

Seeds for Good Soil

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Chapter 1

Knowing Abba

We are instructed in the Bible to live and walk and worship and, well many things "in the Spirit" but most of us don't fully understand what that means. The 'doers' among us say, "just let me get my hands dirty" while the worshipers say, "just let me sing or pray", and the emotional or tender-hearted say, "just show me someone who needs love and care".

"In the Spirit" has different implications depending on how we are 'wired'. And that's fine but we can know our God, our Father, our Savior and our Helper better and better as we submit to this wonderful concept – "in the Spirit".

And there are a couple of really key verses to consider:

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

(Gal 5:22,23a)

Many of us know this verse and refer to it often considering the Spirit of God. It speaks to individual and group edification. But there is an even more consequential verse that I'd like to focus upon:

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"

(Gal 4:6)

There is only one person in scripture to ever use this term, "Abba" – Jesus, when He was in the midst of utter rejection by humanity, there in the garden, sweating drops on blood.

Church-focused Christianity teaches us to understand the Spirit's fruit as in Galatians 5:22, 23 because He is the influence in our relationships with each other, but Christ's focus was upon the Father. For Him, to "cry out Abba Father" signified a deep, intimate, and personal relationship with God, expressing both dependence and love as a child to a father.

"Abba" is an Aramaic word equivalent to "daddy" or "papa," emphasizing a close, affectionate, and trusting connection. And this is perhaps the crux of the matter – it reflects a sense of **belonging** and assurance of being God's own.

Intimacy and Closeness:

The term "Abba" denotes a level of intimacy and closeness that goes far beyond a formal or religious relationship with God.

Childlike Dependence:

It expresses a childlike trust and reliance on God, recognizing Him as a loving and caring father.

Not Just Words:

It's not merely a vocal expression but a heartfelt cry arising from a deep-seated understanding of God's love and the identity as His child.

This is what Jesus came to share, to give to us – not only the glorious promise of eternal life but everything "Abba" represents.

Importantly, notice that the placing of His Son's Spirit in our heart is not expressly for salvation. The scripture tells us that that was settled in Christ from before the beginning:

*But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God **from the beginning** chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth,*

(2 Thes 2:13)

*who has **saved** us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which **was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began**, (2 Tim 1:9)*

Rather, Galatians 4:6 tells us expressly that for those of us recognize Him as our Savior, the Son's Spirit was sent into our hearts crying, "Abba, Father". It is all about **recognizing God as our Abba**, it's about opening our spiritual eyes to that reality – that connection, that awesome trust, that we are indeed in Him and He in us.

This sense of **belonging** is the sense of being accepted, valued, and included in God's family. It's more than just being physically in the pew so to speak; the new creature doesn't just behave or think differently, the new creation sees the Creator in a whole new way. It's about knowing, having absolute assurance that you're **connected** and that you matter to the Father and your heavenly family.

Key aspects of a sense of belonging:

- Acceptance, Inclusion, Connectedness, Support

Now, I'm not just putting forth theory – you see, the concept of Abba is so important to us for we literally inherit our desire to belong; it's hardwired in our brain. Studies have shown that we crave connection in the same region of the brain that we crave food, and we experience social exclusion in the same part of the brain that we experience physical pain.

As someone recently reminded me, we don't 'walk' by feeling; even a feeling of belonging. We walk by faith/trust. That's true; nevertheless, God's work is to **give** us this awesome sense through His Spirit, and so we **recognize Abba** – we do walk in that recognition or awareness. It's His will that we have this view. You could say that through Jesus He has shown us He welcomes that connection with us. It's His will for us to know we belong, that we have an inheritance along with Christ:

*"He who overcomes shall **inherit** all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.*

(Rev 21:7)

*and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and **joint heirs with Christ**, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*

(Rom 8:17)

Last month, we traveled through a foreign country. We experienced many warm friendships but also sensed, all the time, that we were not 'native' to the environment. There was no sense at all of belonging.

But there is a 'country' where all of us, as believers, belong. It's a home with a wonderful Father:

*"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be **with Me where I am**, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."*

(John 17:24)

This is what our hearts long for – Abba, Father:

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

(John 17:3)

Chapter 2

Light of the Living

*You have taken account of my wanderings;
Put my tears in Your bottle.
Are they not in Your book?*

*For You have delivered my soul from death,
Indeed, my feet from stumbling,
So that I may walk before God
In the light of the living.*

(Psa 56:8,13)

David was in anguish. As a fugitive, his enemies took him in temporarily when he was in Gath. Perhaps you know the story – Gath was the home the giant Goliath whom David slew with a sling and a stone, but David had gained much fame since then with his military exploits for Saul the king. In fact, he was so renowned, the people of Gath mistakenly thought he was the king of Israel.

This was partly because the following adage had gone 'viral':

*'Saul has slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands?'*

(1 Sam 18:7)

But Saul was hunting down his own servant, son-in-law and general for this very reason – he was filled with rage and envy of David's fame and standing among the people. But because of the 'ten thousands' saying, David greatly feared Achish the king of Gath as well.

Now, David was 'a man's man' but his heart was tender, and he had spent many a night hiding from Saul and weeping in desperation. He never stopped trusting God, but he was at wit's end with all the persecution. For this reason, it wasn't difficult to feign insanity in Gath.

*So, he changed his behavior before them, pretended madness in their hands,
scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his
beard. Then Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see the man is insane.
Why have you brought him to me?"*

*"Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman
in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?"*

(1 Sam 21:13-15)

So, David made his escape, humiliated but alive and thus we have the verses from Psalm 56 above. When his heart had stilled, he could praise God and rejoice that in spite of his tribulation, *that [he could] walk before God in the light of the living.*

What is this light? Is it just a poetic way to say, "Wow, God, thank you that I'm alive!" or is it revealing to us something more about walking with God, walking in His light?

Because, there it is – another bookend, a tremendous indication of its importance for us. Light was the first thing God spoke into existence, Genesis 1:3 and one of the last promises to His children, Revelation 22:5:

They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

And there it is associated with Life, over and over:

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

(Psa 36:9)

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

(John 1:4)

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

(John 8:12)

Of course, this Light is not made of photons. It is not on the electromagnetic spectrum at all. But get this (and I repeat this verse intentionally):

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

(Psa 36:9)

That is, only **in this Light** can we see (perceive, understand) this Light

*For You will light my lamp;
The LORD my God will enlighten my darkness*

(Psa 18:28)

Your 'lamp' is your life, your soul, and without God's help you exist in darkness. In fact, Jesus said to His disciples:

*"As long as I am in the world, **I am the light** of the world."*

(John 9:5)

Plain and simple – **Jesus is the Light; Jesus is the Life**. So, to walk in the Light of the Living is to exist IN the person of Christ, to abide in Him as He abides in you.

David's praise is, for us, God's promise:

*"I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not **abide** in darkness.*

(John 12:46)

And:

*"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 17:21-23)

Gleaning from David's tears, tribulations and praise leads us to a wonderful promise and a glorious plan from our amazing Savior, Jesus Christ. Walking in the Light of the Living is abiding in Christ.

Chapter 3

Can You Hear Him?

Ever since Eden, mankind has had a love affair with lies. Yes, ever since we first decided to believe the serpent's lies over God's truth, we've been deaf to it and often butchered it to suit our own 'narrative' or agenda. It's what we do. Think about it, even communist Russia's own national news was called Pravda, or 'truth'.

Standing before the Truth itself, Pontius Pilate said dismissively, "What is truth?" He should have asked, "Who is Truth?"

And the Truth is that without the help of God's Spirit, like Pilate, we cannot even recognize the Truth so that we sometimes resort to holding up books and claiming, "This is the truth!" Of course, if that book is the Bible, our claims are the truth about the Truth but only part of the Truth. The scriptures say:

"The entirety of Your word is truth,..."

(Psa 119:160)

The Bible is the written truth because it was given by the Spirit of Truth, Christ's Spirit, God's Spirit.

*"But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the **Spirit of truth** who proceeds from the Father, He will **testify of Me.**"*

(John 15:26)

And

*"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 16:13)

So, to say you know the Truth is not merely to know the Bible but most importantly, to know it's **Author**. Jesus said,

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

(John 14:6)

The Jews who confronted Jesus knew the Book, but they did not know the Author of its words. **Because** of that, they could not hear Him or understand:

*"Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are **not able to listen to My word.**"*

*"You are of **your father the devil**, and **the desires of your father you want to do**. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth,*

because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."

*"But **because** I tell the **truth**, you do not believe Me."*

(John 8:43-45)

These verses grabbed my attention yesterday, especially that word "because" in the last one. Jesus didn't say, "You guys are not listening." Or "I'll rephrase that so you can understand Me."

No, He said plainly that their problem was like 'spiritual DNA', that they had/have their father's. The devil has no truth in him, which is what his children inherit. As such, they are **not able to hear truth** and thus we have that word "because".

"Because" means that their problem wasn't with Jesus' accent or clothing or His tendency to produce miracles on the Sabbath. Their 'inherited spiritual DNA' **caused** them to not hear, to **refuse** to hear, when **the truth** was spoken and thus, they could not believe Jesus because that's all He spoke.

Some people just **cannot** hear Truth. However, Christ told Pilate:

*"**Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.**" (John 18:37)*

Now, if you've been reading your Bible, you know that Jesus frequently spoke intentionally in parables. Sometimes His listeners understood and sometimes they did not. Even His disciples were a bit fuzzy at times –

Jesus told them, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know."

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

*Christ told His disciple, "**I am** the way, the **truth**, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*

(John 14:6)

But as I started with, He told a group of Jews that Satan was their father and the father of lies as well. I wonder what "23andMe" would say about that? I'm not sure, but I know what Paul said. He told Timothy about the character of our days:

"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:"

And,

*"But evil men and impostors will grow **worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.**"*

(2 Tim 3:1,13)

In our love affair with lies, we have claimed that truth is relative, based upon one's perspective. Having spoken God's Word to people from more than a hundred countries, I can attest that perspective does influence understanding and that's why knowing Christ by His indwelling Spirit is the difference in determining or discerning Truth. It's the only way to truly know Truth, to know Him. The written Word can lead you to Him but it's the Holy Spirit who unites you with Him.

*"...clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but **by the Spirit of the living God**, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of*

*flesh, that is, of the **heart**. And we have such trust through Christ toward God... who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, **not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**"*

(2 Cor 3:3,4,6)

Jesus dealt a death blow to mankind's illicit love affair with lies. The Truth, knowing the Truth, KNOWING JESUS sets us free.

Chapter 4

Expectations

Bitterness. The result of shattered expectations.

From the days of Adam until now, the expectations of godly men and women are realized in the person of Jesus Christ -- Who He is, what He does, all that He represents. Most of us would agree, however, that some of the expectations of the godly aren't so 'godly'. Rather, we can shade them in selfishness, impatience, covetousness or misunderstanding and as a consequence be very disappointed with God and with each other.

The big deal, the important lesson for us, is to be aware that shattered expectations are one of Satan's favorite tools. They can lead to a loose grip on faith and even a turning away from the Lord. One of the great dangers of the whole so-called 'faith movement' -- the name it and claim it teachings -- is this very thing. Many people have been duped into this 'hyper-faith' mindset only to run into a 'brick wall' spiritually. They fail, they think, in faith. They place faith in faith. Or worse, they think God has failed.

Their expectations, nurtured and trained in the wrong school, are dashed. Of course, this does NOT make they themselves ungodly but simply exposes some of their expectations as being something other than 'heaven-sent'.

But in the Christian community as a whole, so many have turned away from God because they became angry and/or disappointed. Some if not most of us can relate -- bitterness born from disappointment, even grief... I'll give an example -- we were in Greece. In our home, Darlene gave birth to our little boy John Lance. In our early twenties, we were there to serve the Lord. God had done so many wonderful miracles in our rather young spiritual lives that we simply believed... well, believed that despite any impending doom or dire circumstances that He would always step in and 'save the day' so to speak. He always had.

Then our little one got sick...very sick. For me, denial set in and as he grew weaker denial gave way to confusion. We had no money for a doctor -- no money at all. Surely, he would be all right. God would heal him.

But the next day, as I held him in my lap, he just stopped breathing and went all blue. I didn't know what to do. Darlene was crying uncontrollably. I tried breathing into his mouth and in a few seconds, he started breathing again. Immediately, we went to the hospital.

The doctors told us that he had septicemia and meningitis. About six weeks later, he died.

A year later, we returned to the States. We still loved the Lord and wanted to serve Him. Despite the doctors' forecasts, Darlene was pregnant again. Officially, we came back just to get better healthcare, but in retrospect, there was also a festering distrust of God's care born out of a shattered spiritually immature expectation. As a consequence, we were confused about what to believe. Mixed with the joy of salvation and the memories of His wonderful bona fide miracles were the pain of grief, the image of our son's suffering and our helplessness and for me, the terrible sobbing and brokenness of my precious wife.

There were those who said he died because of our lack of faith. I don't know where people get this garbage. Not from the Bible! That misguided theology portrays our heavenly Father like some sort of 'referee' who times our spiritual race or watches how high we can jump so that when we fail -- and

we will fail – he can bring devastating judgment upon us. That ugly notion actually fosters ‘works-trips’ and mislabels it faith.

Now, I’m not saying faith isn’t important – to the contrary, it’s critical. But the scripture says specifically that to each one of the saints is given a measure of faith with which to work. (Romans 12:3) God knows our measure of faith because He gave it to each of us, and He says He won’t test us to a greater degree than we can handle. (1 Cor 10:13) As with dear Job, the greater faith is not that which sees the miracle but that which persists despite contrary circumstances.

