our salvation forever; the second results in greater degrees of fruit, greater love, greater relationship... In this, in the Gospel, the rightness of God is revealed as we go from faith to faith. Paul put it this way:

*“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)

The gate is narrow because there is only **one way** to enter, faith in Christ. This is not the same gate as the ‘pearly’ gates into the heavenly city, but it does lead to them. This is the gate of discipleship. The consequent path or way on the other side of this gate is characterized as **difficult**. The Greek word literally means to press as in pressing grapes and is a metaphor for trouble, affliction and distress. It’s difficult because that’s what God uses to shape and develop our eternal character, our glorious resemblance to our Lord Jesus:

“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)

It's a difficult life, a difficult path or way, because it involves denial of selfishness:

*“When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him **deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.**”*

(Mk 8:34)

It's on this path that, though it is difficult, teaches us obedience. If you will follow Jesus, that is believe AND follow, go through the gate and walk the path, you will learn as He learned:

“...though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

(Heb 5:8)

Now, Jesus said that few would find it. I encourage you, be one of the few. Enter the gate and walk the path; believe and follow – all by faith.

Chapter 10

The Joy of Your Lord

*"...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the **joy** that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

(Heb 12:2)

What was that joy? I've heard a lot of preaching and theories on it, and they sound good but I still want the full assurance of understanding because that joy, THAT joy, gave Christ the will to go through the cross, the shame and rise absolutely victorious over death and the devil.

Let's see if we can learn more from the scriptures about this wonderful thing called joy:

- Clearly, it's not the temporary happiness that can come from the human heart; it's supernatural, entirely spiritual and is a product (fruit) of the Holy Spirit:

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

(Gal 5:22,23a)

- If for no other reason, Jesus was filled with this joy because He was filled with God's Spirit and He claimed it as His own and something He could share:

*"These things I have spoken to you, that **My joy** may remain in you, and that your joy may **be full**."*

(John 15:11)

- And you can see that He was not 'stingy' with it. He wanted His joy in His followers to be full – that is, to the max which could mean that it will continue to increase throughout eternity; He even spoke to Father God about it:

*"But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have **My joy fulfilled** in themselves."*

(John 17:13)

- And knowing our propensity to view all His promises as fleshly rather than heavenly, Paul said:

*“the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and **joy in the Holy Spirit.**”*

(Rom 14:17)

- And this joy is not just for His Bride, the mostly gentile Church, but for Jewish believers as well for we see these promises for them (and presumably all believers) during the millennial reign of Christ –

*Behold, God is my salvation,
I will trust and not be afraid;
‘For YAH, the LORD, is my strength and song;
He also has become my salvation.’
Therefore, with **joy** you will draw water
From the wells of salvation.*

(Isa 12:2,3)

*And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
And come to Zion with singing,
With everlasting **joy** on their heads.
They shall obtain **joy** and gladness,
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

(Isa 35:10)

*“For you shall go out with **joy**,
And be led out with peace;
The mountains and the hills
Shall break forth into singing before you,
And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

(Isa 55:12)

Eternal joy is what heaven, God’s presence, is all about. It’s a wonderful promise. All He wants is for us to be faithful to Him, to continue believing and thus producing His spiritual fruit in our own lives and the lives of those around us. Christ spoke a parable and summed it up this way:

“His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”

(Mat 25:21)

You can have this joy now, like a sapling that grows and grows and grows. Open your heart to Christ, ask for His forgiveness for your misdeeds and trust in Him.

Chapter 11

Never Stop Trusting

*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 8:38,39)

This verse points out that there are many entities engaged in attempting to “separate us from the love of God” so it behooves us to understand this term separate. It means to **depart** as when a man or woman departs from their spouse. Of course, there’s only one reason anyone would depart from the perfect loving spouse Jesus, that’s doubting His love.

You see, this potential departing or separation is not a matter of distance but a matter of relationship. To get mankind to doubt God and specifically to doubt His love has been the goal of Satan and all these evil entities ever since man was created. And he knows that until Jesus, it was an effective weapon against God’s children. Apart from the power of faith and trust given by the Holy Spirit, no one can honestly believe that God loves them.

Before salvation, all we can see is our sin, our flesh, and it stinks:

When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”

But Simon answered and said to Him, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.”

And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking.

*So, they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for **I am a sinful man**, O Lord!”*

(Lu 5:4-8)

It's evident that Peter typified this struggle from here in the beginning of his relationship with Christ all the way to the shores of Galilee after the resurrection. (See John 21)

But God's love for you is because of Christ and when you are saved, you are IN Christ. God no longer regards your sin, your failures. They are paid for in full and His love is unwavering; it's eternal.

So, when you fail, and you will fail; you will fall short, don't listen to the enemy's sniveling lies that you've alienated God or that He's disappointed in you because you're just so bad. He wants only to get you to doubt God's love for you. Don't you buy it! Even when you blow it. Confess your failure, your sin, change your mind, your direction (i.e. repent) and focus on God's grace, goodness, and promise of forgiveness. Christ is totally committed to you!

For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you. (Heb 13:5)

and...

"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)

Chapter 12

At Home

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

(Rom 8:28-30)

“Now here God is speaking of things concerning me that are not yet fulfilled. For you do not yet see the glorified Chuck. I am not yet in my glorified state. That is a yet future experience that I am to have. But yet, God puts it in the past tense, which to me is quite interesting. But even as He spoke to Abraham concerning his seed in the past tense, because He knew that Abraham was going to have a son whom He did foreknow. And because God has the foreknowledge, He can speak as Paul said of things as existing even though as yet they do not exist, because He knows they are going to exist. And so God speaks, and this is what thrills me, He speaks of my being glorified, because God knows He is going to do it. He is going to complete that work in me. He which has begun a good work in me shall surely continue to perform it. And so I rest in the fact that God has already spoken in the past tense of my future state of glorified together with Jesus Christ. I have got it made.” – Chuck Smith

I love what Chuck said here, but I’ll take it a step further – I’ll suggest that not only does God have foreknowledge to speak of seemingly future events in the past tense but in the eternal realm, time exists in a different fashion – it’s a “heavenly thing” that Jesus gave Nicodemus a taste of when he told him:

*“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 3:12,13)

In other words, I don't think Romans 8:28 – 30 speaks of our predestination, our call, our justification and our glorification in the past tense only because of His foreknowledge but because sometime "before time began" (see 2 Tim 1:9) He accomplished it and in heaven it is settled; somehow, it's actually done. Of course, in this life, in our realm of time and space, He is always at work in us "to complete" what he has begun (see Phi 1:6).

Sir Isaac Newton said of God, "He is eternal and infinite, omnipotent and omniscient; that is, his duration reaches from eternity to eternity; his presence from infinity to infinity." God is the one "who inhabits eternity" (Isaiah 57:15). Creatures inhabit time. Jesus, as the God-man, inhabits both. – C.S. Lewis Institute
Jesus said concerning the believer:

"My father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him"

(John 14:23).

Now one author wrote that this is indicative of the heavenly city descending out of heaven and remaining with mankind on the new earth. That's a nice thought but this verse specifies an individual believer, not the whole planet. I recall that Jesus also said:

*"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)

and...

*"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, **as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us**, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: **I in them, and You in Me**; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."*

(John 17:20-23)

This oneness, this unity with Christ and the Father and the Spirit, **this is our home** and it's right now if you're born again. You see, when you are born again, you are thenceforth a spiritual creature – a new creation, and your home is of course, a spiritual home. Did you get that? When you are born again, you are IN God and He is IN you – it's an eternal unity, a home unconstrained by time or space – eternal and infinite just as God. Will you have a physical body? Yes, Christ did after He rose from the grave, but it was a spiritual body as well. Remember, we will be “*conformed to the image of His Son.*”

We have so much to be thankful for now and so much to look forward to as well, forever!

Chapter 13

Dead Body Walking, Live Spirit Waiting

*For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but **in the Spirit**, if indeed the Spirit of God **dwells in you**. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the **body is dead** because of sin, but the **Spirit is life** because of righteousness.*

(Rom 8:6-10)

Man classifies death as the separation of man's consciousness from his body. But the Bible says that if your consciousness is separated from God, that is, you don't have a real consciousness of God, (and Paul goes even further by saying that this condition is actual enmity against God) then of course you are truly dead. The mind of the flesh is death, because it is a consciousness that being separated from God is absorbed simply with the things of the body and its needs.