Anyway, we journeyed back to the States and I confess I did a spiritual ‘belly-flop’ if you would in the cesspool of grief and worldliness. I made a horrible display of myself and got many of those around me ‘all wet’ too. Oh, I still looked to the Lord, but my behavior was incongruent with trust and led to much hurt. However:

"It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not."

(Lam 3:22)

...and I praise Him that He healed my heart and turned me around. That was about 50 years ago.

Now there was nothing ‘ungodly’ about our hope or expectation that God would heal our son. However, bitterness developed because I took my eyes off the cross. I was short-sighted. Let me explain:

Back in Exodus, the host of Israel were riding a ‘wave’. They had seen miracle after miracle after miracle during their liberation from slavery. Pharaoh’s army was annihilated under the Red Sea and for a short time the people were buoyant but with shallow faith. Then, after just three days of ‘roughing it’ in the wilderness, exhilaration turned to desperation. Just after praising God in the Song of Moses and the Song of Miriam, the people found poison in the waters of Marah (literally means bitter).

"So, Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore, the name of it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, 'What shall we drink?'"

(Ex 15:22-24)

The people, as yet, were pampered, in a way. Their faith was untested – most everything had gone their way so to speak. Sure, some of the exodus dilemmas were pretty ‘hairy’, pretty tense – but until then, the miracle –working power of God had just ‘flowed’. Here, in the wilderness, they were seriously dry. The waters of Marah were a huge and life-threatening disappointment. But a wonderful picture was being painted:

"So, he (Moses) cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet."

(Ex 15:25)

The chemistry here is clear – the Tree, when it was cast into the bitter waters, made them sweet. And the same is as true now – as ever – our Tree is the cross of Calvary. Peter wrote of Jesus:

*"Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on **the tree**, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."*

(1 Pet 2:24)

And Luke recorded:

*"... when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took Him down from **the tree**, and laid Him in a sepulcher."*

(Acts 13:29)

When our expectations are nested in true faith/trust and held to by the same, there is no shattering disappointment or shame. (See Romans 5:5) But how is that trust secured? The Tree. In essence we must 'apply the Tree'. Now, that's **not** a formula for getting what **we want** but a cure for the bitterness of short-sighted expectations. We've got to grasp the fundamental truth of what Christ accomplished there – life from death, an entrance into the awesome presence of God Almighty, an eternal mind-boggling inheritance in **heaven**, the determined **end** of all evil, redemption and cosmic reconciliation, ... on and on it goes. My small mind needs help to comprehend this – that's why the psalmist sang:

"My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him."

(Psalm 62)

Herein is a key to consider. David spoke to his soul – that part of the believer which is influenced both by the Spirit and by the flesh. His determination was to wait only upon God, and he acknowledged that his **expectation** was from the **Almighty**. It had to be divine to be realizable.

You see, in our carnality, if we do not "walk in the Spirit," we can be influenced to entertain all kinds of earthly expectations or even godly expectations that are 'fuzzy', incomplete.

It seems that when it comes to Jesus, many peoples' expectations are at times askance. How could it be that our Father, Who gave His own Son to satisfy the payment for our sins, could produce ANYONE's unsatisfied expectation?! One more story – and you know it well.

It was probably a long walk, not because of the length of the road but their long 'faces'. The two travelers to Emmaus were initially perturbed with the 'outsider' who apparently didn't know why they were dismayed. But as He toured them through the scripture pointing to one picture after another concerning Christ, their hearts burned. The smoldering embers of faith were rekindled so to speak. And then, when He broke the bread, their vision cleared. Their spiritual myopia was healed, and Christ came into focus.

The broken bread – symbolic of His broken body. We MUST remember what that means; what it means to us eternally.

You see, "expectation" in Hebrew has an interesting second meaning – a "**cord**". And as you consider the principle of first mention in the scripture, (that is, the first place a significant prophetic picture or word is presented in scripture often reveals additional insight), this first cord points, in the same manner, to the broken bread and to the Tree in our previous examples. You see, it is the **scarlet cord** that Rahab had to keep in her window to save her when the Israelites conquered Jericho. That scarlet cord represented the living hope we MUST keep in our 'window' – it needs to be visible, in focus. **We must keep it there especially when the walls are crumbling around us**. It's not just a protection against judgment which we indeed deserve but a reminder of a divine promise of salvation.

Alas, our expectations are usually just too small, too carnal, too myopic. When Christ broke the bread – when the wood was placed in the water – when the scarlet cord was kept in the window – these are **illustrations** for us that point to our need to establish or re-establish trust in our Lord and Savior Who's plans far, far exceed our own; who's eternal kingdom includes **resurrections, restorations, transformations and inspirations** way beyond our imaginations!

Always know that you can give God your shattered expectations, dashed hopes, bitter heart. You can tune in once again to His Holy Spirit's voice so that your hope may be **alive**, your expectation may be from Him, your anticipation joyful, peaceful and confident. Trust me, your heart will heal. You will find God worthy of your love and devotion.

Keep the cross, the broken body and the precious blood of our Savior before you at all times. And rest in His glorious resurrection. "*Set your minds on things above.*"

One day soon, our Abba will send His Son, and you'll see that indeed He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.

Chapter 5

Christ's Peter Principle

"Not that I have already attained or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

(Phil 3:12-14)

We'd so much like to think that the 'older' we get in the Lord, the **saintlier** we get. Whole denominations are built on this notion. Of course, there is some validity to this, but there is also a tension, if you would, with it as well. For, the more 'mature' we become in Christ, the more '**taintlier**' we realize we are in comparison to our dear Savior.

Paul claimed that he had not already attained or been perfected or had apprehended because he is referring to **his goal, the prize of the upward call** – his final transformation.

"Pressing on" is not Paul asserting a quest for self-improvement. "Laying hold" is to take hold of so as to make one's own, to perceive, to take into one's self. What he's expressing is that, "what Christ wants for me is what I want and the only way that happens is when I stop ruminating the past and instead surrender more completely to Him. The prize is His upward call." (See 1 Cor 15:52-54)

Regarding the **inner man**, he wrote:

*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so **walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him** and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.*

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

*For **in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead** bodily; and **you are complete in Him**, who is the head of all principality and power.*

(Col 2:6-10)

While the writer of Hebrews, speaking of the presence of our inner beings in heaven said:

*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the **heavenly** Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn [who are] registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, **to the spirits of just men made perfect,***

(Heb 12:22,23)

Now, some would characterize Paul as an ever gung-ho, you-can't-hold-me-back kind of guy. Maybe so, but what he asserted in this passage in Philippians has much less to do with spiritual

accomplishment and much more to do with character, relationships and facing the balance of your life when you know that 'much water has passed under your bridge' so to speak. You could say that it is an attitude necessary for finishing well. It's fundamentally about trust.

Perhaps, you've accomplished much; perhaps, you've suffered much; perhaps, you think you've failed greatly and repeatedly. Perhaps, you think there's reason to boast or be thankful, or perhaps, there are woeful regrets. Paul had them all; perhaps you do as well.

Focusing on the past, we can be swung from castigation to congratulation back and forth. Both are balls and chains to the Spirit-filled believer. And of course, Satan knows this, so he endeavors to fix our attention there.

How do you get out of the pendulum swing and reestablish trust? Paul was as fed up as you and I are with the failures of the flesh, but there is one way to deal with them, one thing to do. "...*forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead*". The Greek is more emphatic – "truly forgetting".

"OK", you say, "but truly forgetting is truly difficult." Sometimes that is truly true. But there's a principle, a tool if you would that is very helpful. It's called **repentance – a complete change of mind**. You see, both ends of the pendulum involve **self**-focus which interferes with your relationship with our Lord and others. Combined with **confession** and **trust**, the three tools are invaluable to us as believers.

That's because sinful attitudes of the flesh are typically 'sticky'. But Christ understands this and even coached Peter in it – we can call it the spiritual 'Peter Principle'. It is prefaced by these two points - God promised to cleanse us from all unrighteousness when we confess our sin (1 John 1:9) and as with the woman caught in adultery, He says, "*Go, and sin no more.*"

But dear Peter was perplexed because someone was evidently a repeat-offender and he wanted to know just how far this forgiveness deal went:

Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"
*Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to **seventy times seven**.*

(Mat 18:21,22)

Christ's 'Peter Principle' reveals something to us about the heart of God. He hates sin but He loves you. Paul could "*reach forward to those things which are ahead*" because he was absolutely confident of His Father's love and forgiveness. Towards the end of his life, he could justly boast of his sufferings for Christ as in 2 Cor 11 and yet, he came to esteem himself as the 'chief' of sinners (see 1 Tim 1:15).

Yes, chief of sinners but still complete and sinless in Christ. How does that work? He wrote, "*Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to **repentance**?"* (Rom 2:4) Paul could write that because he **experienced** it and told us:

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.
For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.
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.

(Rom 7:15,19,23)

Paul wrote of what we can call 'the stickiness' of sin or persistence of the flesh in which case repentance is not always a 'one and done' thing. Speaking of this, Jesus told all the disciples:

*"Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and **seven times in a day** returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."*

(Luk 17:3,4)

Now, as a believer, all your sin is forgiven – all your sin. Your inner being is clean before God because of Christ. Your salvation is absolutely secure. This repentance is not about your salvation; it's about your **relation to others** and **your** ability to go forward **in trust** and to **have peace**. The relationship between believers is immensely important to God. Jesus said:

*"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have **love for one another.**"*

(John 13:35)

And understand, repentance, though it is a valuable tool, is not intended as a free pass for continuing in sin. Paul also wrote:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?

Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

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

(Rom 6:1-4)

Christ's 'Peter Principle' regarding sin is simply Confess, Repent, Trust. And never stop trusting God. That's how you, along with Paul, can keep "...*forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead*". That's your peace, the peace that Christ gives.

Remember, in Christ **your soul, your inner being** is complete, perfect in God's eyes. It's a finished work. Your final transformation, your own "upward call" will follow in God's time. So, abide in Him, trust Him, love Him, for He loves you!

Chapter 6

Sunday

Jesus told them over and over – He would be beaten and crucified. Then, on the third day, He would rise again from the dead. But His disciples and other dear followers just didn't get it. What was the problem? It's hard to believe that they didn't hear Him.

Then, they saw Him lay down His life. They watched His Agony in Gethsemane, His beatings, His stripes and crown of thorns, and then the tortuous crucifixion on Golgotha.

Now, Jesus had predicted the course of these events (Mat 17:12,22,23; 20:18; 26:31,32; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33...) and the scriptures were amazingly specific from the stripes to the crucifixion to the piercing of the spear to the criminals on His side to the rich man's tomb and much more. But still, they didn't get it. That was 'Friday'.

Fundamentally, they didn't believe He would conquer the grave. (Mark 16:9-11) It was one thing, I guess, to see Him raise the dead, open the eyes of the blind, heal the lepers, feed the 4000 and then the 5000 on a few scraps of food, to still the raging sea, to cast out demons...they saw it all and yet they couldn't believe He'd return. That kind of trust required something more than seeing the miraculous.

They saw Him transfigured on the mount and in dialog with Moses and Elijah. They heard the voice of God Almighty declaring Jesus as His Son. But He'd also been wrapped in linen grave cloths, and they just didn't really believe He'd return. That was 'Saturday'.

When hopes are dashed, and grief is raw, that's 'Saturday'. When all your purpose seems absolutely purposeless, that's 'Saturday'. When your heart hardens into a callous pursuit of self-gratification or worldly comfort – that's 'Saturday'. When doubts and fears surround, and you feel like hiding – that's 'Saturday'.

And many, if not most of us can get stuck there to some extent. Stuck, because like the disciples, we don't really trust that He'll return – not like He said He would – not imminently, not really.

Many Christians don't identify with Christ's Spirit within us. They still identify with the dead corpse we all drag around. Many don't notice the whisper of His Spirit because the shouting of the flesh is so obnoxious and loud. That too, is the result of living in 'Saturday'.

Perhaps you've not noticed, but like them, we're seeing many miracles too if we pay attention - many prophesied signs of the last days coming to pass – but, we often behave like it's 'Saturday'. Oh, we grant intellectual assent, even verbal 'atta-boy's' to the notion of the imminent return of Jesus Christ or our union with/in Him.

But here's the truth and it's good news - as believers, we get to live in the expansive joy of Sunday or should I say **Sunday** morning. We get to share in the fantastic reality of resurrection, eternal life and holy transformation – perfect unity with Him born out of the God-originated intimacy with Him and a holy new image and likeness to Him. You see, that **Sunday** is not only the confidence of His resurrection but also of His return, and His indescribable love for us - the fulfillment of His redemption. It's called in the Bible the "blessed hope" (Tit 2:13).

Whether it is filled with travail or slumber, 'Saturday' is like the 'valley of the shadow of death'. It's not the place the Lord wants us to linger in but rather to pass through. Abiding in Jesus

means passing through this worldly state of mind, this 'Saturday' if you would. And pass through we must. Jesus said:

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

(Mat 16:24)

So how did Jesus get to 'Sunday' and what does it mean for us? Please let this sink in; it's so important. **It was God's doing.** And the same is true for us who abide. No matter how hard we try, how many gimmicks we use, we won't 'unstick' ourselves from the muck and stupor of 'Saturday'; dear Paul wrote:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

(Rom 7:18)

You see, we can't somehow pull ourselves up by the bootstraps and land in the 'Sunday' of that blessed new life, unity with Christ and a truly imminent expectation. We must call out to the Lord. Yes, though we often miss it, it really is that simple and that serious.

Now, lest I leave you with the impression that living in the hope of His imminent appearance means some sort of 'hyper-spiritual' (is there such a word?) fanaticism or enormous works trip, let me relate a story from dear Francis of Assisi. One day as he was working in his garden a disciple asked him what he would do if he absolutely knew that Christ would be back in five minutes. He replied, "Why, I'd finish this weeding!"

The blessed hope can't be worked up or feigned. It must be real in our hearts and it will always conduct us to the place where we live in the trust, real trust in our Abba and our Savior.

May each of us look for and hasten the day! (2 Pet 3:12)

Chapter 7

Lost and Found

Luke 15: 1-32

Joseph was seventeen when Jacob lost him. His brothers tossed him in a pit in the wilderness and then sold him as a slave into Egypt. Then they mercilessly lied to their father letting him think his beloved son was dead, torn by a wild animal.

Gabriel was just seventeen when we lost him. So, I can relate to Jacob's grief. It tore our family apart. We eagerly watch for the day that we will find him again.

When Jesus was challenged about His ministry to "sinners", He spoke three parables – one about a lost sheep, another about a lost coin and one we all remember, the lost or prodigal son. All three speak of loss but the primary point of view of the first two is of the seeker and that of the third is of the one lost.

The religious leaders of Jesus' day divided humanity into two classes: the unclean and the righteous. They decided to live, as much as possible, in complete separation from the unclean. Some rabbis of Jesus day took this idea so seriously that they refused to teach the unclean God's word (Morris).

In seeking the lost sheep, the emphasis of the story is not that the shepherd valued the lost one over the ninety-nine but rather that he cared for it and then celebrated when he found it. "This was the error of the Pharisees and scribes who complained. They were not joyful when tax collectors and sinners drew near to Jesus." (Guzik)

Then there's the story of the lost coin. In a sense, the lost belong to God whether they know it or not. "The piece of silver was lost *but still claimed*. Observe that the woman called the money, 'my piece which was lost.' When she lost its possession, she did not lose her right to it; it did not become somebody else's when it slipped out of her hand and fell upon the floor." (Spurgeon)

This is a tremendous comfort to those who may have lost a loved one or watched them walk away from the faith. "One of the first things to arrest us powerfully is *the worth of single souls*. It was one sheep the shepherd went to find. It was for one coin the woman searched the house." (Morrison)

Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

(Luke 15:10)

Lost coins find it impossible to repent, so Jesus added this so that both the religious leaders and the sinners who heard Him knew that repentance is important for lost people. (Guzik) And repentance is the main theme of His final story:

Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So, he divided

to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything."

(Luke 15:11-16)

What we should not miss here is that the younger son gets lost, we'd say he lost his way. But unlike the first two stories, no one seeks for him.

"The son left the area to become independent of the father and lived a prodigal (reckless, foolish, extravagant) life. No doubt it was fun while it lasted." (Guzik)

"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" (Luke 15:17-19)

The message is still one of finding but the perspective has changed – the lost son repented and found his way home to his father. So, it is with the lost even today.

"And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

(Luke 15:20-22)

Unlike the first two stories, the joy results not just from the finding but from the fact that the son was dead and is alive again. You see, the father couldn't simply search for the lost son until he found him because he would have remained 'dead'. Repentance brings life so the son had to find his change of heart and return to the father but notice that once he appeared on the horizon, *"his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him."*

And he said to his servants:

'Bring out the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry."

(Luke 15:23-24)

None of the things brought to the repentant prodigal were necessities; they were all meant to honor the son and make him know he was loved. Yes, God searches and rejoices when what was lost is found. But the third story is necessary to tell us about the need for repentance and humility on the part of the lost.

As with the sheep, God will carry you back to your family and as with the valuable coin, God will clean house, your house. As with the son, God will run to welcome you home. And in all cases, when what's lost gets found, all heaven rejoices.

Chapter 8

Can't Contain Him

A rarely mentioned attribute of God's creation is that it is filled (pun intended) with containers. You see, people are containers; the earth is a container, the cosmos in its entirety is a massive container. And of course, there are containers for virtually everything – material and spiritual. But there is one exception to this – God, Himself. God does not contain, God is and God fills.

Mankind simply cannot conceive of this. Mankind has always tried to place God in a container, or imagine Him to be a container - to give Him a definition. Mankind's understanding requires "boundary conditions" but God simply says, "I AM" and He adds "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" which are not boundaries but qualities. God has attributes but not definitions or boundaries. You cannot 'contain'(i.e. limit) Him even in your mind or imagination.

Why do we try?? Every false religion tries. Bluntly, every religion tries. So, what does God say about Himself?

*Can anyone hide himself in secret places,
So I shall not see him?" says the LORD;
"Do I not **fill** heaven and earth?" says the LORD.*

(Jer 23:24)

God says He fills – in fact, He says He fills all things. Clearly, this is a mystery far beyond human understanding. We say that He is omnipresent; and so is Jesus Christ:

*He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that
He might **fill** all things.*

(Eph 4:10)

Now, before He ascended far above all the heavens, Jesus as the Son of Man was filled - some good news is that you and I can be, like Jesus, filled with His Holy Spirit. Yes, Jesus Himself was filled when He was baptized by John:

*Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led
by the Spirit into the wilderness,*

(Lu 4:1)

Mind-exploding, right? But what we can know and trust is what He has declared. God says He is Almighty, He is self-existent, He is gracious, He is holy, He is first and last.

*"**I am** Almighty God..."*

(Gen 17:1)

*And God said to Moses, "**I AM WHO I AM.**"*

(Ex 3:14)

*And it will be that when he cries to Me, I will hear, for **I am** gracious.*

(Ex 22:27)

*"For **I am** the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for **I am** holy."*

(Lev 11:44)

*Who has performed and done it,
Calling the generations from the beginning?
'I, the LORD, am the first; And with the last **I am** He.'*

(Isa 41:4)

Again, not boundary conditions but qualities or attributes. God says these things because He wants us to **know** Him. In fact, God the uncontainable, made His Son a container in Mary, the Son of Man, and took all the sins of creation to the grave on Calvary so that we could **know** Him:

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

(1 John 5:20)

Friends, this is more than information. It's an invitation to intimacy. This "know" as in know Him is a special word which means to know by experience. It's not 'head knowledge'; it's a realization due to personal relationship or intimacy. In fact, it is used to refer to the relationship between a husband and wife. It's so important that Jesus indicated it was a necessity for entrance into His kingdom:

*Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never **knew** (same word) you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

(Mat 7:22,23)

In fact, God created Eve, compatible with Adam as a prophetic picture of the intimacy that leads to unity:

"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

(Eph 5:21,22)

The first Adam and his bride became **intimate and united** in the flesh, and the mystery Paul referred to is that the Last Adam, Jesus, and His bride, the Church, became **intimate and united** in the Spirit:

*But he who is joined to the Lord is **one spirit** with Him.*

(1 Cor 6:17)

So, may He Who fills all things, fill you:

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

(Rom 15:13)

Chapter 9

What Do You Know?

What do you know? Peter was not a warrior, not a swordsman – all he could do in a pinch was hack off an ear (see John 18:10). But he could fish, or so he thought. He'd been doing that his whole life. He knew the sea of Galilee like any fisherman knows his favorite spot. But twice, on 'his spot', he'd gone fishless, nada, empty nets. The first time Jesus said to him,

"Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

(Luke 5:4)

Now if you're a professional, you usually don't like a 'newbie' telling you how to do your job. But to Peter's credit, he replied,

"Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless, at Your word I will let down the net."

(Luke 5:5)

You know the story. Wham!

And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So, they signaled to their partners (James and John) in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.

(Luke 5:6,7)

All his life, he had been doing **his thing** in **his spot**, and he'd never seen anything like this!

*When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"
For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken;*

(Luke 5:8,9)

Jesus intended to use Peter, use what he knew; but He would use it in a different way. He told him:

"Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men."

(Luke 5:10)

Yes, after Christ's resurrection, Peter, in the power of the **Holy Spirit** went 'fishing' in a new spot. He preached a mighty sermon to a large crowd:

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words.

Peter was fishing with the bait of the truth:

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

The 'fish' drew near, and Peter cast the net:

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

And Jesus' words were fulfilled:

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

(Acts 2:14,37-39,41)

But before this, Peter, after the resurrection, had returned to Galilee, in the power of the **flesh**:

***Simon** Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. **Simon** Peter said to them, "I am going **fishing**." They said to him, "We are going with you also." They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught **nothing**.*

(John 21:2,3)

You know the story. Jesus appeared on the shore and called out to see how the fishing was going. It had been a fruitless endeavor all night. They didn't recognize Him and He asked if they had caught anything. He got a one-word answer, "No!" Again, He tells them how to do what they 'know':

"Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So, they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.

(John 21:6)

I can imagine John and Peter scratching their heads, thinking, 'this seems familiar' when suddenly John blurts out, "It's the Lord." You probably remember, Peter swims to shore where Jesus already has some fish cooking on a fire. The rest of the guys struggle to pull the net, full of 153 large fish to shore. After breakfast Jesus beckons Peter to follow Him and gives him the famous 3-fold "Do you love Me?" lesson.

Peter knew how to fish but the only time he caught fish (or men) was in obedience to Christ's command. What do you know?

Maybe it's music or singing or speaking or teaching or building or... Jesus will use that but only when it's done in obedience to Him. When you do it in your own power, even if you're doing it "for the Lord", your spiritual nets will be empty. You may hear the Lord ask you, "Do you love Me?"

Chapter 10

Nowhere Town

The more I consider the whole incarnation of Christ, the amazing humility of Mary, the divine choice of “nowhere town” Nazareth, the orchestration of a world-wide registration in order to move Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, the miracle births of John the Baptist and of Jesus. It stuns me and overwhelms my puny mind.

The setting for the announcement from Gabriel amazed the first century Jewish readers first because he ignored Judea and the city of Jerusalem and the temple itself, and instead went to Galilee, which the Jews held in contempt because of its ‘half-breed’ population. Furthermore, Gabriel went to the village of Nazareth, basically a “non-place”. It wasn’t even mentioned in the Old Testament or in the rabbinical writings. A shoddy, corrupt stop between the ports of Tyre and Sidon, it was basically overrun by gentiles and roman soldiers. You may recall that even Nathaniel when learning that it was Christ’s hometown said, “Can anything good come from there?”

And who was this girl, Mary?? As young as 12 years old, she was from a poor family and was certainly illiterate. Like all the peasants of this area, she rarely traveled more than a few miles from home – “a nobody in a nothing town in the middle of nowhere.” (thanks Kent Hughes)

She presents for us a wonderful contrast in several ways – whereas Zachariah and Elizabeth were elderly, she was a youth; whereas Gabriel approached Zach in the Holy Place of the temple in Jerusalem in the course of his service with the incense, Mary encountered Gabriel in a non-descript place, presumably her home in “nowhere-town”; whereas the priest was fearful and doubting, the girl was afraid but trusting and submitted; whereas Zachariah and Elizabeth’s son, great man that he was, with his death, ended the Old Testament, on the other hand, Mary’s son, God-son that He is, with His death on the cross, began the New Testament.

Consider all the characters and conditions that came into place; consider all the audience, divine, angelic and human; consider all the divine promises, the many thousands of years of expectation. What if Mary declined? What if she fumbled in faith like Zachariah? What if Joseph freaked or made a public display? The magnitude of the all the intricacies of the holy drama are mind numbing to say the least.

And thus “nowhere-town” became the very center of the universe, both seen and unseen. And this is how God does things, isn’t it – absolutely perfect and completely contrary to man’s ways.

That gives me such hope! When Nathaniel blurted out, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” he certainly had no idea how far off his skepticism or cynicism was. And in like manner, I can look at the utter disaster the world has become today or look at Revelation and read:

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!”

(Rev 18:1,2)

And like Nathaniel, I can only see our world, planet Babylon, as "planet-nowhere". But that's not the end of the story for God has promised to renew our world:

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.

(Rev 21:1 and see also Isa 65:17, Isa 66:22 and 2 Pet 3:13)

So why does God choose Mary in whom to plant the seed of salvation? Why does he choose Nazareth to plant His Son? Why does He choose a planet that is "without form and void" (see Gen 1:2) to plant a garden of Eden? Why did God choose you and me??

God delights in choosing nobodies in nowhere places to accomplish the things that only He can do. That brings Him the glory only He deserves and praise from our hearts!

Chapter 11

New Identity

There are eight men who were named or renamed by God in the Bible. Each one became the identity described in the name. And each one's name spoke of a relationship with or truth about God. This concept of identity is important because who we believe that we are influences highly how we live and what we believe. It's **not** a matter of a name tag on a lapel or sticker on a shirt.

So, who are you? Here are the eight that God named or renamed:

*He created them male and female and blessed them and called them **Adam ("Mankind")** in the day they were created.*

(Gen 5:2)

*"No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be **Abraham ("father of a great multitude")**; for I have made you a father of many nations.*

(Gen 17:5)

*Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name **Isaac**; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.*

(Gen 17:19)

*And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but **Israel ("One who wrestles or struggles with God")**"; for you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed."*

(Gen 32:28)

*'Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies all around. His name shall be **Solomon ("Peace")**, for I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days.*

(1 Chron 22:9)

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

(Mat 16:18)

*But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name **John ("God is gracious")**.*

(Luke 1:13)

*"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name **JESUS ("God saves" or "The Lord is salvation")**.*

(Luke 1:31)

Typically, we get an 'identity' soon after we are born. But that name doesn't necessarily identify us – **that's** what we put on the name tag or sticker but it's not **who** we are.