And let's take this a step further – he writes “*you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit...*” That is, you, the real you, your soul, is not contained by your body, not when you're born again, but is rather in the Holy Spirit such that when the flesh gives up and dies, you, being in the Spirit are instantly in the ‘face to face’ presence of God. Further, when you are in the Spirit, the Spirit is also in you – take your time to wrap your mind around that. Your spiritual ‘container’, if you would, the Spirit of God simply waits for that sin-filled disaster called your flesh to kick off.

I know firsthand what it's like to hold the hand of someone you love when physical death comes and I can tell you, you know instantly when they are gone, finally free. They are no longer in that body but fully alive.

And notice how he concludes – the body is dead, present tense, because of sin, but the Spirit, which holds you, is living. In fact, it is itself life. And that's present tense also. How does it feel to be in life?

So don't get all bummed out by your tendency to stumble and err. It's that dead flesh. As Paul wrote:

*“I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind
(soul) I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.”*

(Rom 7:25)

Your salvation is present tense!

Chapter 14

One Perfect Man

What does it mean to be a Christian?

Of course, there's an answer well worded and 'tuned' by knowledgeable theologians that many if not most believers may agree on but not everyone. Then there's an answer that sounds like it was developed for a Christian men's or women's retreat – simple and well-polished. Then there's the answer you'd get from a street corner philosopher – really off but sounds interesting. Many answers, many points of view.

Each denomination or movement has its own version of the answer – what to believe, how to behave. Someone looking for **the** answer could get really confused.

To better understand the truth of the matter, we need to go back to the beginning to establish a foundation for it. Beginning in Genesis, scripture tells us that the first man, Adam, a perfect man, in that he was originally sinless, rebelled against God's command not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Now, Eve, his spouse indeed ate first but she was deceived by the serpent. Adam did not have that excuse. He chose on his own.

When he did that, sin along with its wages - death, entered into the human experience, into our most basic element, our genome if you would. It became a fundamental part of our fleshly existence just as it is with the devil. With that came a shift in our allegiance or subservience. Satan then moved and motivated mankind spiritually and physically. And, because God said we would die if we ate that fruit, that's exactly what has since transpired ever since until another perfect Man showed up, Jesus Christ.

Consequently, He changed everything. The Bible records:

*“He who **believes** in the Son has everlasting life;”*

(John 3:36)

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who **believes** in Me has everlasting life.”*

(John 6:47)

*“To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name,
whoever **believes** in Him will receive remission of sins.”*

(Acts 10:43)

*“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone
who **believes**.”*

(Rom 10:4)

*“Whoever **believes** that Jesus is the Christ is born of God,”*

(1 John 5:1)

As you can see from these and many other verses, belief in Christ is the key to eternal life. So being a Christian is first and foremost a matter of sincere belief. However, as we all know, someone can say they believe but in sincerity, they don't. So, we look to other verses which say:

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

(John 7:38)

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, **the works that I do
he will do also;**”*

(John 14:12)

*“But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the
word with joy; and these have no root, who **believe for a while and in
time of temptation fall away.**”*

(Luke 8:13)

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness,
goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”*

(Gal 5:22,23)

From these and many other verses, we see that true belief leads to outward evidence of that belief.

OK, but why Jesus? Why not belief in Moses or Elijah or David or Peter or John or anyone else? The answer is quite simple actually. You see, the debt or the wages of that original sin was initiated by one perfect man, Adam. The consequence of that was an ensuing immeasurable weight of countless sins, iniquities and trespasses by the whole

human race. This was a debt or penalty no human could pay off because no human after Adam was sinless – no one since that time has ever had the base requirement of perfection, of sinlessness.

Now, God knew this from before the beginning of time and so at the appointed time God came in the form of a man – the God-Man, Jesus Christ. He was entirely perfect and sinless and He paid the debt owed for all our sin, all our rebellion against God, for all time. Too good to believe? No, indeed belief based on trust or faith in God's Son, faith in His goodness, His pure and unwavering character – that's it.

One perfect Man showed up from heaven and our devotion, our **faith in Him** and **what that produces** in our lives is what makes us Christian.

Chapter 15

Thoughts Along a Shady Country Lane

No words can sufficiently laud the infinite beauty, glory, power, majesty of Almighty God – God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit. Perfect in unity, perfect good, perfect wisdom, perfect plans, perfect perspective. Amazing mercy, love, kindness, ...

And when we see Him, we shall be like Him for we shall behold Him as He is.

(1 John 3:2)

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

(1 John 1:5)

*...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)

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

(1 John 1:9)

*He who loves his brother **abides in the light**, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.*

(1John 2:10)

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

(1 John 2:15)

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

(1 John 3:1)

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

(1 John 3:3)

Something to understand here. This is not encouraging a self-improvement program. No sprinkling of hyssop, no ten steps to purity. The translation is accurate but it makes all the difference how you read it. This is not an if then statement; it is not a action that is initiated by the believer driven by his/her hope. Rather, it is **the hope itself** that purifies the believer.

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

(Heb 6:19)

*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 Pet 1:3)

Isn't He Wonderful!!

Chapter 16

The Ugly 'P'

There's this great group of guys I meet with to talk about the things we're learning from the Lord. A few days ago, we got on the topic of pride and I mentioned C S Lewis' statement on it:

“The vice I am talking of is Pride or Self-Conceit: and the virtue opposite to it, in Christian morals, is called Humility...According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.”

— C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Well, one of the guys who is especially frank and honest (which I love) blurted out, “But God gave me pride and I can't get rid of it.” And if we consider what the Bible has to say concerning this, you can understand his frustration:

*Therefore, **pride** serves as their necklace;
Violence covers them like a garment.*

(Psa 73:6)

Lesson: **Pride** is associated with violence

*The fear of the LORD is to hate evil;
Pride and arrogance and the evil way
And the perverse mouth I hate.*

(Pro 8:13)

Lesson: If we reverence the Lord, we will hate **pride**

*When **pride** comes, then comes shame;
But with the humble is wisdom.*

(Pro 11:2)

Lesson: **Pride** leads to shame

***Pride** goes before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before a fall.*

(Pro 16:18)

Lesson: **Pride** precedes destruction

*A man's **pride** will bring him low,
But the humble in spirit will retain honor.*

(Pro 29:23)

Lesson: **Pride** brings dishonor

*The **pride** of your heart has deceived you,*

(Oba 1:3)

Lesson: **Pride** leads to self-deception

*...not a novice, lest being puffed up with **pride** he fall into
the same condemnation as the devil.*

(1 Tim 3:6)

Lesson: **Pride** caused the fall into condemnation of Satan

*“when your heart is **lifted up**, and you forget the LORD your God who
brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage;*

(Deut 8:14)

Lesson: **Pride** will cause you to forget the Lord

*“Your **heart** was **lifted up** because of your beauty;
You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor;
I cast you to the ground,
I laid you before kings,
That they might gaze at you.*

(Eze 28:17)

Lesson: God cast Satan to the ground because of **pride**

*“How you are fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How you are cut down to the ground,
You who weakened the nations!
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.
Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol,
To the lowest depths of the Pit.*

(Isa 14:12-15)

Lesson: **Pride** deceived Satan into thinking he was greater than he was and led to his downfall

*Though the LORD is on high,
Yet He regards the lowly;
But the **proud** He knows from afar.*

(Psa 138:6)

Lesson: God distances Himself from the **prideful**

*Everyone **proud** in heart is an abomination to the LORD;
Though they join forces, none will go unpunished.*

(Pro 16:5)

Lesson: A **prideful** heart is an abomination

*Hear and give ear:
Do not be **proud**,
For the LORD has spoken.*

(Jer 13:15)

Lesson: The **prideful** don't hear the Lord

*Behold the **proud**,
His soul is not upright in him;
But the just shall live by his faith.*

(Hab 2:4)

Lesson: The **prideful** are not upright

*So now we call the **proud** blessed,
For those who do wickedness are raised up;
They even tempt God and go free.*

(Mal 3:15)

Lesson: This is when we just look at the flesh, the outward appearance

*“God resists the **proud**,
But gives grace to the humble.”*

(Jam 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5)

Lesson: Grace goes to the **humble**

So why does God save us and then still leave us with this and other ugly flesh characteristics to deal with? The Apostle Paul agonized:

“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”
(Rom 7:24)

and said:

*“For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice.”*

(Rom 7:19)

Well, I’ll suggest that it has to do with helping us to grow in trust of God’s grace and learning to walk humbly. Let me illustrate:

The Bible says that the **firmament**, that is **nature**, shows His handiwork (Psa 19:1). This is clearly evident in its beauty, its majesty and its intricacy, but also in the spiritual lessons God displays if we’ll pay attention.