So, who are you? If you are **not** born again in Christ, you will identify with that name tag or sticker label because you think you are your flesh, or if you're religious, you think you are your flesh and your soul. Most people in your church think this way because even if you've heard the sermons and sang the songs, you think of God as being 'up there' or someone we follow or who we invite to be a part of what we do. When that is the case, we think of God, Jesus, His Holy Spirit, as separate.

However, when we are truly born again or as some say new creatures in Christ, that perception is not true. Our Lord is NOT separate, not "up there" or "out there" or someone we need to keep up with or else we'll lag behind. Rather, He's in you and you are in Him – salvation brings a perfect unity in the Spirit:

*"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you **and will be in you.**"*

*"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 14:16,17,19,20 NKJV)

So no longer are you separate from the Almighty, identified by that dead corpse, your flesh. But you are a part of God's family - children and part of the glorious bride of His Son. And there is even more to your identity for God made us to be "**in His image and likeness**" (Gen 1:26) and in order for that to be fulfilled, your identity includes a glorious two-part transformation.

First, in Jesus, you are complete spiritually. You are one spirit with Him:

But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

(1 Cor 6:17)

Thus, Father God sees you as holy and blameless because He sees Jesus:

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

(Eph 1:4 LSB)

And this transformation is complete, perfect, spiritually for in Christ you are spotless, sinless just as He is. But second, being made to have His likeness and image, there is more transformation to take place which indeed may happen suddenly – in the blink of an eye – as Paul wrote:

*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will **transform our lowly body** that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.*

(Phi 3:20,21)

...who will **transform** our lowly **body** that it may be conformed to His glorious **body**, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

*Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be **changed-- in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye**, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal [must] put on immortality.

(1 Cor 15:51-53)

And/or gradually, again as Paul wrote:

*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a **mirror (who do you see in a mirror?)** the glory of the Lord, **are being transformed** into the same **image** from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*

(2 Cor 3:18 LSB)

So, who are you? When you listen to our enemy and identify with your body, your 'flesh', with the name on the lapel tag, even though you're born again, you'll be plagued by the pernicious sin-nature of your body and like the dear Apostle Paul when he bemoaned:

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.

(Rom 7:15)

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

(Rom 7:18)

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

(Rom 7:22)

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 7:23-25)

Paul clearly recognized this identity problem and summarized that the only hope for peace in his mind was to trust totally in Jesus which is what he preached:

*...the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man **perfect in Christ Jesus**.*

(Col 1:26-28)

So let me encourage you – if you are indeed born again in Christ, don't identify with that dead stinking corpse you drag around called by whatever name is on 'the tag', but realize Christ, by His Spirit, is IN YOU -- **identify with Him**. Don't try to impress Him with how good you are or how fruitful you are or anything about you. In Him, you are perfect, you are clean, you are justified. And one day soon, you'll be glorified – your transformation into His image and likeness will be forever! He does it, not you.

Chapter 12

Decay

You know, I don't typically focus on decadence. I think God has called me to edify and encourage but there are times for each of us to be reminded of the true nature of our society and the environment we live in. This is where we're at. Look around and take note. Here are ten clearly evident examples of the terminal decay of our human society.

1. Ethical Value Decay:

- Widespread dishonesty and a lack of integrity in various spheres of life.
 - Politics, Justice, Social, Educational, Religious, Market/Trade, Entertainment, Medical, Scientific systems are a few of the areas that have become decrepit.
- Acceptance or normalization of corruption. It's like the proverbial frog in the slowly boiling pot.
- Pursuit of wealth, success, and material possessions at the expense of ethical considerations.
- A culture that prioritizes and glorifies pride and self-interest.
- Leaders engaging in unethical behavior without accountability.
- Exploitative or self-serving leadership practices that prioritize personal gain over the well-being of the nation or institution.

2. Family Decay:

- Increasing rates of divorce, family fragmentation, and breakdown of traditional values. Many in the newest generation have decided against marriage or having children.
- Technology-driven disintegration of community bonds and a rise in social isolation.
- Neglect of responsibilities toward vulnerable populations, such as the elderly and children.

3. Moral Decay:

- Entertainment industry has driven the rejection of long-esteemed moral values and promoted the belief that "anything goes."
- Justification of evil actions based on subjective interpretations of right and wrong.

4. Spiritual Decay:

- Indifference or hostility toward religious and spiritual principles.
- A lack of reverence for sacred values and traditions.
- Religious leadership neck-deep in the pursuit of celebrity and wealth while manipulating attendees to achieve those ends.

5. Social Decay:

- Deterioration of trust between individuals and institutions.

- Escalation of crime and a breakdown in social cohesion.

6. Entertainment and Media Decay:

- Proliferation of entertainment content that glorifies violence, immorality and trivializes ethical considerations.
- Manipulative media practices that prioritize marginalizing, deception, and sensationalism over truth and integrity.

7. Educational Decay:

- Dilution of educational standards and a decline in the emphasis on character development.
- Promotion of political and sexual ideologies that undermine moral principles.
- Lack of focus on critical thinking and ethical decision-making in educational curricula.

8. Cultural Decay:

- Loss of cultural identity and appreciation for cultural heritage.
- Prevalence of cultural expressions that promote immorality or undermine traditional values.
- Societal acceptance or normalization of substance abuse that leads to harmful consequences.

9. Integrity Decay:

- Misuse of technology for unethical purposes.
- Spread of harmful content online that influences societal attitudes negatively.

10. Generational Decay:

- Disconnection between generations, with younger generations lacking or rejecting guidance from positive role models.
- General apathy and breakdown of intergenerational relationships ending transmission of moral values.

But it's not just the society as a whole that's nose-diving in decay. The Apostle Paul wrote concerning the last days churches:

*But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:
For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud,
blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,
unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good,
traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,
having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn
away!*

(2 Tim 3:1-5)

And he followed with the sad but true admonition:

*But evil men and **impostors** will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being
deceived.*

(2 Tim 3:13)

Thus, the last-days **church** is identified by the following general characteristics:

- Self-love: (2 Tim 3:2-4)

- Hypocrisy: Professing believers are described as displaying an outward piety, but their lives show no effect of the conviction and power of God's Word. Paul warned, "turn away" from them. In other words, do not be a member of a fellowship that is guilty of a pattern of sin and ungodliness (1 Corinthians 5:9-11, 13; 2 Corinthians 6:17).
- Apostates Leading Astray the Spiritually Weak: (2 Tim 3:6-7)
In the last days, the church will be afflicted with false teachers and their doctrines. With the introduction of mass publishing, radio and television in the 20th century, and the internet in the 21st century, apostate teaching has become epidemic.

With this in mind, I encourage all of us to radically devote our hearts to loving and submitting to our Savior Jesus, to His Holy Spirit and to Almighty Father God. These are the days He told us would come.

Chapter 13

In Due Time

Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"-- therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken.

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

(Gen 3:22-24)

It seems like the Tree of Life in the garden of Eden could extend forever the existence of the flesh but what a terrible fate that would have been – existing forever in sin and death and darkness just like Satan. So, God sent Adam and Eve out of the garden to protect them and to protect mankind until the time was right.

Some 4000 years later, the time was right, and God invited all of mankind to the Tree of **Eternal Life** that created **new creatures** – creatures fit for eternity, creatures **raised** from the dead and forever cleansed from sin, filled with His Holy Spirit. This is the Tree that does not just give eternal existence but eternal Life. Eternity filled with awe, thankfulness, love, kindness, goodness, mercy, joy... heaven and perfect relationship, union with our Creator.

Everything, every event, every person, every tragedy, every victory, every prayer, every praise... all of it from the time Adam left Eden led ultimately to the time of Calvary. The **time** of Calvary? OK, what happened on Calvary forever changed the cosmos, but do you mean that the time itself was special as well? Yep.

Jesus began His ministry saying:

*"**The time is fulfilled**, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."*

(Mark 1:15)

And the scripture tells us:

*"But when the **fullness of the time** had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,..."*

(Gal 4:4)

Not only was it the fulness of time but:

*He says: "In an **acceptable time** I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

(2 Cor 6:2)

Even the demons knew about the time, the **set time**:

*And suddenly they cried out, saying, "What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us **before the time**?"*

(Mat 8:29)

We know the time was **set** for Jesus performed one of His greatest miracles to illustrate that fact. Let me summarize. During His ministry time, Jesus had become extremely close to a trio of siblings in a small community just outside of Jerusalem – two sisters and a brother. As the time grew close for Jesus to go to the cross to fulfill His mission, He received word that someone dear to Him, especially dear, was sick unto death. When He heard the news, He said:

"This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

(John 11:4)

and then intentionally **waited** two days to respond at which point He told His disciples:

"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)

When Jesus and His disciples arrived, they found many mourners and two grief-stricken sisters. Now the Lord knew what He would do. He told a grieving Martha, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."* Shortly after this, the other sister, Mary, came and fell at His feet, crying the same thing as Martha, *"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."*

Everyone was weeping. When Jesus saw this, He groaned in the spirit and the Bible simply says, *"Jesus wept."*

They showed Him where they had placed the body. It was a cave.

*Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for **he has been dead four days**."*

(See John 11 for this story.)

Many of you know this story. Jesus cried out, *"Lazarus, come forth!"* and the dead man rose from his grave.

Lazarus means, "God has helped" and indeed that's what God did **four days after Lazarus died and four prophetic days, after mankind died**. What?

It was indeed about 4000 years since Adam was exiled from the garden and specifically the Tree of Life. According to Peter in 2 Peter 3:8, that's like **four days** to the Lord. As God warned, Adam (and mankind) died after eating of the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. As with Lazarus, God waited for the right time to make that right. He waited four days to raise him from the dead.

It was four days that we (mankind) were dead **with Adam** until we were '**crucified with Christ**' (Gal 2:20) and raised with Him, like Lazarus, (see Eph 2:6, Col 2:12).

So, the **time** was right. After four days, four thousand years, **in due time**, the Tree of Life was accessible again. Only this Tree, the Cross of Christ, gave us the fruit of the Spirit for the Life God wants for us – Eternal Life and a quality of Life that only He can give.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

(Gal 5:22,23)

*For when we were still without strength, in **due time** (i.e. a fixed and definite time, the time when things are brought to crisis, the decisive epoch waited for) Christ died for the ungodly.*

(Rom 5:6)

Chapter 14

Fumbled

We have a sport in which if you are carrying a ball and for whatever reason you drop it, we say you fumbled it. In a way, that's what happened to Zacharias – he fumbled. Let me explain.

Only priests from a particular lineage could serve in the temple. Over the years the number of priests multiplied, (there were said to be as many as 20,000 priests in the time of Jesus) so they used the **lot** to determine which priests would serve when. The **lot** to serve might fall to a priest only once in his life.

There were several lots cast to determine who did what at the morning sacrifice. The first lot determined who would cleanse the altar and prepare its fire; the second lot determined who would kill the morning sacrifice and sprinkle the altar, the golden candlestick, and the altar of incense. The third lot determined who would come and offer incense. This was the most privileged duty; those who received the first and second lots would repeat their duty at the evening sacrifice, but not with the third lot. To offer the incense would be a once in a lifetime opportunity. (thanks D. Guzik)

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

(Luke 1:11-13)

So, here was the father of John the Baptist, standing in the holy place of the temple, in front of the golden altar of incense, facing the holy of holies and suddenly an angel appears standing next to or in front of, the table of showbread and Zach is freaked.

Of course, this is understandable for this was the Archangel Gabriel, who immediately says, "Don't be afraid." And he follows with the encouragement, "...your prayer is heard and your wife, Elizabeth, will bear you a son." You see both he and his wife, like Abraham and Sarah of old, were OLD and childless. Elizabeth, based upon her praises later, was living in shame and probably deep discouragement. So, the prayer Gabriel referred to was likely not just a recent one – perhaps a continuous one over decades of disappointment.

But, you see, this 'scene' was the opening act in the drama of God's final plan of redemption. Of course, the plan itself originated even before the beginning of the planet but at this time, it was reaching its apex and John was its long-foretold precursor. This was not just a big game or even THE big game; it was the BIGGEST game ever. And to top it off, I can easily imagine the Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit, along with untold numbers of the angelic host watching intently. Gabriel continued:

"And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink.

He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

(Luke 1:14-17)

Did his knees knock? Did his teeth chatter? Did his hands shake? Zach managed to speak:

"How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years."

(Luke 1:18)

He fumbled in faith. He needed a sign in order to believe that God could or would answer his prayer. I don't know if angels can be shocked but if so, this would likely have been the time.

When we pray for something for so long and see no result, we can stop believing, stop trusting that God hears. Some believe Zach's attitude is 'this is just too good to be true.' And that's likely the case but it doesn't make it any less doubtful. We know this because Gabriel tells him:

*"I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, **because you did not believe my words** which will be fulfilled in their own time."*

(Luke 1:19,20)

Some people just think they should see some proof of God. They can say, "But I didn't feel anything." Or "But I don't see any change."

They think of God's handiwork as a magician's act. But that attitude denigrates God and belittles His plans. He does all things in His time and way, and if He says something, it is guaranteed absolutely whether or not it is visible to our eyes. This is the 'stuff' of Abraham's faith – an old man, a long life, an apparently unwilling God but when He spoke the blessing, Abraham believed, and for that attitude God considered him righteous. (See Rom 4:3)

But here, God sent Zach on a 'time-out' so to speak – time to think about his faith and God's abilities.

Now, after this, God presented for us a contrast – someone who had every excuse to fumble but did not. She was a young maiden, betrothed but unmarried.

Now in the sixth month (of Elizabeth's pregnancy) the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

(Luke 1:26,27)

She was probably quite young in our reckoning – 12 to 15 or so. At least that was typical. OK, same amazing Archangel, an even more amazing miracle. He addresses her:

"Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"

(Luke 1:28)

And as with Zacharias, she is scared. So, Gabriel continues:

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God

will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

(Luke 1:30-33)

Now, unlike Zacharias who was found in the very temple itself, Mary is in the 'nowhere' town of Nazareth.

Though Nazareth is in the general region of Galilee, it is 15 miles away from the Sea of Galilee. It is six miles from the closest major road. Nazareth had no good water supply; only one fairly weak well in the center of the village. (Guzik)

Notice as well that with this greeting the focus is not on Mary but rather on Jesus.

Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible."

(Luke 1:34-37)

Mary's question was logical. She asked the same question Zacharias asked (Luke 1:18), but his question was asked in skeptical unbelief, and her question was asked in wonder-filled faith. (Guzik)

Forget any ideas of the Holy Spirit 'mating' with her, the word overshadow refers to the cloud of the Shekinah glory of God – this was a purely miraculous conception.

Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

(Luke 1:38)

In this 'nowhere' town, far from the majesty of the temple, this humble girl did not fumble in faith. Some think God is mostly active or even only active within the confines of the 'temple' or church. Sure, the Lord is active there, but He **loves** to do what only He can do far from the limelight in the hearts of the **humble**. The humble who He knows won't fumble in faith! It's in those people that the Seed of His Son is 'planted'.

Chapter 15

Beholding Transformation

*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)

What a glorious promise! When He is revealed, we shall be like Him. Now, I always thought this was speaking of His revealing/appearing when the trumpet sounds just as Paul described in 1 Cor 15: 51,52:

*Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed--in a **moment**, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

(1 Cor 15:51)

This, clearly, is an instantaneous transformation – one that we all look forward to. But I believe that being like Him is far more than putting on incorruption. So, I'm inclined to look, in scripture for more transformation. Here it is:

*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)

You see, it appears that the Apostle declares the coming instantaneous transformation of the new body of the believers in 1 Corinthians but in 2 Corinthians 3, he points to the present and ongoing transformation of the believers' spirit. By the Spirit of the Lord, we all can see clearly the image of ourselves (i.e. as in a mirror) displaying the glory of our Lord and being **transformed into His image**. It is a fulfillment of God's original intent when He said:

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

(Gen 1:26)

That is, even now we are being transformed into His image spiritually as He is in union with us inwardly and as He lives His life in and through us:

*"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)

So, the revealing John spoke of is actually two-fold – one we look forward to in hope (a hope that purifies us!) and one that is even now ongoing. In both cases, there's a transformation and Christ is glorified. In both cases, we glorify Jesus because it's **His glory**:

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the **glory which shall be revealed in us**.*

(Rom 8:18)

So, I will join with Paul in exhorting all of us:

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

(Rom 12:2)

Chapter 16

Bookends

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."

*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.*

(Gen 3:4-6)

*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. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.*

(1 John 2:16,17)

Almost like bookends, these two passages in the Bible speak of the fundamental nature of the **world**. In the garden of Eden, the serpent's lie ensnared Eve (and Adam) with these things, and we all know how that worked out.

The Apostle John wrote near the closing of the New Testament that, "*he who does the will of God abides forever.*" In both cases, three elements of worldly existence were brought forth. The serpent used them as temptations; John used them as warnings/admonitions. What can we learn from them and their presentations?

The serpent first developed in the woman the **lust for something she did not have**. He tempted her that she could be like God. Satan understood this lust for he had it in spades:

"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.**'*

(Isa 14:12-14)

As soon as she started to listen to his drivel, she was hooked.

Immediately, the tree **looked** good for food, pleasant for the eyes and desirable to make her wise. John called these, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. This was and is the **trifecta of lust**. She was **poisoned** by the **deceit** and **hooked** by the **lust**. And she took the bait.

Unfortunately, it poisoned not only her and 'hubby' but **all of mankind**.

Fundamentally, lust is the desire for something more, something or someone you think you lack. It doesn't come necessarily from dissatisfaction but rather it creates dissatisfaction. It ensnares the mind and darkens the soul.

The Bible says that sin was **found** in Lucifer (means light-bringer or morning star) and it turned him into Satan (means adversary or opposer). From there, he apparently infected up to a third of the angelic host with it, condemning them to darkness as well and when he showed up in Eden, just listening to him infected Eve and then Adam with the same 'contagion'.

We have no evidence that the serpent told Eve that the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was good for food but **that's the way she saw it**. I suggest she entertained the lust, or her sense of lack, and then she **perceived** it was pleasant to the eyes and desirable to make one wise.

One thing led to another. Whatever the case, **the lust seemed to validate the lie** that God was holding out, that Satan was right.

Now Eve was deceived, **Adam was not**. That's why he was the one accountable for the sin and mankind's nosedive into darkness.

So, with the other 'bookend', John describes three things, the same three things Eve perceived in Eden at the tree, the tree that brought death and eternal darkness – separation from God. But he adds that they are, "*not of the Father but ... of the world.*" Significant because he adds, "*And the world is passing away...*"

They are earthly, not heavenly. They are from Satan's realm, not God's. "And the world is passing away..." Eve was grasping for MORE but the reality is that it's vapor, it's really nothing, it's passing away.

But while the garden of Eden ended in death coming from a deadly tree, Jesus brought forth another tree, the cross of Calvary which became for us a tree of Life. That's because when you **believe** in Jesus' Name – "God saves" – you are **doing God's will**:

*Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the **work** of God, that you **believe** in Him whom He sent."*

(John 6:29)

*And this is His commandment: that we should **believe** on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.*

(1 John 3:23)

*"He who **believes** in the Son has everlasting life...*

(John 3:36a)

The 'bookend' of the first tree brought **death**, but the 'bookend' of the last tree brought **life**:

...but he who does the will of God abides forever.

(1 John 2:17)

So regardless of what lust tells you, turn away and believe/trust in the name of Jesus, trust in what He accomplished. Do the will of God and live forever!

Chapter 17

Holy Hope

*And not only [that], but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now **hope** does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

(Rom 5:3-5)

There are just a few words that absolutely transcend our human existence. They cannot be explained, at least not adequately, and they cannot be explained away.

I was on a lunch break driving in my car and as I approached the traffic signal to turn left, I supernaturally heard Psalm 23 in my heart, and I knew my youngest son was going to die soon. It shook me to the core.

I prayed, "No, Lord. Not now. Please." More than twenty-five years later, I still remember it perfectly.

Why is hope so important and how does God use it? One of the unfortunate realities of humanity is our tendency to destroy important elements of our heritage and our language over time. The hope in the scripture, you can call it **holy hope**, is not at all the same word we throw around today. To illustrate, let me highlight some instances:

*Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart,
All you who **hope** in the LORD.*

(Psa 31:24)

*For in You, O LORD, I **hope**;
You will hear, O Lord my God.*

(Psa 38:15)

Even before Calvary, hope was our 'tether' to the Almighty. The word literally means expectation and/or confidence. It also means "cord" in the Hebrew.

*Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him
For the help of His countenance.*

(Psa 42:5)

*My soul faints for Your salvation,
But I **hope** in Your word.*

(Psa 119:81)

Herein we see that hope in God is a spiritual balm for our troubled soul.

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

(Jer 17:7)

In this verse, we can see that hope partners with trust and brings God's blessing.

*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)

*For we were saved in this **hope**, but **hope** that is seen is not **hope**; for why does
one still **hope** for what he sees?*

(Rom 8:24)

*For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the **hope** of righteousness by faith.*

(Gal 5:5)

As with faith/trust, hope deals with the unseen – it is the confident expectation of the fulfillment of God's promises and their coming good.

*...looking for the blessed **hope** and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior
Jesus Christ,*

(Tit 2:13)

And for the redeemed, the return of Jesus Christ is our "blessed hope".

*that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we
might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of
the **hope** set before us. This **hope** we have as an anchor of the soul, both
sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil,*

(Heb 6:18,19)

This hope is what anchors (tethers) our soul to God Almighty and brings us into the realization of His presence in us.

*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)

Notably, like our Savior, this is a **living hope** and although the 'time' will come when we will see all that is for now unseen, **this hope** will always abide because in the Lord, we will eternally expect coming good for our God never tires of blessing.

So why do I still remember so clearly my Psalm 23 moment? Well, you see, our little hero had been born with a congenital heart defect and for seventeen years, we trusted God for his life.

Throughout that time, many, many miracles had happened for him. And to God's glory, he had been born again wonderfully by the Spirit just a few months earlier. But when he passed, we truly needed this **holy hope**. We needed the **holy cord of connection** to our Lord like never before. We "*fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.*" In the midst of our grief and suffering we found **this hope as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast**. God carried us through in hope.

Chapter 18

Fulfill All Righteousness

Jewish proselyte baptism was for those seeking to join the Jewish faith:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.

And John [tried to] prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit [it to be so] now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.

(Mat 3:13-15)

You see, Jesus was not a Jew, not 'technically'. Now, He was raised as one, but He did **not** have a Jewish father for His birth was initiated by the Holy Spirit:

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother **Mary** was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the **Holy Spirit**.*

(Mat 1:18)

Of course, some of you may be thinking, 'but Jewish identity comes from the mother.' And that is true in relatively modern times, but in Jesus' day and throughout the Old Testament, the lineage was always determined by the father.

So, once you've considered that, we can move on to the next point – the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Now John was baptizing in the Jordan; it was a baptism of repentance, but Jesus was sinless and had no need to repent. Thus, John told him "I need to be baptized by You..." But Jesus had something else in mind, so He told John:

*"Permit [it to be so] now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill **all righteousness**."*

(Mat 3:15)

In other words, 'we are going to make **all things right**'.

What do you suppose He was referring to? I suggest that He was referring to the salvation of **all mankind**. Jesus said, concerning the cross:

*"And I, if I am **lifted up** from the earth, will draw **all peoples** to Myself."*

(John 12:32)

He came to make us **all righteous**, all who put their trust in His death, and resurrection and forgiveness of our sins.

And God had an order in mind as well. That's why He sent His Son to the Jews; that's why He chose Abraham. Paul explained:

*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.*

(Rom 1:16)

To identify first with the Jews, **He had to become a Jew**. Yes, He was raised as one but because of the virgin birth His parentage with Joseph was always suspect. So, Jesus came to be baptized publicly by John.

While the term "baptism" is primarily associated with Christianity, the concept of ritual immersion for purification and repentance has roots in ancient Jewish traditions, particularly in the practice of the mikvah. Jewish law required immersion in a mikvah for ritual purity after certain defilements, (John's baptism) and this practice was also a **requirement for converts to Judaism**.

Immersion in a mikvah was a requirement for converts to Judaism, signifying their acceptance of Jewish law. (The law which Jesus fulfilled.) So, Jesus 'became' a Jew even though His real Father wasn't Jewish and His real Father made this **heavenly lineage** clear immediately following the baptism when He spoke from heaven:

When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.

*And suddenly a voice [came] from heaven, saying, "**This is My beloved Son**, in whom I am well pleased."*

(Mat 3:16,17)

So, Christ came first to the Jews and identified Himself with them, but why did God choose them in the first place?

*"The LORD **did not** set His love on you nor **choose** you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples;"*

(Deut 7:7)

Well, to be accurate, God first chose **Abram**.

*"You are the LORD God,
Who **chose** Abram,
And brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans,
And gave him the name **Abraham**;"*

(Neh 9:7)

*"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has **chosen you** to be a **people** for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth."*

(Deut 7:6)

Now, God, being God, knew exactly who He was choosing – the 'good', the bad and the ugly so to speak. He knew their fleshly nature, He knew their future and their failures. He knew they would ultimately reject Him via His Son and for a time, even follow the anti-Son the antichrist.

But God chose their progenitor and the people. He chose them to be "a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth". And this was not for their numbers or their intelligence or their wealth or their integrity or any other human measure. These are the people who at one point burned their own children on the arms of an idol. These are the people who danced naked around a golden calf. These are the people who shouted, "Crucify Him!" when Pilate tried to free Jesus.

He chose them because in the end, it would glorify Him; it would be a vis-aid if you would to the whole cosmos of Who He Is. His love, forgiveness, faithfulness, mercy and grace. **He is the One Who makes all things right, He is the One Who fulfills all righteousness!**

Chapter 19

The Great Sin

There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. I have heard people admit that they are bad-tempered, or that they cannot keep their heads about girls or drink, or even that they are cowards. I do not think I have ever heard anyone who was not a Christian accuse himself of this vice....

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 fleabites 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

Now, what I want to do is simple – put a holy spotlight on this ‘great sin’ and its antithesis using the scriptures to illustrate them. As a believer, it does not help to beat yourself up over your pride; it’s ‘hardwired’ into your DNA. But exposing its nature can help all of us to avoid being swept up by it.