In nature, there’s a wonderful parallel to observe – the lowly caterpillar. Here he goes, inching slowly towards a tasty leaf. And when he finally gets there, he just eats and eats – feeding himself seems to be the only goal in his pitifully limited life. From one leaf-binge to another, he slowly creeps.

But then, suddenly, he gets it into his little caterpillar mind that there’s more to life than chlorophyll and he puts himself in a real predicament – dangling by a thread so to speak. You see, he realizes he’s ‘out on a limb’ and it’s time to ‘turn over a new leaf’, to ‘branch out’ (sorry). Anyway, he takes this whole new course, this leap of faith – and there’s a radical change.

Yet to those watching, it’s a conundrum, a mystery, a seeming blunder because he’s now living in a chrysalis – a very ‘limited’ life in the world’s eyes – no leaf parties, no upward mobility. I mean, life is over, right?

Still, while his fat-cat(erpillar) buddies scorn or laugh or scratch their little caterpillar heads, a metamorphosis is taking place – a dramatic transformation. Within that shell, a whole new creature is being formed (2Cor 5:17). And when the time is right, a struggle begins inside.

At first, the shell – what’s left of the old caterpillar resists. But then, there’s a crack ... then another. Slowly, and with tremendous effort, this beautiful new creature emerges – fighting and struggling, then resting, then fighting and struggling. You almost feel sorry for him.

Finally, as he breaks free of the old caterpillar shell, he spreads forth his beautiful new wings. Drinking in the sunlight of a new world, he flies over the old world of leaves and twigs. On the breath of God’s Spirit, so to speak, in the light of His Son, he now looks for flowers – a whole new diet, a new life, a new freedom – completely unimaginable to the old caterpillar. But the struggle to emerge was very important.

A scientist studying this phenomenon cut open the chrysalis just as the butterfly began to emerge, and guess what happened? Instead of helping it, he actually impaired its ability to fly. He found that in the course of the struggle, the breaking loose (that is, dealing with the old caterpillar), the veins of the new butterfly’s wings were filled with the fluid that causes them to stiffen and expand. No struggle, no flight – a new creature but no lift-off.

And so, it is with us who believe in Christ. Upon getting saved, we indeed change. Christ is in us and we are in Christ! Though the world perceives us as ‘constrained’, we are constrained by love (2 Cor 5:14) and an inward transformation now begins. As we grow in the Lord, we start to sense the hardness of the old man and the closer we come, by relationship, to the Lord, the more we detest its influence. We want to be free from it.

But the struggle is vital for in it we learn to make good choices – to resist evil and to cling to good and when we fail, to confess it to the Lord and trust in His promises – to walk humbly with Him, sharing His ‘yoke’ (see Mat 11:29). Thus, our eternal character is shaped. We are humbled by the honest assessment of our old flesh, and we are strengthened as the living waters of God’s Spirit course through our spiritual ‘veins’, preparing us to fly. **And fly we will!**

So, don’t be discouraged when the ‘old man’ rears its ugly head. Fight the good fight (1 Tim 6:12, 2 Tim 4:7). You **will** emerge one day soon into a whole new world with a new body, a new perspective, a new life – that for which you were born!

Chapter 17

God of Peace - Part 1

Enormous winds had erupted suddenly upon the sea and in a matter of minutes the once calm water became a roiling vortex of deadly waves breaking over every side of the ship. The men on board were losing their minds in fear for their lives. They were convinced they would not survive this raging storm. Screaming, yelling, bailing wildly; the waves were winning. It was like they were under some supernatural attack and they were freaking out. All except one man, lying on a pillow in the stern, sleeping.

And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.

(Mark 4:38,39)

Only a few minutes previously, peace didn't mean much to them. They probably didn't even think about it. But when storms rage around you, storms of any kind, peace suddenly becomes critically important and valued highly, really highly. It's true for all of us.

Of course, the peace that is opposite to the raging storm is easy for us to comprehend but there is a much more needful peace that most people do not sense or understand. I'll try to explain.

When mankind first sinned, he in effect rebelled against God and unwittingly took the side of Satan in his cosmic battle against the Most High. Yes, good and evil are at war all the time. And mankind, ever since Eden, has been on the losing side, fighting against the God and Father who loves us.

Now Jesus came to redeem our souls and thus resolve the conflict between us and the Almighty. Most people don't even know they've been in conflict along with Satan, against God. Many would say, "I don't even know if I believe in God." Which is exactly the point.

You see, it's a spiritual war which manifests itself in our world through, disbelief, and the consequences of Satan's weapon – sin. Hatred, pride, lust, deceit, and so on that lead

to conflicts of all sorts and of course, war. But Christ's sacrifice paid the debt we all owed for all time and settled the issue for those who believe. Paul wrote:

*"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,"*

(Rom 5:1)

You see, calming the storm on Galilee was a **visual aid** for all of us of **His peace**. In Him we have this peace, an eternal peace that cannot be disrupted or destroyed. Jesus told us:

*"These things I have spoken to you, that **in Me** you may have **peace**. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*

(Jn 16:33)

Yes, you'll have peace with God but now you will get tribulation from the dark side – the world, and of course, Satan. But there's reason for joy because Jesus vanquished evil and His peace is forever. He said:

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

(Jn 14:27)

If you're in this battle, if you've recognized the raging storm, then you value the peace that comes only from the God of peace. If you're blind to the battle, you're living on death row blind to your prison and deaf to the screams of the gallows, following your doomed commander into hell.

Wake up and walk in the Light where rightness and peace are in perfect harmony. In Christ:

Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

(Psa 85:10)

Chapter 18

God of Peace - Part 2

I think we fail to recognize the importance God places upon peace. Oh, peace between nations – sure; peace between individuals – naturally. But the big one, the most critical one, is peace with God Himself.

Now, Jesus shed some light on this when He said:

*“Peace I leave with you, **my peace** I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”*

(John 14:27)

That is, He distinguished between the peace the world gives and the peace He gives.

You see, worldly peace can be broken in a day and often is. The peace between nations and people is tenuous at best. It doesn't last because the people who contrive it are themselves broken.

But Christ's peace, that which we have through the Prince of Peace, is unbreakable because it is based upon His righteousness. In fact, the Psalmist tells us:

*“Mercy and truth are met together; **righteousness and peace have kissed each other.**”*

(Psa 85:10)

And what's more, the quality of His peace is far greater than the world's. His peace brings a true sense of safety:

“I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.”

(Psa 4:8)

His peace brings a wonderful sense of contentment:

“And you will go to thy fathers in peace; you will be buried in a good old age.”

(Gen 15:15)

Christ’s peace also means relationship and unity with God Almighty :

“Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:”

(Rom 5:1)

In fact, much of the OT law was dedicated to expounding on the Peace Offering (see Leviticus) which was also called the Fellowship Offering because it was the only offering that included the worshiper partaking of the sacrifice along with the priests. It symbolized and celebrated the fellowship God desires with us when sins have been atoned for.

You see **Christ’s peace** that He gives freely to us is actually code for **unity with the Father**. And He loves this unity so much, the scriptures call Him the “God of Peace” five times. Far more than any other descriptor.

You can also think of peace as the polar opposite of evil, just as light and darkness are opposites:

“I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.”

(Isa 45:7)

And as God thinks on you, He looks forward to being united with you:

“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)

So of course, Jesus wanted to give us this peace, His peace, not the world’s. But speaking of the world, the Psalmist wrote:

*“But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the **abundance of peace.**”*

(Psa 37:11)

Yes, abundant peace, because:

*“Of the **increase** of his (Christ’s) government and **peace** there shall be no end...”*

(Isa 9:6)

The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you **peace**.

(Num 6:26)

Praise God!

Chapter 19

Know God

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

(John 17:3)

Now Jesus never told us that there are seven steps to eternal life or a minimum donation needed or a portion of the Law that we must follow or some specific traditions. It's recorded in the New Testament that several times people approached Him asking, “What good deed must I do?” or “What do I have to do?” because our first reaction to the offer of eternal life is that we think we have to earn or merit it somehow; and sadly, even after having surrendered our will, our heart to Christ, we often get caught up in trying to be holy or righteous by embracing a personal moral code (based on scripture of course) – we still don't get it.

Christianity is **NOT** a self-improvement program.

Jesus was blunt, and to the point about eternal life – you simply have to KNOW father God and His Son, Jesus Christ. So, this begs the question, how does one know God? Is there a special phrase to say or a church membership or some tests to pass?

Think about it. How do you know, really know anyone? We're not talking about a casual acquaintance like your buddy that you wave to once in a while. This isn't a trick question. Who do you really know? I mean, who knows you, knows how you think, what's important to you, all your 'secrets'? Many if not most of you are thinking, 'I'm not sure I know anyone quite that well, at least not since I grew up.' That's usually because most if not all of the people we know in life are not unconditionally trusted.

But God can be trusted unconditionally and the first step in that trust relationship is accepting the fact that He sent His only begotten Son to take the pain, guilt and punishment for all, yep, ALL our misdeeds. When you truly accept and believe that, you've opened the door to knowing God and knowing Jesus. Just as you would expect, knowing comes from spending time in relationship, time spent listening to Him, talking with Him, doing what He says in His word both written and spoken. Knowing comes when you finally

realize that He's IN you and you exist IN Him. Knowing comes from many, many, many hours of sincere prayer.

If you've ever been under fire with your squad or pounded by an IED or spent weeks in rehab you begin to know those closest to you much better than your other buddies. And this is good news because knowing happens pretty naturally when the stage is set for it. The stage being set for knowing God is by believing what He did for you on Calvary's cross. Knowing starts with believing, it's developed by trusting and obeying.

And the consequence of knowing God, knowing Jesus – that's eternal life, right now, present tense. Jesus didn't say "This will be eternal life..." He said "This IS eternal life..."

Chapter 20

THE Promise

Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began (or time began, or times eternal);

(Tit 1:1,2)

Now, eternal life is referred to in the scriptures as a gift (Rom 6:23) as an inheritance (Mark 10:17) and here as a hope and as a promise. The term **eternal life** is a New Testament thing but in the old testament we find everlasting life (Dan 12:2) or live forever (Gen 3:22) or life evermore (Psa 133:3) and a few other terms.

But the interest I have in our verse is that it says that God promised it **before** the world or time began. This is intriguing because it begs the question – who did he promise it to? The angels and of course the Godhead are already eternal beings, so I suppose (and yes, I know that's not a very good thing to do) He was making a future promise or commitment to mankind.

Clearly, man was not created yet, but what this demonstrates is God's foreknowledge and graciousness. It is reasonable to postulate that this wonderful promise was made before He created the physical cosmos which exists in the realm of time and space. It is also reasonable to conclude that since this promise is recorded in our scriptures, that God's intended recipients of eternal life is mankind.

Now, Jesus told us:

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

(John 17:3)

And,

“Jesus said unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father, but by me.”

(John 14:6)

In other words, eternal life means you must know God and you can only know God, that is come to Him, through Jesus.

All that is to say that it seems that not only did God plan to give mankind eternal life before time began but He also knew before time began **how** He would deliver this gracious gift. In fact, in Christ's revelation, it speaks of:

“...the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”

(Rev 13:8)

That is, because eternal life was promised before “times eternal”, this whole drama we mistakenly call life is really the setting for God to demonstrate to all creation who He is – His ability, His trustworthiness, His desire to bless, His goodness and rightness, His faithful promise. You see, all Satan's toilet bowl propaganda will ultimately be shown to be utter lies and one day they will be gone forever.

Chapter 21

Rest

Then Yahweh God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and so, the man became a living being (soul).

(Gen 2:7)

In the beginning, God made man in His image and so, among other things, he was triune like the Lord. The dust, which became flesh, the breath or Spirit of God which became man's spiritual link to God and the consequent soul of man which came about from the first two.

Then when man sinned, and his own spirit died; his sinful flesh ruled his soul - he became a prisoner of sin. However, by being born again through faith in the risen Christ, God's Holy Spirit takes up residence once again in men and women and we are freed from the prison of sin.

There remains though throughout our lives a new dynamic – a conflict:

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

(Gal 5:17)

This battle is for influence over the freed **soul of man**. The good news is that Christ paid the price for all sin and the flesh is doomed to die. But in this life, there is a consequent tension of conflict that can give the soul unrest. Paul expressed it this way:

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, 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.

(Rom 7:21-25)

And so, like Paul, as we seek to know, to follow and to serve our Lord, this tension of the soul can result in a sense of “wretchedness” and/or an elation of thankful confidence in Jesus. That latter sense is a rest, not for the body necessarily, but for the soul. That rest is what we learn from ‘plowing’ **with** Jesus. Notice I did **not** say plowing (ministering, or laboring) **for** Jesus. Big difference.

When we are yoked with Him, plowing with Him, side by side, we learn this heavenly rest of complete confidence in Him.

We learn to do it all just as He does – with lowliness, gentleness and true humility.

Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

*“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find **rest** for your **souls**.*

For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.

(Mat 11:28-30)

When we fail, when we sin, that sense of wretchedness is the natural outcome because we are inhabited by the divine Spirit of God but that wretchedness is useful. Now Satan wants to use it to get us to stop plowing because of prideful shame but God will use it to remind us to abide in Christ’s gentle and lowly heart knowing our only hope is in him – He will deliver us from “this body of death”.

That’s where we find rest for our souls. Eternal rest. Hallelujah!

Chapter 22

The Twin

And Thomas answered and said to Him:

“My Lord and my God!”

(John 20:28)

Why did this verse hit me so hard this morning? I’ve read it many hundreds of times before but this time it just grabbed me. I teared up.

Jesus told Thomas to stop doubting and believe. You see, just after His resurrection Christ miraculously rose from the dead and appeared to the ten disciples who were apparently hiding behind closed doors. But Thomas wasn’t there. The only one not present and we don’t know why. Perhaps he was depressed or confused. None of the disciples believed Mary when she told them of meeting the risen Lord, so Thomas wasn’t alone in his doubting.

But there was something more to it, I think. Whether or not the other disciples had believed Mary, they were ecstatic and told Thomas joyfully, “*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.”

(John 20:25)

This wasn’t just disbelief, it was a defiant posture, seemingly rooted in a hurting heart.

Now, everyone among them had been hurt; they all loved Jesus. So why did Thomas act the way he did. Earlier, he had voiced his devotion:

Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”

(John 11:16)

Like Peter, it seems that Thomas was a passionate man, passionate in devotion, passionate in bitterness. So, for Jesus to show up to everyone EXCEPT him, it may be that he was also passionate in disappointment.

Have you ever been forsaken, left alone? When people do that to us, we hurt. When people we have loved do that, we hurt profoundly. But when our Lord appears to have done that... that's when our hearts can be crushed, and it could be that this kind of pain was weighing on Thomas. Nevertheless, he desperately desired to be restored in his heart.

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 20:28)

His sudden realization of truth made Thomas the first person to explicitly acknowledge Jesus' divinity. And, church history tells us that Thomas went on to be an absolutely devoted apostle, carrying the Gospel as far as India and dying a martyr's death. So with Thomas, maybe you relate to his pain and his passion. Jesus does, and so do I.

Chapter 23

In One Another

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 14:9)

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

(John 14:20)

*"that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be **one in Us**, that the world may believe that You sent Me."*

(John 17:21)

"I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."

(John 17:23)

The four verses above characterize the tone of what Jesus emphasized to His disciples as He headed to the cross. During this time, it seems that His heart was deeply concerned that they would understand the oneness He came to impart to us from God the Father.

Many if not most believers have never recognized this, just like Philip, that if you are truly born anew, Christ is IN YOU and YOU are IN CHRIST via the presence of His Holy Spirit. You're not just believing in Him, you actually are living in Him and He in you.

That disgusting 'body of death' that you're dragging around is indeed dead because of sin. It's filled with it. But YOU, the born anew you is already alive **in Christ**. You're in that body to learn to walk humbly, aware of your faults, to learn to truly trust in God's word, His love, grace and mercy, and to prepare you to appreciate the new body Christ will give you at His revealing. Paul wrote that it is:

“...God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (or down payment).”

(2 Cor 1:22)

Oneness, perfect or complete unity. **Not** a loss of identity but rather a fuller identity – kind of like when you’re in a really good marital relationship – a fuller identity, just as with Christ and the church. Ultimately, it will be a oneness that brings the fullest identity, all the parts living together perfectly again in our Creator.

“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 1:10)

Chapter 24

Several Amazing Things

*“**Seventy weeks** (sevens) are determined
For your **people** and for your **holy city**,
To finish the transgression,
To make an end of sins,
To make reconciliation for iniquity,
To bring in everlasting righteousness,
To seal up vision and prophecy,
And to anoint the Most Holy.”*

(Dan 9:24 KJV)

*“So, you are to know and have insight that from the going out of a word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there will be **seven weeks and sixty-two weeks (i.e. 69)**; it will be restored and rebuilt, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.*

*“Then after the sixty-two weeks the **Messiah will be cut off** and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are decreed.*

“And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will make sacrifice and grain offering cease; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”

(Dan 9:25-27 LSB)

In this passage, the word translated as ‘weeks’ is literally ‘sevens’ so the prophecy starts with a declaration that **70 sevens** have been determined or pre-established and in the first 69 sevens several awesome things will be accomplished.