Adam and Eve were snared by it the moment they disobeyed God. Cain killed Abel because of it. And when God mercifully dealt with him on it, to allay his fears, He said that if anyone came against him, he would be avenged seven-fold. Not long afterward, one of his descendants, Lamech, bragged to his mate:

*"And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech **seventy and sevenfold.**"*

(Gen 4:24)

And throughout history, we read of many, many notable incidents in which pride is manifested greatly. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, walked in the palace of his city and:

*All [this] came upon King Nebuchadnezzar.
At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon.
The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that **I have built** for a royal dwelling by **my mighty power** and for the honor of my majesty?"*

(Dan 4:28-30)

The king’s hubris led to his humbling by the Lord – soon after, he literally began to think and act like a beast and this lasted for years.

But the peasant and poor are just as prideful as the mighty and rich. Peter boasted pridefully that he would never betray Jesus. Oops. James and John thought they deserved to sit on Christ’s left and right in His kingdom. Whoa. Suffice it to say that the list of people sinning in pride includes EVERYONE.

Does this seem to you exaggerated? If so, think it over. I pointed out a moment ago that the more pride one had, the more one disliked pride in others. In fact, if you want to find out how proud you are the easiest way is to ask yourself, "How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take any notice of me, or shove their oar in, or patronize me, or show off?" The point is that each person's pride is in competition with everyone else's pride. It is because I wanted to be the big noise at the party that I am so annoyed at someone else being the big noise. – C S Lewis

Reconsider Cain and Abel. They both brought sacrifices to offer before the Lord and as you know, Abel's was accepted while Cain's wasn't. Cain resented this and in pride, competitive pride, he killed his brother.

Now what you want to get clear is that Pride is essentially competitive — is competitive by its very nature — while the other vices are competitive only, so to speak, by accident. Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest.

It is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began. Other vices may sometimes bring people together: you may find good fellowship and jokes and friendliness among drunken people or unchaste people. But Pride always means enmity — it is enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God. – C S Lewis

But humility is the antithesis to the Great Sin. It is pictured wonderfully in the innocent lamb and perfectly in the Lamb of God - Jesus.

*Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, **put on** tender mercies, kindness, **humility, meekness, longsuffering;***

(Col 3:12)

When the apostle says, "put on" it's the same as saying, "submit yourself to the Spirit" and thus manifest...

Now, as I said earlier, pride is part of your DNA so to speak. It is part of your dead fleshly nature. Humility, on the other hand, **is not**. Like agape love, you must **choose to put it on**.

*"if My people who are called by My name will **humble themselves**, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."*

(2 Chron 7:14)

And the Bible has much to say about the humble. For example:

*The **humble** He guides in justice,
And the **humble** He teaches His way.*

(Psa 25:9)

And:

*The **humble** also shall increase their joy in the LORD,
And the poor among men shall rejoice
In the Holy One of Israel.*

(Isa 29:19)

And:

*For thus says the High and Lofty One
Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
"I dwell in the high and holy place,
With him who has a contrite and **humble** spirit,
To revive the spirit of the **humble**,
And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*

(Isa 57:15)

And:

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

(Jam 4:6, 1Pet 5:5, Pro 3:34)

Has God 'offended' you? Is there something bad that happened to you for which you hold God accountable? You can call it offense or justifiable blame or anger but basically, it's just pride.

In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that—and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison—you do not know God at all. – C S Lewis

Trust, humility and love are the antidotes to the poison of pride.

Chapter 20

The Seed

I faced this conundrum. Many verses in the Bible tell me that as a believer I am perfect, complete in Christ, for example:

*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are **complete** in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.*

(Col 2:8,9)

But at the same time, it tells me that there's a continuing need for growth:

*... that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may **grow up** in all things **into Him** who is the head--Christ-- from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes **growth** of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

(Eph 4:13-16)

So, how does that work? I'm complete, perfect in Jesus and yet He's looking for me to grow. Then someone told me that a **seed** is perfect, and I recalled the parable of Christ in which He said:

*"The field is the world, the good **seeds** are the **sons of the kingdom**, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one."*

(Mat 13:38)

These are perfect sons of the kingdom (they're in Christ), good seeds, seeds which are designed to be planted, to die and to grow.

Yes, the seed is complete; it's perfect. It needs nothing added to its design. But its purpose is incomplete. It needs to grow. And to grow it needs to be buried. It needs to die. It needs to be watered.

Yet wonder of wonders, what it grows into is not just another seed but a seed-maker – like Jesus. Uh-huh, Jesus Who died, was buried and when He rose again, He became the Seed Maker, the Life-giver (see 1 Cor 15:45). And through salvation, we are by faith, in union with Him and He with us.

Anyway, as a seed, a son of the kingdom, I'm complete, but God wants me to increase, to **grow** in my **relationship** with Him -- that's what I'm designed for – that's my purpose. To mature in this, I need to learn to submit to His Holy Spirit, to appreciate and thus worship Him in an ever-growing way. My salvation in Christ has made me complete in being, but by design, I'm going to grow:

*...till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a **perfect** man, to the measure of the stature of the **fullness of Christ**;*

(Eph 4:13)

The seed is perfect in its design, but it is designed to be more than a seed. Such are we in Christ. I can rest in the understanding that I am complete because of

Jesus in me and I can rest in the whole growth issue because **it's in God's hands**, it's His work. It's His Spirit Who will 'water' me, weed' me, draw me closer and work in me a greater yielding to Him. In this way, I will grow. I'll come to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ who is totally in union, in submission to the Father.

Chapter 21

Let This Sink In

*"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me**; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."*

(Gal 2:20)

You know, after you are genuinely saved, Christ is no longer 'out there' or 'up there' or 'somewhere'. But He is forever IN HERE, in you, and you are IN HIM. Let this really sink in. Union in Christ is one of the most fundamental creeds we have.

Our union with Christ is captured in that simple prepositional phrase, "in Christ," used by Paul in one form or another 164 times. Only as we are "in Christ" are we chosen, called, regenerated, justified, sanctified, redeemed, assured of the resurrection, and given every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:4,7; Rom. 6:5; 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:3). This union with Christ spans space and time— so that Paul can say that the Christian has died with Christ (Rm. 6:1-11; Gal. 2:20); the Christian has been resurrected with Christ (Eph. 2:5f; Col. 3:1f.), the Christian has ascended with Christ to share now in his reign in the heavenly places (Rm. 5:17; Eph. 2:6) and the Christian is destined to share Christ's coming glory with him (Phil 3:20f; 1 Jn. 3:2).

Paul speaks of a body (with Christ as its head), a building (with Christ as its foundation), a marriage (with Christ as the groom), and in Rom. 5 and 1 Cor. 15 Paul develops one other picture of solidarity that sheds light on our relationship with Christ, cosmic in its scope and embracing all humanity—the picture of our union with Adam. "For just as through the disobedience of the one man (Adam), the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man (Jesus Christ), the many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19).

But one final image takes us to the very nature of God himself. Jesus tells us that our relationship with himself is in some sense a reflection of his own relationship with his Father in heaven. We are united to Christ in a way that reflects the mysterious union of the divine persons of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Union with Christ—you could say it is the sum of our salvation. The saving work of Christ is captured in this one simple phrase—by faith we are now **in Christ**. That's our only hope, for to be separate from Christ is to be "without hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). But to be in Christ is to share in all his riches.

William L. Kynes - *Pastor, Senior Fellow for Pastoral Theology, CSLI*

This concept is so important, let's examine a few of the "in Me" scriptures:

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

(John 6:56)

Now understand, His **flesh** represents His **sacrifice**, and His **blood** represents His **atonement**. Taking these into us, eating and drinking if you would, represents **believing** and ultimately **submitting** to their rule, accepting their gift. But wonder of wonders, as we 'take them in', we ourselves are taken into Christ and there we abide/remain.

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

(John 14:20)

As Pastor Kynes pointed out, "We are united to Christ in a way that reflects the mysterious union of the divine persons of the Trinity..." And so, when the Lord first said, "*Let Us make man **in Our image**, according to **Our likeness**..."* (Gen 1:26) It is evident that He was planning for this intimate union. Even Paul spoke of it:

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

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

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

(Eph 5:30-32)

This is something that Satan simply could not and cannot stand. He himself wanted desperately to be "like the Most High" (see Isa 14:14) but he was not created for that, and so he has always hated that mankind was designed for ultimate union with the Godhead by faith.

*"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides **in Me**, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."*

(John 15:5)

When we abide in this union, the 'sap' of His Holy Spirit moves in us, and we bear His fruit abundantly. It's like the parable of the two who doubled their entrusted talents. When we do not abide, we are like the one who buried his talent and ultimately lost it.

*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 17:22,23)

This **glory of God** which He gave to Jesus and which Jesus in turn gave to His disciples is the mysterious agent of unity, for the Spirit uses it to transform us into His image:

*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)

I'll even go so far as to suggest that when the scripture says of Christ, "... *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) He may have pondered our eternal intimate union.

I hope you will let this sink in.

Chapter 22

The Right Side

I can relate to Peter; he was a **'doer'**, a 'get r done' kind of guy. So, he couldn't just sit around waiting for Jesus. I think he was also the kind of guy that could carry a big load, a big load of guilt that is. So, after Christ had risen from the grave and they had made the trek to Galilee, Peter said to his fellows, "I'm going fishing." I mean what else was there to **do** besides wait.

Evidently, the rest of the boys felt the same way because they all jumped into a boat and spent the whole night casting their net and hauling in a whole lot of nothing, nada. Then as the sun begins to rise and the morning breaks a stranger on the shore about a hundred yards off says, "Children, have you any food?"

Their response is simple but honest, "No!"

Now the stranger could have replied, "Of course not. You're **doing** your own thing." But instead, he tells these 'seasoned' fishermen, "Cast the net on the **right side** of the boat, and you will find some."

I confess, I've spent many, many hours fishing and like these guys just coming up with nothing, nada. And at that point, the last thing I'm in the mood for is a stranger telling me where to cast but on the other hand, what have I got to lose?

So, we could spend the rest of this devotion with Peter, but I want to focus on what happened next. Surprisingly, they cast the net yet again but on the right side (starboard) of the little boat and WHAM – no more waiting. The net immediately filled with so many fish that all of them together could not capture the haul.

Jesus made a strange suggestion to His disciples. There was no logical reason why fishing in the morning light would be better than fishing at night. There was no *logical* reason why fishing on one side of the boat would be better than the other side. It wasn't even directly a test of trust in Jesus, because they did not know it was Him until *after* the fish were caught. (Guzik)

OK, now it seems evident that the fish themselves were not the important thing but rather the number of the fish. Some interpreters (like Augustine) thought that because 153 is the sum of numbers 1 to 17, this catch of fish points towards the number 17. **If** that's so, we should consider how the Bible uses this number.

Its first mention, which is usually the most significant is with Joseph:

*Joseph, being **seventeen** years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers.*

(Gen 37:2)

Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers and brought to Egypt when he was 17. He spent approximately 13 years in Egypt, serving Potiphar, being imprisoned, and finally being released and promoted to a position of power by Pharaoh. At the age of 30, he was raised up out of prison and appointed over all of Egypt.

Joseph's story in Egypt, particularly his rise to power and subsequent ability to provide for his family during famine, is often seen as a type or prefiguration of Jesus Christ. Joseph's suffering, betrayal by his brothers, and eventual forgiveness and service are seen as mirroring aspects of Jesus' life, including his suffering, death, and resurrection.

It is also significant that after Joseph's resurrection out of the pit of prison so to speak, the family of Jacob was eventually bound in Egypt for some 400 years. In like manner, after Jesus' resurrection out of the pit of hell, God's attention and grace was upon the church while the Jews were eventually 'bound' by the world for some two thousand years. At the conclusion of both of these bondages, it is Joshua/Jesus (same name) who led (and will lead) the Jews into the Promise Land.

So it **could** be that the specificity of 153 fish was a prophetic type of what Christ planned for both His Church and His people as portrayed in the life of Joseph and his family.

And why specifically the **right** side? Why did the stranger say it had to be on the **right side** or **right hand** of the boat? I suggest that it was yet another indicator of Who they were listening to for these words are frequently used to indicate God's Son:

*Let Your hand be upon the man of Your **right hand**,
Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself.*

(Psa 80:17)

*The **right hand** of the LORD is exalted;
The **right hand** of the LORD does valiantly.*

(Psa 118:16)

*Fear not, for I am with you;
Be not dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you,
Yes, I will help you,
I will uphold you with My righteous **right hand**.'*

(Isa 41:10)

Now John says that he wrote his gospel to help those who didn't see the resurrected Christ to believe in Him and in the first twenty chapters we learn of some seven miraculous signs presented for that purpose. But then he adds chapter twenty-one wherein he presents the risen Lord as a humble servant who cooks fish and bread on the shore and ministers healing to Peter's self-condemnation.

It seems to be presented for a different purpose. If the linkage to Joseph and the bondage of Israel in Egypt is the intended foreshadow of God's plan for His people from Christ's resurrection until His return, it would be like Him saying to them, "**Wait for Me. I'm not finished with you even though, like Peter, you've denied Me.**"

He will come and **all Israel will be saved!** The net did not and will not break.

Chapter 23

Choosing to Love

*"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; **abide in My love.***

*"If you keep My **commandments**, you will **abide in My love**, just as I have kept My Father's **commandments** and **abide in His love.***

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

*"This is My **commandment**, that you **love one another as I have loved you.***

*"**Greater love** has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.*

*"You are My friends if you do whatever I **command** you.*

"No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

*"These things I **command** you, that you **love one another.***

(John 15:9-17)

Few passages are so emphatic – five mentions of **commands** and six of **love**. Jesus had just said:

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser."