First, he says, **“To finish the transgression”** or literally, the rebellion or break away. You see, mankind broke away from God back in the Garden of Eden and the Lord said that within this period, the rift would be healed – mankind (including the Jewish people) would be reconciled with our loving creator—the revolt ended, the rift healed.

But for this to happen, the next promised occurrence had to take place – **“To make an end of sins”** or literally offences and their penalties. All of man’s offenses before a just and holy God had to be paid for – all past, present and future offences. And furthermore, the slate had to be wiped clean so the true reconciliation of man with God could take place.

That is, not only would all offences and their penalties be satisfied but it would be as if they never occurred in the first place – **“to make reconciliation for iniquity.”**

Then he added the kicker – not only would the rift be bridged, offences and penalties ended, and reconciliation produced, but then, a perfect future is guaranteed, for he said that **“everlasting righteousness”** would be brought in – eternal rightness in everyone and everything! Wow!

Now, there was a realization of **these things** when Jesus went to the cross, died for our sins and then rose again. However, there will be a second fuller realization at the conclusion of the church age, that is at the rapture. Then there will be a third even fuller realization when “all Israel will be saved” upon Christ’s second coming. And finally, there will be a final and complete realization after the millennium when God makes all things new.

So, what about when he said that vision and prophecy would be **sealed or locked up** and that the Most Holy would be **anointed**?

Well, the last prophecy in the Bible chronologically is the entire book of Revelation. At the conclusion it says:

“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

(Rev 22:18,19)

Therefore, it is clear that the book was sealed and locked – nothing to be added and nothing to be taken away and since it is mostly about the Jewish people and the holy city (the NEW Jerusalem) just as in Dan 9:24, it seems that the verses in Revelation fulfill that part of Daniel’s prophecy.

Finally, throughout scripture, some things are described as holy and some even as most holy but only one thing is termed “the Most Holy” and that is the Holy of Holies – the most inner sanctum of the temple where the High Priest would enter just once a year. This is how the LSB version of the Bible translates “the Most Holy”.

It contained the Ark of the Covenant underneath the Mercy Seat, both of which are perfect representations of Jesus. So how was the Most Holy anointed? The earthly was anointed yearly with sacrificial blood of bulls and goats but the reason the prophecy is special is because the heavenly ‘Holy of Holies’ or THE Most Holy was **once** and **for all time** anointed with the blood of Jesus Christ.

Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

(Heb 9:12)

A final note: a careful study of Dan 9:24 – 27 reveals that Christ rode into Jerusalem on the donkey’s back after 69 of the 70 sevens TO THE DAY. The 70th seven is the upcoming seven-year tribulation. God’s Word is perfect and trustworthy!

Chapter 25

Curling With Faith

You know, it may be that Peter recalled needing a helping hand. Here's the story:

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!"

And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

(Mat 14:26 – 33)

Eager to display his faith in the Lord, Peter stepped out of that boat and indeed walked on the water but then he saw the wind and waves and fear stifled his faith. He knew he didn't have the spiritual strength he needed and he began to sink. There was no way for him to raise himself up. In mercy, Jesus responded to his desperate need, reached out, caught his hand and lifted him up. Like a one-arm curl.

Sometime later, after Jesus Himself rose up from the grave, Peter and John witnessed another certain man in desperate need of help. He had been sinking under the waves of brokenness his whole life and now sat or laid at the main gate of the temple in Jerusalem. There were people everywhere, but few if any paid any heed to his pitiful plight. He had been born lame.

The man saw the two disciples and asked for a coin or two. He never expected what he got:

Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.

And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms.

And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us."

So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.

Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

So, he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God.

(Acts 3:1-8)

Now, Peter was an 'expressive' guy – he **ran past** John into Christ's empty tomb; he **jumped into** the sea to meet Jesus on the shore after the resurrection; he felt things deeply. He was just wired like that. So, it's easy for me to think of him 'leaping and praising God' in his heart right along with this healed beggar. He absolutely knew the power of God and with this he had experienced it 'on both ends' so to speak.

And in **that power**, seeing the amazed crowds gathering, he spoke:

So, when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"

"The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses."

"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 3:12 – 16)

He made it clear right up front that he didn't heal the lame man, it was faith in the name of Christ – the one who lifted Peter up lifted the beggar up too. Faith in Him will lift you up as well.

Chapter 26

Try or Trust

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

(1 John 3:2,3)

To “be like Him” is indeed a glorious promise for every sincere Christian. But the second part of this verse can be for some a mystery. That is, just how do we purify ourselves just as He is pure. Misunderstanding this led some desperate folks in the Middle Ages to beat themselves supposedly into submission to the spirit. They tried very hard to be pure in this way even if they had to ‘help God out’. If you’ve studied church history, you may recall that even Martin Luther got caught in this practice.

Now, purifying means cleansing and refers to the spiritual cleansing of the heart by faith. When the early church leaders were concerned about all the Gentiles coming into the assembly, Peter stood to address them and reminded them that God:

*“...made no distinction between us and them, **purifying** their hearts by **faith**.”*

(Acts 15:9)

And James wrote:

*“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.
Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and **purify** your hearts, you **double-minded**.”*

(Jam 4:8)

In other words, do not doubt. Have unwavering faith and hope.

So, purification, for the Christian, is a matter of faith and hope. And then, there’s the notion of sanctification which is closely related. Fundamentally, this latter term means to

set apart to special (usually "godly") use; in the OT it especially pertained in this way to the priests or items in the temple. For example:

*"They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God.
For they offer the Lord's food offerings, the bread of their God;
therefore, they shall be holy. You shall sanctify him, for he offers the
bread of your God. He shall be holy to you, for I, the Lord, who sanctify
you, am holy."*

(Leviticus 21:6-8)

In the *New Testament* - the word sanctify is the verb form of the word for "holy"; "to make holy" gives the idea; something that is "holy" is set apart from common use; it is the idea of becoming more like God who is holy. For example:

*"And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes
all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,
"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to
come!"*

(Revelation 4:8)

Now, sanctification is a wonderful principle but like purification, it can be misunderstood. Let me explain:

The Bible speaks of sanctification in three ways, and it is important you know which way it is being spoken of in which passage! These have been described as past, present and future sanctification or as initial, progressive and ultimate sanctification or other terms like these.

Sanctification has a definite beginning the moment someone has been born anew in Christ. You can refer to:

*"And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is
able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those
who are sanctified."*

(Acts 20:32)

*"And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified,
you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the
Spirit of our God."*

(1 Corinthians 6:11)

Next, sanctification increases as we mature in our Christian life. You can refer to:

"We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. So, you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for [weapons of] righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you."

(Romans 6:6,7, 11-14)

"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth."

(John 17:17-19)

"Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

(1 Peter 1:13-16)

"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

(2 Corinthians 3:18)

Next, sanctification is never complete in this life.

Sanctification of our souls is complete at death. Refer to the following:

Though God sees only His Son in us, we experience the problem of sin through our life. It's like the "hangover" of our fallenness:

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

(1 John 1:8)

Yet, at death our souls are instantly in heaven with:

"the spirits of the righteous [people] made perfect"

(Hebrews 12:23)

Our souls are fully sanctified in **the presence of God** since nothing unclean (not even mostly clean) can ever stand before Him (see Revelation 21:27). Sanctification of our bodies takes place at the Lord's Return.

"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."

(Philippians 3:20-21)

At His coming, every Christian will be given their resurrection body that shall fully:

"bear the image of the man of heaven"

(1 Corinthians 15:49).

Now, here's the stumbling many believers need to understand.

God (especially the Holy Spirit) is the one who sanctifies us:

*"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it.**"*

(1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."

(Ephesians 5:25-27)

Unfortunately, many of us think that as with the Jews trying to keep the Law, the onus of sanctification falls on us and so we end up trying to be holy and failing and trying again and again and again... The point of the Sermon on the Mount was that we can't make ourselves holy. Some Christians even walk away from the faith because they think they have to be good enough, holy enough and they just keep failing.

Listen, you cannot be good enough, holy enough, perfectly sanctified by your own efforts. The good news is that God's got you. If you are born again, Christ is in you and His Spirit will accomplish all that He has for you. Refer again to 1 Thes 5:23, 24.

Having said that, we are given commands that we must heed in order to continue the sanctification process in this life. Refer to:

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality."

(1 Thessalonians 4:3)

"I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification."

(Romans 6:19)

"But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life."

(Romans 6:22)

However, understand that your initial, progressive and ultimate sanctification is all the work of the Spirit of God – call on the Lord and trust **Him**. Don't try but rather trust.

(Thanks to Grace Fellowship Church for some of this.)

Chapter 27

Courage in the Fire

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which was sixty cubits and its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

(Dan 3:1)

God used the Babylonian empire as a tool of judgement upon the Hebrew nation. For many years the people of Judah had turned their backs on their Creator. They no longer worshipped Him, preferring the gods of the nations around them. They sacrificed their own children to achieve greater pleasure. Their military had become pathetic in the face of their enemies.

The nobility shown and grandeur built by David, Solomon and their ‘founding fathers’ was long gone. The streets were filled with vile displays and crime was rampant. Prophets speaking for God like Jeremiah and Isaiah and others had warned them for generations to repent, but each generation became more self-righteous and arrogant.

Into this cesspool came Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian army. They utterly destroyed Jerusalem, robbed the temple treasury and carried captive the children of the elite to be servants in their own realm. Among them, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah who became servants and advisors in the king’s service.

At one point, as we read about it in Daniel chapter two, they were able to save the lives of all the king’s wise men by revealing and interpreting his extremely troubling dream. Though the king received the message of his prophetic dream as given by Daniel, he later seems to have believed he could pridefully make his own destiny and symbolically built this enormous gold, all gold, statue and set it up in Dura – a statue symbolizing him and his eternal kingdom.

Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent word to assemble the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had

set up. Then the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces were assembled for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they were standing before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

(Dan 3:2,3)

Of course, setting up this image and then gathering everyone to the dedication is a foretelling of what the satanic antichrist will do pretty soon during the Tribulation where everyone must worship him (who is called 'the beast') and his own image or else be killed.

Then the herald loudly called out: "To you it is said, O peoples, nations, and men of every tongue, that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe, and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire."

(Dan 3:4-6)

A German philosopher is known for saying, "The only thing that we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history." And I do believe that at least as far as the Jewish people are concerned, that's a major reason this story is in our Bible. The Tribulation time will be a fiery trial for them in particular but God will deliver those who turn to Him. The Bible says:

"And I will bring the third part (of the Jews) through the fire (of the Tribulation)

And refine them as silver is refined

And test them as gold is tested.

They will call on My name,

And I will answer them;

I will say, 'They are My people,'

And they will say, 'Yahweh is my God.'"

(Zech 13:9)

Anyway, our story continues:

Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe, and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations, and men of

every tongue fell down and worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

(Dan 3:7)

No one wanted to get burned so they all capitulated. Many probably thought, 'No big deal. What's a little bow.' In fact, it's the same trade that Satan offered Jesus:

Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

(Mat 4:8-10)

You see, a 'little bow' is a big deal.

And well, you probably know the rest of the story. Some of the honchos who bowed down to the king's golden image brought charges against Daniel's three friends (interestingly, Daniel is not even mentioned in this chapter – that's a fascinating thing prophetically as well but not for this posting) that they did not bow and therefore must be thrown into the fiery furnace.

So, these three fellows were dragged before the king who demanded to know if their accusers were correct. He said:

"Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, that you are not serving my gods and do not worship the golden image that I have set up? Now if you are ready, at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, and bagpipe and all kinds of music, then you shall fall down and worship the image that I have made. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can save you out of my hands?"

(Dan 3:14,15)

You have to admire these gutsy guys. They responded to the king:

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to respond to you with an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to save us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will save us out of your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we

are not going to serve your gods, and we will not worship the golden image that you have set up.”

(Dan 3:16-18)

At that point, the king really lost his cool and commanded that his servants fire up the furnace seven times hotter than usual. Then the three cohorts were thrown into the furnace by men who were themselves killed by the seven-fold heat.

Of course, the king as he watched was expecting to see some crispy-fried Hebrews but as he looked his eyes bugged out and he cried:

“Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?” They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.” “Look!” he answered, “I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.

(Dan 3:24,25)

Anyway, he called the lads to come out and when they did, only their binding ropes were burned off. They didn't even smell of the fire.

Sure, this is a wonderful miracle, but I want to point out their courage. That's because it's this kind of courage that we as believers are going to need today and in the coming days, as will the Jewish believers during the coming Tribulation.

Friends, don't cave in, don't 'bow', don't compromise your faith. Don't fear the threats and don't believe the lies. Even if you stumble or fail, don't give up:

The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds him with His hand.

(Psa 37:23,24)

Yes, the Lord will be with you even in the fire – only the binding ropes of this life will ultimately be gone!

Chapter 28

It's About Time

God is very much into **timing** and scripture is filled with examples. Just after appointing twelve disciples, Jesus instructed them:

“Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

(Mat 10:5,6)

However, later on the mount of ascension, He would say:

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”

(Mark 16:15)

On another occasion, upon being prodded by His half-brothers to go to the feast in Jerusalem, He said:

“My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready.”

(John 7:6)

“But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.”

(John 7:10)

God does what He wishes in His time, not ours; and He conveys His Words and His Will in His time as well. Upon explaining to His disciples that He had to “go away”, Jesus said:

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”

(John 16:12,13)

Now, this becomes quite poignant to each of us when it comes to our expectations of God and how He decides to answer our prayers. You see, He has said many things

concerning His willingness to hear our prayers of faith and to respond but as you search the scripture, you'll note that He never commits to respond according to our timetable. And if you take your trust back (which you should never do) this can be disappointing, frustrating, and even disillusioning.

It's not that God is slow. It is not that He is juggling too much. It is not that you are in a queue of billions waiting for your turn. All those are human concepts and of course, we are quite prone to placing our human characters and concepts on Him. God's infinite capabilities, knowledge and presence are well beyond these notions.

But our spiritual enemy has shrewdly manipulated society, rev'd it up so to speak, so that we all want any and everything NOW. Food, entertainment, information, money, justice, you name it – we are conditioned for instant gratification. And when God doesn't play that game with us, a game that the enemy has driven into our characters, we doubt and complain that God doesn't see or care.

Why did God wait for several thousands of years after He first alluded to it in the Garden of Eden to bring the suffering Saviour, and risen Lord, Jesus Christ? Why did the Hebrew people have to wait 400 years in Egypt before being freed? Why have these same people endured nearly 2000 years of "stupor" and "blindness" to their true King and why must they still endure seven years of horrendous rule by a false king?

Timing. It is so real and so important and yet, for us, it is so mysterious. Can you imagine being with Mary when the angel Gabriel told her, 'You're the one. You will give birth to the Messiah.' Or with Noah when the Lord said, 'Come into the ark.' Or with John at the foot of the cross when Jesus said, "*It is done.*" Timing is a mysteriously important part of all that God does. Existing outside of time gives Him complete perspective and full control. This is clear from the following verse provided in two translations:

*"While we were still weak, at the **right time** Christ died for the ungodly."*

(Rom 5:6 RSV)

*"You see, at **just the right time**, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly."*

(Rom 5:6 NIV)

Now all of this is simply an introduction into the purpose of this message – you see, we have yet another time to be aware of, to "Watch" for and to be prepared for. Jesus Christ is going to return to take possession of this world. He will resurrect His faithful ones from their graves, rapture those who are waiting and found faithful, and will conquer Satan and his loyalists. The former two will occur in an instant.

And our waiting for this reminds me of a story in scripture.

He was a truly godly man. We don't know if he was a priest or member of any select group of religious/pious people. He may have been a devoted Levite or simply a farmer or even a beggar. In any event, he was in the temple at the right time.

In all likelihood, Simeon had earnestly desired to witness the coming of the Messiah. He probably longed for it for many years. Surely, he had pleaded with God to let him see Christ and perhaps days strung out into weeks, into months and years. At some point, he struggled with believing that God had heard his prayers as his own life waned and he grew older. He knew his time to pass was close and it would seem that he hung out continually in the temple, hoping and waiting and hoping.

One day as he stumbled along, making his way to the temple courtyard. Something Holy drove him to come this time - perhaps in great faith, perhaps in great expectation, perhaps in despair, perhaps in the midst of a spiritual battle – the greatest of his life. The Holy Spirit moved him, and I'll bet as he entered, he sensed a glorious presence that grabbed his heart and lifted his step. A lifetime of waiting was culminating in the most amazing moments he could ever have imagined – a baby. And he supernaturally recognized this child instantly. His waiting was over in an instant:

*“And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. So, he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: ‘Lord, **now** You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.’”*

(Luke 2:25 – 32)

In like manner, our waiting for the true King of Israel will soon be over. Like Simeon, do you want to “depart in peace?”