And:

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

(John 15:1,5)

So clearly, to abide in Him is at least partly to heed/obey His command and the "much fruit" is **all about love**. But think about this – we are commanded, not encouraged or asked or suggested – commanded, to love. It's like the 'Great Commandment' of the Old Testament.

Now, some of you may be scratching your head, thinking 'I can understand a command to sit or stand or do some sort of work, but a command to love? How does that work?'

First or all, you must understand that this love is the godly **agape** love that you can **choose** to exhibit. It's not the romantic or 'feel-good' emotion. Second, it is something that **God initiates**, we receive, and can **choose** to reflect both back to Him and to others:

*We love Him **because He first loved us.***

(1 John 4:19)

So, God initiates this love. He starts it. And then He commands us to make our own right choice – to choose to embrace that love, submit to that glorious love and by the power/gifting of the Holy Spirit (see Gal 5:22,23) shine it outward to others.

Yes, fundamentally, **God's love through us is a choice, our choice, our response.** It's His love, His power, but our response. And as if to amplify this point, Jesus told the guys, "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you.*" That is, this choosing ability should never go to our heads or be taken for granted for we only get to choose God's love **because He first chose us.**

This is **not** about salvation. This divine gift from Christ of agape love is what **empowers** us to **minister** to His sheep. That's what Jesus made clear to Peter after His resurrection on the shore of Galilee:

*So, when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, **do you love Me** more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "**Feed My lambs.**"*

*He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, **do you love Me?**" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "**Tend My sheep.**"*

*He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "**Feed My sheep.**"*

(John 21:15-17)

But there's more to understand; it's not as 'simple' as it sounds. Oh, it can be if you are trusting and fully submitted to God's Spirit, but there is an enemy who will fight you and try to influence your choosing, just as in the garden of Eden. Now, he cannot win this battle, but if you choose, like Eve, to **listen** to his drivel and whine, that is, if you make a poor choice, God will wait on you to learn to ignore his lies and **trust His Son.** Again, we're **not** talking salvation – that's a forever settled deal once you placed your heart in Christ's care. This is **ministry.** This is fruit-bearing. This is about you learning to trust in Jesus moment by moment and to continually choose to obey His Word.

So, will you keep Christ's command? Will you choose to love (agape) God and your family in Christ? If so, Jesus said that you will abide (remain) in His love.

It's **not** how you feel. It's **not** emotional. This love is not romantic. It is the most powerful love of all; the love that accompanied Jesus to the cross and empowered Him to say, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." This is the essence of Almighty God for God is Love. This is the fruit of His Spirit. This is what makes eternal life, eternal **life.**

If you're saved, He is in you and you in Him. Join Him in living in and through you. Submit to His will to love Him and others. God created us to love, serve, minister and fellowship. Choose love, choose life, choose Him always.

Chapter 24

Home!

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

(John 14:23)

The implications of this verse are staggering. If you love Christ and keep His word, you'll be loved by God Almighty and both the Father and Son will come to you and make a home with you. Think of that! No camp out. Not a visit. But a permanent residence, a home or dwelling.

Jesus told us:

"In my Father's house are many dwellings."

(John 14:2)

Combine that with His previous statement:

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

(John 14:20)

This is the perfect union. As believers, we are all at home in Him. And He is in us.

This is to know God's love perfectly, to know His Life fully, to enjoy Him unboundedly, to trust Him completely, to be made 'in His image' eternally.

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)

Trust me on this – this is **not** religion. This is not a matter of knowledge or rule-keeping or propriety or even an inspiration. This wipes out any and all your fantasies about heaven or eternal life or 'Christian kumbaya'. You don't know Christ yet like you will know Christ:

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

(1 Cor 13:12)

Understanding what this verse really means can supercharge your walk in Christ, increase your faith. Not only will you anticipate His appearing with sincerity, but you'll rejoice presently.

So, meditate on it. Ask the Lord to open your heart to its significance. Study it, share it. **Trust Him.**

Chapter 25

Signs

*This again is the second **sign** Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.*

(John 4:54)

A nobleman came to Jesus from another town and begged Him to heal his son. In response, Christ spoke the word for healing. The next day, the nobleman got the news of the results and asked when it happened:

*So, the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives." And he himself **believed**, and his whole household.*

(John 4:55)

Signs have been a part of God's communication with man for a long time. The scriptures tell us:

*Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for **signs** and seasons, and for days and years;*

(Gen 1:14)

Which was poignantly fulfilled with the wise men and Christ:

"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

(Mat 2:2)

The rainbow in the sky after the Noahic flood God called a sign. The circumcision of Abraham and all his descendants was termed a sign, the virgin birth of Jesus was called a sign.

Fundamentally, signs give us direction, warning or important information. And to the Jews, signs have been especially valuable:

*For Jews request a **sign**, and Greeks seek after wisdom;*

(1 Cor 1:22)

Ironically, despite all the miraculous healings and deliverances Christ performed, many Jews simply didn't notice:

*So, the Jews answered and said to Him, "What **sign** do You show to us, since You do these things?"*

(John 2:18)

We started with the Lord's second sign above. His first sign though, was not a healing but a different kind of blessing:

And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!"

*This beginning of **signs** Jesus did in Cana of Galilee and manifested His glory; and His disciples **believed** in Him.*

(John 2:10, 11)

As you may notice, some signs are given to individuals, others for specific groups, and yet others for large groups or generations:

*And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, He began to say, "This is an evil **generation**. It seeks a **sign**, and **no sign** will be given to it except the **sign** of Jonah the prophet.*

(Luke 11:29)

And we should note that all signs given by God are intended to generate trust in Him:

*And truly Jesus did many other **signs** in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that **believing** you may have life in His name.*

(John 20:30,31)

But the great deceiver, Satan through his antichrist, will use signs to turn people away from God and toward himself:

*He performs great **signs**, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those **signs** which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.*

(Rev 13:13,14)

*Then the beast (antichrist) was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked **signs** in his presence, by which he **deceived** those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.*

(Rev 19:20)

So, God wants us to be alert to His signs and to discard the 'signs' of the evil one. God's signs, intended for us, nurture trust in Him. For the ungodly, they are warnings of impending doom that are rejected:

*But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, **did not repent** of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.*

(Rev 9:20)

So, open the eyes of your inner being and take heed to God's signs personally and in the greater context. The 'signs of the times' are all around us.

Chapter 26

New Commandment

From the days of Moses and the giving of the Law until Jesus there was one great commandment. Christ told a man who inquired of the same:

*Jesus said to him, "You shall **love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**"*

"This is the first and great commandment.

*"And the second is like it: 'You shall **love your neighbor as yourself.**'*

*"On these two commandments hang all the **Law** and the Prophets."*

(Mat 22:37-40)

And as you may already know, it was an impossible command for men to obey. People can give 'lip-service' to it but no one without the help of the Holy Spirit can love God that way, or one's neighbor. Mankind simply could not (and cannot) keep the Law, so **Jesus** fulfilled it and set it aside:

*For, on the one hand, there is a **setting aside of a former commandment** because of its weakness and uselessness*

(Heb 7:18)

Because of its **weakness** and **unprofitableness**: In its weakness and unprofitableness, the law made nothing perfect. The law does a great job of setting God's perfect **standard**, but it does not give the **power** to keep that standard.

The law provides expert diagnosis of our sin problem, which is absolutely essential. But the law **does not provide the cure** to our sin problem. Only Jesus can save us from our sin problem. -- Guzik

But then the Lord gave a new command:

*"A new commandment I give to you, that you **love one another**, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."*

(John 13:34)

"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you."

(John 15:12)

It wasn't God setting aside His command to love Him supremely and just love your neighbor. Rather, it was about receiving, by faith, His gracious gift of love in Jesus and consequently the power of His Holy Spirit as a necessary precursor. John put it this way:

*And this is His commandment: that we should **believe (trust)** on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and **love one another**, as He gave us commandment.*

(1 John 3:23)

Yes, it is God's gift, His Spirit, that gives us the power to trust and to Love:

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

(Rom 5:5)

So of course, we are still to love God supremely, but the commandment alone couldn't do it in us. The same was true of all the Law, even circumcision:

*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision (that is, the Law) avails anything, but **faith (trust) working through love.***

(Gal 5:6)

This verse also tells us what does matter... faith working through love. You have faith? Wonderful; but it must be faith working through love. If your faith doesn't *function*, it isn't real faith. If it doesn't *function* through love, it isn't real faith. But your love alone isn't enough; your love must also have faith: an **abiding trust** in Jesus and what He did for us. –
Guzik/Dickey

So, in short, the fulfillment of God's great Command comes not through any human effort or formula or even doctrine. It's God's Spirit which you can ask for and expect:

*"If you then, being evil, know how to **give** good gifts to your children, **how much more** will your heavenly Father **give** the **Holy Spirit** to those who **ask** Him!"*

(Luke 11:13)

Chapter 27

Noah and Lot

*"And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man:
"They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the
day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.
"Likewise, as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought,
they sold, they planted, they built;
"but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from
heaven and destroyed them all.
"Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.*

(Luke 17:26-30)

Christ used two examples for us to discern the coming of the Son of Man. Noah and Lot. Specifically, the days of Noah and the days of Lot. They both have something in common and they also have important differences. Let's consider both of them and what it means for us.

First, what did they share in common? Both of them were called righteous by the Lord (see Gen 7:1 and 2 Pet 2:7). Both of them had families and both of them along with their families were delivered miraculously by God from catastrophe. Both of them were ostracized by the society in which they lived, and both showed their desperate need for God's grace and mercy (see Gen 9:20-27 and Gen 19:30-36).

For both of them, God's judgement on the society came suddenly and the populace was clueless. And in both instances, the judgement on the society "destroyed them all".

But now, what about the differences? We can note differences in the scriptures that describe the 'days of Noah' and the 'days of Lot' and we can note the distinctions between them in the verses above in which Jesus instructed His followers.

We can see that the society in which Noah lived before the catastrophe was filled with sexual amorality and ubiquitous violence:

*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)

*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)

Lot's society in Sodom had become so perverse that the men craved to have sex with the angels that came to save him. (see Gen 19:5) In addition, they had become so wealthy that they were filled with pride, laziness and lost all compassion:

"Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy."

(Eze 16:49)

Now, what about the opening verses? What are the distinctions, and do they have any relevance to us? First, for Noah's days, Christ focused on the **marital relations** which is 'code' if you would, for sex. For Lot's days, Jesus alluded to their **business dealings**.

We should also note that Noah was saved in the **midst** of judgement whereas Lot was saved **out** of judgement.

So why did Christ use the two men and two judgements along with their similarities and distinctions? I'll suggest that it is because there will be two groups of people, God's people, who will be saved from or in the midst of catastrophe in the last days.

Who are these two groups? One group will be snatched up when Christ comes for His bride, that is the church:

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed-- in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

(1Cor 15:51-53)

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus, we shall always be with the Lord.

(1 Thes 4:16,17)

With them, the Holy Spirit be taken out of the way and will cease restraining evil in this world:

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.

(2Thes 2:7)

Christ warned this second group:

"Likewise, as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built;"

(Luke 17:28)

And He added:

"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. (See also Rev 3:3)

*"For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to **escape** all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."*

(Luke 21:34-36)

The second group is 'born' soon after the first group is taken. This is pictured in Revelation 7:

*Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."
And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the **children of Israel** were **sealed**:*

(Rev 7:2-4)

Note: "children of Israel" means **children of Israel** and "sealed" means anointed or empowered with the **Holy Spirit**.

Yes, after the dispensation of the "church age" is concluded, God's attention returns to His chosen people. And as the Apostle Paul wrote:

*For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.
And so, all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;
For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."
Concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sake but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.
For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*

(Rom 11:26-29)

Indeed, God is faithful and will save His people even in the midst of Tribulation – His anointed remnant will become a massive harvest of souls for immediately following their "sealing", we read:

*After these things I looked, and behold, **a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"
All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen."
Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?"
And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So, he said to me, "These are the ones **who come out of the great tribulation** and washed their robes and made them **white in the blood of the Lamb**.*

(Rev 7:9-14)

So, there you have it – Lot, representing the mostly gentile church is symbolic of the first group and Noah, representing the children of Israel remnant and their proselytes is symbolic of the second group. Of course, you might think that we've got the groups reversed since Christ's warning mentions Noah first and Lot second. However, Jesus also told us in His parable of the workers in the vineyard:

"So, the last will be first, and the first last."

(Mat 20:16)

Chapter 28

The Struggle With Status

*Then little children were brought to Him that He might put [His] hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them.
But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."*

(Mat 19:13,14)

If you do a study of the topic of "child" or "children" in the Old Testament, something stands out – at least it begins to after several hours. 'Kids back then had no cred'. It's amazing how little mention there is of notable children. Of course, there are the few notable exceptions like Moses and Samuel but only because they became notable adults.