What are you waiting for? God's timing is perfect and usually mysterious, but your time is easy to understand - it is right **now**. That is, you have no guarantee of tomorrow. If you don't **know** that you have a right relationship with God via Jesus Christ, **your time is now**. Pray for God to forgive you for all you have erred in and to redeem you by the sacrifice of His Son.

If you're already saved through faith in Christ and waiting on an answer to prayer, wait in **patience** and **peace** – if you asked in faith, God heard you and He will answer. All our waiting will be over soon.

Chapter 29

Finishing the Feasts

God seems to love festivals and has used them not only to bless His people with reasons to worship and fellowship but also to appreciate His divine plan. That's because each of the **seven** that He specifically ordained have prophetic fulfillments. **Four** of them **have been** fulfilled in the first appearing of Jesus Christ and the consequent birth of His church.

Briefly, **Pesach** or **Passover** was fulfilled on the day of this festival when Jesus was **crucified**. He was the true Passover Lamb that all the sacrifices pointed to since Moses first told the Hebrew slaves to kill a lamb and place its blood upon the door openings and in the basin (see Exo 12). Where they placed the blood pictured the bloody head, arms and feet of Christ on the cross.

The next feast is all about unleavened bread. The **Feast of Unleavened Bread** began the day after Pesach and was a continuation of the Passover. It lasted for seven days (see Lev 23:6). Recalling that leaven in the scriptures speaks of sin, this unleavened bread pictures a needed purity of that which we as believers take in. Jesus' perfectly pure life fulfilled this. As the spotless Lamb of God, His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary was acceptable to God. **Believing** that is what we consider 'taking Him in' to our hearts.

Unleavened bread also symbolizes the manna that the Israelites ate when they traveled through the wilderness. This reminds us of Jesus' own words:

“As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”

(John 6:57,58)

The **Feast of First Fruits** was celebrated soon after the Feast of Unleavened Bread (see Lev 23:10,11; Deut 26:1-4). The first of the barley harvest was dedicated to God and brought before Him. The Jewish people recognized that it was God who brought the increase, and it all belonged to Him. By giving the first part, they were recognizing God as

the provider. Christ fulfilled this holiday literally with His resurrection, “*on the day after the Sabbath*” and thus He is called the “*firstborn among many brethren*”. (Rom 8:29)

The **Feast of Weeks** which we know as Pentecost was celebrated 50 days after this last feast. This celebrated the **harvest** and was again fulfilled **to the day** when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers gathered together in the upper room. A harvest of three thousand souls were saved that day, and the church was born having a commission to reap the harvest of souls in all nations.

Hence, there remain **three** festivals or feasts **to be fulfilled**. They are all in the fall season.

The first is the **Feast of Trumpets, Rosh Hashanah**. This festival starts the new year with the blowing of the ram’s horn trumpet, hence the name. Since it is a preparation of repentance, the traditional activities center around looking at sins. It has become customary to go down to the sea, filling one’s pockets with rocks along the way. Once there, the rocks are thrown as far as possible into the sea, identifying one area of sin with each rock. As they are thrown, it symbolizes a cleansing, representing God removing the sins to the bottom of the sea.

This feast will be fulfilled at the last trumpet (as opposed to the first trumpet – see Exo 19:16) and the voice of our Savior calling us up in the Rapture of the church (see 1 Cor 15:51-55). In a glorious transformation, all our sin will be left behind forever. Though we know the day of this festival, Jesus said that no one knows the day or hour of **this event**. It is always to be considered imminent. Its position, however, **preceding** the next feast is very relevant for in like manner its fulfillment will surely precede the fulfillment of the next one.

The sixth holy day is the **Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur**. This is the only solemn feast - all the nation of Israel would fast together, coming before God, to atone for their sin. This is the one day of the year when the High Priest would enter into the Holy of Holies, bringing the blood to place on the mercy seat. The temple of God and all the worship items in it were consecrated anew to the Lord. I’m strongly inclined to believe this will be fulfilled when the 144,000 saints of the tribes of Israel are saved by grace, sealed and sent, like the church, to continue God’s witness in a godless world (see Rev 7). They will bring the atoning grace of God through Jesus Christ to both Jew and gentile in the terrible days of the tribulation.

Finally, there remains the **Feast of Tabernacles or Sukkot**. This seven-day festival commemorates God’s provision while the nation of Israel wandered in the wilderness. In addition, the people express thanksgiving to God for His continued provision in their lives. During this festival, the people live in, or at least take their meals in temporary shelters, commemorating that time. The family starts building their sukkah (tabernacle)

immediately after Yom Kippur. It is noteworthy that this is the only feast that will be celebrated throughout the millennial reign of Christ (see Zech 14:16-19).

As such, it will undoubtedly also commemorate the caring of God for His remnant of Jewish believers in the wilderness during the tribulation. From its place in the sequence of feasts and its symbolism, I'll suggest that it will be fulfilled in the second coming of Christ, the victory of Jesus and His saints at Armageddon and the ushering in of the millennial age.

Chapter 30

Turning Points – The Fall of Mankind

As turning points go, this was huge. Oddly enough, it hinged upon what we, in our violence-filled age, might consider as a seemingly small faux pas. Now, God placed both the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil right in the middle of the Garden of Eden. And of course, He knew what was going to happen, but how it happened and why it happened are our points of interest.

In making Eden and placing Adam in it, God was desiring fellowship with Man. Walking in the garden in the cool of the day, he was looking for Adam and Eve. Of course, you know the story of what happened – they had disobeyed God’s command and had eaten of the forbidden Tree, and now they were hiding, ashamed that they were naked and afraid of their Maker.

But how did this come about? How could a very simple restriction be so brazenly ignored? Let’s back up and review the situation.

Shortly after the six days of God’s creative work, He made a wonderful place called Eden. The serpent, i.e. Satan, who has always been a liar and deceiver was also in the picture. Clearly, his goal was to ruin the relationship between God and his special creation, mankind. So, Eve was in the vicinity of the forbidden tree. Bear in mind that she had not yet been created when God warned Adam about it, so she evidently learned about the restriction from her mate afterward.

Now we’ve got to consider:

That she and Adam had no understanding of death.

That she was apparently one person removed from direct communication with God at least on this matter.

She was fairly easily ensnared by Satan’s lie, but we should recall that she had never been lied to.

It seems possible that in her own mind, her disobedience was to Adam.

With the whole garden to roam in and tend to, she (and Adam) chose to be near to the forbidden tree.

She was not surprised by the talking serpent which we could say shows her innocence and naivete.

At the time, she was sinless, just as Adam.

All this made her the serpent's target. So, as he slithered in her direction, she was 'sunk' the moment she engaged in the conversation. Her only defense was Adam. He was the one who could say, "That's not true or that's not what God told me." But it would seem that although he was nearby, he was not in on the dialog or wasn't in the immediate vicinity. So, what was this conversation? Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

He started with a question. One that Eve could not answer with the same assurance as Adam. And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree, which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' "

Now, God never said anything about touching it. So, for whatever reason, she got it wrong, and Satan knew he had her.

Then the serpent said to the woman:

"You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

(Gen 3:4,5)

There it was, the flat out lie followed by Satan's twist on truth.

So, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

This was what the serpent was aiming for. Eve was the way to derail Adam and thus bring the split between God and Mankind. This was the turning point because Adam was fully aware of God's command, and he still disobeyed.

And at this point, we might ponder why. Why disobey?

When he saw that Eve was 'still vertical', did he doubt God's warning?

Did he love Eve more than God and decide to commit 'suicide' with her?

Bottom line, we just don't know. It's not recorded.

However, for Eve, it is recorded – she SAW that the tree was good for food, it was pleasing to look upon, and desirable for wisdom. It would seem that her seeing, though, was highly influenced by what she wanted and what she heard from the serpent. That is, she was seduced.

And we are surrounded by that same seduction every day. Almost all modern marketing is based upon subtle plays of seduction. The Scripture says:

“For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world.”

(1 John 2:16)

These are the very things that seduced Eve and they seduce us as well.

So, this turning point turned mankind away from God and made us slaves to sin, doomed to death. But this did not surprise God, deter His grace or foil His plan. In fact, I suggest that it was simply a part of it for out of this incident came the first allusion to His redemption plan through Christ. Paul says:

“...He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love.”

(Eph 1:4)

If mankind had not fallen in Eden, we could have enjoyed gardening here on earth for a long time. But with the fall came the divine response of eternal redemption so that all who believe can enjoy much, much, more than gardening in God’s presence in heaven for eternity:

“Eye has not seen, not ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

(1 Co 2:9)

In other words, what looked like disaster and a ‘win’ for evil became the ultimate triumph for the Father as His Son redeemed us and all creation and took His place at God’s right hand. Hallelujah!

Chapter 31

Turning Points - The Exodus

The Exodus was a turning point for the Hebrew nation but with a ‘background’ of two to four million enslaved people, the epic story is focused on just two characters, God and Moses. Now, as our sovereign, omnipotent creator, God has no turning points – He doesn’t change. However, Moses had a momentous turning point. And we need to understand its impact on the man as the catalyst for the turning point of the masses.

Now, this incredibly important event occurred when he was eighty years old, but we have to review his life before that in order to appreciate it. Many of us can recall how in order to persecute the Hebrews who had become too numerous in Pharaoh’s eyes, the order was given for all newborn sons to be cast into the river to drown. Defying this order, Moses’ mother hid him for three months after he was born and then built him a little ark out of bulrushes. She made it waterproof and then launched the baby boy with hope in her heart onto the river. Soon after, the little boat caught the attention of Pharaoh’s daughter who was bathing nearby.

At this point, God touched her heart, and she took the Hebrew baby as her own. Now, Moses’ sister was watching and offered to find the princess a nursemaid. When Pharaoh’s daughter said yes, she found her mother who was then paid to nurse her own child.

Over time, in Pharaoh’s household, Moses grew in stature and renown and at the age of 40 or so, he tried to resolve a dispute between a couple of Hebrews. However, in the process, his crime the day before of killing an Egyptian was made public and he had to flee from Pharaoh for his life into the desert. So, after some 40 years of learning to be a real somebody in Egypt Moses found his new abode in the remotest part of the desert, tending sheep and avoiding scorpions.

This wasn’t just the desert; it was the “far side” of the desert. And in that place, he became a shepherd, considered the lowest profession in Egypt. Consequently, in the next 40 years he learned to be a real nobody. Finally, at the age of 80 God saw that he was ready for his turning point.

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So, he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn."

So, when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." Moreover, He said, "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

(Ex 3:1-6)

So, what made this the turning point? No longer brash and impulsive, no longer prideful or pompous, Moses observed this simple but amazing miracle and as a result he encountered the God of all. He had become meek, so meek that the scripture describes him as the meekest man in the world. (Num 12:3)

This was the first time God spoke to Moses revealing, Himself through a humble bush burning in the desert.

So, the preparation of this speechless shepherd was finished. God knew he was ready for the next step – a mission unparalleled in human history before or since. He was ready to trust God and in obedience to His commands, to lead some six million Hebrews out of Egypt and to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob about four hundred years earlier.

Now, Moses would continue to learn from God for forty more years until his death but in a day, he went from lost to found, from lonely to the friend of God, from having no clue of spiritual truth to receiving the law of God. Everything that transpired after this – the ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the march through the wilderness – all of it launched from this simple experience.

Therefore, let's consider what this means to us.

What does it say about God? We can see that He has great patience and humility. He waited for more than 300 years to bring Moses on the scene and then another

80 or so to get his attention. He did not appear as a stormy tornado or a mighty cedar tree or even as a commanding king but rather as a simple bush burning in the desert wilderness. Also, He is perfectly holy, and He told Moses to respect that holiness.

When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, He called to him – He didn't engulf him in flames or sweep him up into the heavens or even shake the ground. Oh, God could do those things if He wanted but here, He reached out to Moses gently.

What does it say about God's promises? Now, God made many specific promises to His people.

In Caanan, God made a promise to Abram:

*And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them **four hundred years**; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.*

(Gen 15:13, 14)

When Joseph, as Prime Minister in Egypt called for his family to come down there where he would take care of them, Jacob/Israel stopped along the way to check with God on the journey.

And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac. And God spoke unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I.

And he said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: ...

(Gen 46:1-4)

And then near the beginning of Moses' life, the Bible records that concerning the Hebrew nation:

And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

(Ex 2:24)

That's to say God **always** fulfills His promises, and He does so on His schedule and according to His plan, not ours.

What does it say about God's preparation? I went through 13 weeks of preparation in the military officer training program. Moses went through eighty years of training. The Hebrew people went through about 400 years of preparation and still they needed 40 years of 'toughening' in the Sinai wilderness before entering the promised land.

I think it's fair to say that God's training is considerably more thorough than mankind's. Most if not all of the men and women God used mightily in Scripture were tested and prepared for years; from Noah to Abraham to Joseph to Daniel all the way to Jesus, everyone was prepared through testing and training. You will be too.

When a crop is planted, you cannot rush it; it will be ready in its time and not before. The same is true for each of us who look to the Lord to grow us in faith. We are all being prepared for heaven. God knew Moses was ready for his next step in service when he turned and decided to investigate the burning bush – why it wasn't consumed. That's when he met God and as a consequence, soon all of the Hebrew nation would meet the Almighty.

To encounter the Lord personally – that's the turning point in anyone's life. That's what this burning bush experience represents.

Chapter 32

Attributes of God – Restoration

Every attribute of God is perfect, infinite and boundlessly good because that's God. And one of these wonderful attributes is His restoration. It's not something we hear a lot about but instead **we observe it** over and over and over. Before the six days of creation, God found the earth "tohu" and "bohu" – void, wasted, in a ruin and he proceeded to shape it into a state of life, abundance and goodness.

Consider the life of Jesus Christ who restored so many people to health, to sight, to cleanness, to hearing, even to life. He spoke "Talitha cumi" to the 12-year-old girl meaning "little girl, arise," and she rose to life; He called out "Lazarus, come forth!" to the one who had been dead for four days and out of the tomb he came, still wrapped in grave cloths but restored to life.

He Himself rose from the dead on the third day after His death on the cross. The grave could not hold Him.

God does allow testing and trials into our lives for His own purposes but as with Joseph in Egypt, when the time is right, the prisoner can be made a Prime Minister. As with Job, when the lesson is learned, a life that was stripped of prosperity can be restored to abundance. As with Peter who shamefully denied Christ three times the night of His mock trial and condemnation; when the 'storm' was over and grace appeared, the apostle was restored to faithfulness.

So, when He restores something or someone, He doesn't just fix with a 'patch'; He makes whole and new. Consider the following scriptures:

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**; old things have passed away; behold, **all things have become new.**"*

2 Cor 5:17

*"Behold, I shew 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 trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and **we shall be changed.**"*

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So, when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'"

(1 Cor 15:51 – 54)

*"Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for **new heavens and a new earth** in which righteousness dwells."*

(2 Pet 3:13)

So, as we can see, God's 'end game' is the restoration of believers as well as the restoration of his physical creation but He proclaims that He won't stop there. Consider these examples:

The apostle Peter preached to *the crowds* gathered soon after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit:

*"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of **restoration of all things**, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.*

(Act 3:18 – 21)

In heaven, John the Apostle witnessed and recorded:

"And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful."

(Rev 21:5)

And here's another wonderful thing about it. As a part of this, He restores **joy**:

***Restore** to me the **joy** of Your salvation,
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.*

(Psa 51:12)

That's because joy is a primary characteristic of our restored being:

*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)

*Therefore, with **joy** you will draw water
From the wells of salvation.*

(Isa 12:3)

*And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
And come to Zion with singing,
With everlasting **joy** on their heads.
They shall obtain **joy** and gladness,
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

(Isa 35:10)

Jesus Himself concluded His parable with:

*“His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were
faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter
into the **joy** of your lord.’”*

(Mat 25:21 and 23)

And He said to his disciples:

*“These things I have spoken to you, that My **joy** may remain in you,
and that your **joy** may be full.”*

(Jn 15:11)

And shortly after the resurrection, Peter shared with the crowds gathered around him the words of King David:

*“You have made known to me the ways of life;
You will make me full of **joy in Your presence.**”*

(Acts 2:28)

What great news! This is, what you as a believer can look forward to is – a fully restored life, a fully restored character, everlasting and ever increasing joy in the presence of God, boundless restored relationships and an eternally expanding quality of life. And actually, as good as that sounds, it’s still just the beginning for:

*“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

(1 Cor 2:9)

Chapter 33

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 'godliest' 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 godliest people tend to be those who know firsthand 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 34

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 35

Help, Lord!

I've written before concerning the following lesson 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."

(Luke 8:50)

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.