Jesus was different. To the contrary, one of the few times He actually got angry was when the disciples attempted to keep the little children away from Him. And when He spoke of children, He said things like:

*"Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a **little child** will by no means enter it."*

(Mark 10:15)

*and said to them, "Whoever receives this little **child** in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great."*

(Luke 9:48)

*"Take heed that you do not despise one of these **little ones**, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven."*

(Mat 18:10)

"In his ministry, as it is recorded in the NT, Christ has several great experiences with children. It is amazing that He not only blessed them, He used them as an example for adults who were desiring to enter the kingdom of heaven. How ironic that the lowest subjects in a society would be honored with such respect, and even by Jesus Himself! I thoroughly enjoy studying about the way that Christ overturned the traditional views of the day and totally blew the minds of his listeners. I can only imagine the confusion of the disciples as Jesus used a little kid in their midst as a description of who is the most important in heaven, or the anger of the Pharisees at Jesus' words about the futility of their religious prayers."

"Jesus blessed the children in Mark 10 not because of anything they had done; not because they knew the Law or because they fasted and offered sacrifices, but because of their simple hearts. What an example for us! We cannot enter the kingdom of heaven without the simple faith that is pure and not complex in nature."

"The elements that come so naturally to us, adults, such as worry and attachment to possessions, are unnatural for little kids. It is a challenge to live out this sermon that Jesus preached, but perhaps it is because we lack the characteristic of dependence that comes so easy to children. In a culture that honors individuality and independence, it is so difficult to humble ourselves to become like weak, dependent children, but it is with our Heavenly Father's help that it can become possible." -- Maryana Misula

After all, children were considered to hold the lowest status in society in the ancient world (Barton and Muddiman 907). Instead of conforming to this societal norm, however, Jesus contradicted the disciples' expectations and became angry at his followers for not allowing the children to come to Him.

"Okay, so what was Yeshua talking about here? Well, it was about social status and not about mythical childlike qualities. Children had no legal rights and no honor status of their own to speak of. In general, children were neither seen nor heard and stayed at home with their mothers until the sons were old enough to work and the daughters were old enough to marry. They weren't out playing kick the can—for more reasons than just the obvious."

"You have to be like this little guy. You have to be willing to be nothing. You must be willing to have zero status in this world because my Kingdom isn't about exalting the rulers of this world, but in giving dignity and life to the least of these. Heck, why do you even think I was spending time with you guys? Because of your innate leadership abilities, warrior skills, and education? Don't you get it yet? I am not interested in what the world values and what the world sees in people. I am interested in the people themselves."

"That is the verse in all those "become like a child" passages that gets lost in all our idealism. Humbling ourselves like a child, becoming nothing the way a child was nothing in the ancient world, precious only to his own family members. But again, we have these romantic ideas about childlike faith, childlike innocence, childlike honesty."

"Children weren't like they are today, all full of ideas about their rights and armed with the phone number to social services if they get spanked after going at the side of their parents' new car with lava rocks, but I don't want to think about that right now."

"Like children in the ancient world, we must consider ourselves to be so lowly and socially insignificant that we will not dare get all prideful and huffy and puffy when people oppose us, ridicule us, or walk over us. A child would depend on his father to take care of any slights to the family—and so must we. It was the father in the ancient world who had all the respect and standing and responsibility to protect the family members and not the children." – quotes from Tyler Dawn Rosenquist, the Ancient Bridge

I've been a pastor, and I know a good number of very godly pastors. It is, however, my observation that some if not many ministers are fundamentally concerned about their **status** – status among the congregation, status in the community, status amongst their peers. And this concern influences their relationship with the Lord, the flock and those who would benefit from their ministry.

Now, I could say, oh what's the big deal. I mean people are naturally status oriented, right? Does Jesus honestly expect believers to live-out Mark 10:15?

I think the answer is **Yes**.

Chapter 29

Can't Touch This!

*Then Jesus put out His hand and **touched** him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*

(Mat 8:3)

*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.*

(Mark 1:41,42)

*Then He put out His hand and **touched** him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately the leprosy left him.*

(Luke 5:13)

This incident was deemed so important by the Holy Spirit that it is recorded in all three of the synoptic Gospels. (One of twenty-one such miracles.)

Now, Jesus healed other lepers but His methodology with this man is very important. The Lord had just come down from the mountain where He had preached the Beatitudes, Salt and Light, and many other weighty lessons when this poor man, probably clothed in rags, approached Him, worshipped Him and said with desperate hope in His lonely heart, "If you are willing, You can make me clean."

Jesus did not hesitate. The stench did not deter Him; the filth did not stall Him. He did not lecture the man for failing to cover his mouth and cry "unclean!" He did not back away or cringe in disgust.

Jesus did not in any way retreat nor protect His purity but rather reached forward and touched the man. He **touched** Him. Did you get that? **He touched him!**

Now, other people touched Jesus – Mary wiped His feet with her hair, John laid his head on Christ's chest, Mary Magdalene clung to His feet upon His resurrection, Peter grabbed His hand while sinking under the waves. One woman, sick for twelve years just touched the hem (tassel) of His garment while in a large crowd and Christ said she had touched Him.

But with this disfigured man, carrying a disease that would seemingly have made Jesus the Son of God, the spotless Lamb of God unclean, Christ did not hesitate. You see, His purity was not of the flesh. His inner being was perfectly pure and clean before Father God. Nothing physical could taint that. The devil had tried to stain Him in the wilderness and failed.

So, Jesus took on himself the sickness He saw and shared with this man the power of His own purity and the man was cleansed:

*"He Himself took **our infirmities**
And bore **our sicknesses.**"*

(Mat 8:17, Isa 53:4)

This is so powerful when you consider how often and terribly **we all** fail and fall short of God's perfection but in humble surrender to God's indwelling Spirit we also find "cleansing from all unrighteousness". (1 John 1:9)

So, touch is an interesting topic. It was a **part** of the first 'mistake' of mankind:

"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.'"

(Gen 3:3 -- Eve speaking to the serpent).

Note, **God** said nothing about not touching the tree.

When a woman was having her menstrual period, she was considered unclean and she was not allowed to touch anything holy. (see Lev 12:4) And how ironic in contrast to this story that it was Satan who challenged God to 'touch' Job saying that he would curse Him (Job 1:11 and 2:5).

The Apostle Paul reminded the church in Corinth what God had said concerning their moral conduct in that ungodly city:

*Do not be **unequally yoked** together with unbelievers...*

"Come out from among them

And be separate, says the Lord.

Do not touch what is unclean,

And I will receive you."

(2 Cor 6:14,17, Isaiah 52:11; Ezekiel 20:34, 41)

Jesus touched the blind, the deaf, the mute, but although He healed other lepers by His word, this is the only time we know of in which He touched a leper even though cleansing the leper was one of the six attributes He cited for validation of His ministry. (Mat 11:5)

So, you can see that it was indeed a big deal that Jesus touched this man. Consider that he had probably not been touched by anyone for as long as he had the disease. He had likely forgotten what that kindness even felt like. In all likelihood, his family and friends, kept far away and people generally scattered when he approached.

But this was God's Son, the One Who showed us the character, the person of the Father – He did not hesitate to touch the leper, take the disease, carry the sin and impurity, heal, and take that horrible darkness to hell with His divine purity intact, perfectly intact.

Someday, if you ever feel like you've made a horrible mess, that you are surely as unclean as a leper's rags, remember the Son of God. Remember that when you're saved, you are IN HIM and His purity is unphased by your failures. Remember His touch, remember His kindness. And you can tell Satan, "You can't touch this! I'm His!"

Chapter 30

What Do They See?

Before the age of earth, they witnessed the creation of the cosmos both seen and unseen. They saw how the Almighty created, nurtured and ruled all things. They beheld His indescribable beauty and light, His wonderful kindness and power, His glory. This and much, much more they experienced and they witnessed, for untold eons in an environment without time – a spiritual existence.

They beheld the discovery of Lucifer's sickness, sin, and his utter demise to become Satan, the deceiver and destroyer. They watched around a third of their fellows become ensnared and enslaved to him.

They watched God's patience and mercy.

They saw God's beautiful creation become corrupted and completely formless with darkness everywhere, turbulent seas covering all. They viewed from 'front row seats' the redemptive, creative power of the triune God as He made the earth new.

They watched God's patience and mercy.

Then with the creation of mankind, they observed the beginning of the execution of God's plan for redemption and reconciliation. They watched the Father, the Word and the Spirit make man physically in the image of the Godhead. A new species, designed for fellowship with the Almighty. They saw Adam and Eve listen to the destroyer and break faith with God, they saw the terrible devolution of mankind into violence darkness and death.

They saw the flicker of holy light with Enoch who walked with God, the crushing dearth when evil angels left their first estate and took 'wives' on earth to toxify the entire race of human beings.

They may have cheered with the advent of the "one who comforts" – Noah; and watched with intensity as God shut him in the ark. They learned how sin leads to death in many ways and brings catastrophe.

Then God continued His redemption plan when He chose one man from a place called Ur and led him from there to Haran and then to the land that He promised to give him. They watched the Lord make surprising choices and make additional outlandish promises to Isaac, Jacob and then wildly unexpected promotions to Joseph and then Moses.

They watched God's patience and mercy.

They saw Him birth, nurture and develop a separate nation intended to display God's character to the world but which perpetually failed to do so. Over and over and over, the Lord sent His prophets, kings, and servants to rescue them from the brink, but they chose to head over the brink. He disciplined them, scattered them, regathered them, reassured them, and all the while the angels watched.

They watched God's patience and mercy.

Then came the time established from before the beginning. God's messenger brought the promise of the long, long desired Savior. He placed Himself in a frail, human body and was born to a young maiden, Mary, a virgin. He lived His life in a perfect manner, without sin and at the right time began to teach about God, demonstrating God's character with kindness, holiness, love and holy power. The heavenly host saw Him suffer and die a most cruel death rejected by His own people, while accepting the weight, the horrible burden of ALL our sin, forsaken by the Father, crushed and condemned to hell where He took all the hellish darkness He carried for us and dumped it there.

They watched God's judgement **on Himself**.

Then they saw God raise His servant, His Son, Jesus Christ, from the grave and exalt Him to His own right side and with that they watched the birth of a Bride, a new spiritual nation living with the Spirit of God within each member. They observed the faithfulness and faithlessness of this new nation and learned that God's grace and love never fail, never fail. This is why the Apostle Paul wrote:

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what the fellowship of the mystery is, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;

*to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known **by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,***

(Eph 3:8-10)

God *wants* the angels to **look** in on what He does in the church, and the idea is that the angels are bending over with intense interest and **desire** to learn. -- Guzik

I'm convinced that it is **not about us**, it's about God. Oh, they may be interested in us but the eternal lessons they desire are all on the **holy** character of their Creator, the Almighty.

The main idea behind *holiness* is not moral purity but it is the idea of "*apartness*." The idea is that God is *separate*, different from His creation, both in His essential nature and in the perfection of His attributes. But instead of building a wall around His apartness, God calls us to come to Him and share His apartness. He says to us, "**Be holy, for I am holy.**" -- Guzik

Thus, how God deals with the Bride (mankind made in His image) demonstrates His perfect attributes and is forever fascinating to all the heavenly host.

Chapter 31

Many More Things to Say

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who **has blessed** us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He **chose** us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having **predestined** us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He **made** us accepted in the Beloved.*

*In Him we **have** redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He **made** to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He **purposed** in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him.*

*In Him also we have **obtained** an inheritance, being **predestined** according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.*

(Eph 1:3-14)

For hundreds of years, there's been much debate on the issue of predestination but that is **not** my intent herein. I do take great comfort in the repeated use of the **past tense** verbs I've highlighted. That's because God is not a gambler – he's not asserting something based upon a hunch or a prediction.

God is a Spirit and lives in the spiritual realm; it's dynamics are totally foreign to us so consequently we read verses like the ones above and say, "God knows the end from the beginning." Or "God has foreknowledge."

That's because those explanations are the only things that make sense to our limited minds. You see, God is far greater than we have the ability to imagine. He's not a soothsayer; He's not looking forward in time. He's not just knowing all things; all things exist in and because of Him. He uses past tense because in Him, they are past tense. He chose whom He chose before the

creation of the earth. He exists in past, present and future at the same 'time' because for Him, there is no time.

Believers are chosen by God, and they are chosen **before** they *have done* anything or *have been* anything for God. ...The reasons for God's choosing are not capricious, nor are they random. Though they are past our finding out, we know that they are altogether wise and good, but the reasons are all in Him, not in us. His choosing is *according to the good pleasure of His will...* For believers, Jesus is not a judge, but the One in whom we have an inheritance. – Guzik (emphasis mine)

Now, "*In Him we have redemption...*" is not past tense but rather present tense and I'll call it 'eternal present tense' -- that's because it's NOT outside of Christ but rather IN Him and He is eternal.

With all that, don't be too concerned if you're kinda lost. Jesus told His disciples:

"I still have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth;"

(John 16:12,13)

What He was saying is that He had things to share that were just too heavy for them but that His Spirit would guide (lead the way) into all the truth. i.e. it's a **journey**. This is like a 'life verse' for me. Of course, I would like 'McKnowledge' or 'McSpirituality' – but "all the truth" doesn't come that way. To the contrary, I expect that it, that is the journey, will never end.

Chapter 32

Many More Things - Part 2

*To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which **from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God** who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known **by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places**, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,*

(Eph 3:8-11)

God wants to reveal this wisdom to the church. Yet in the big picture, God doesn't use the angels to reveal His wisdom to the saints, but He does use the saints to reveal His wisdom to the angelic beings, both faithful and fallen angels. This reminds us that we are **called for something far greater than our own individual salvation and sanctification**. We are called to be the means by which God teaches the universe a lesson, and a beautiful lesson.

We are surrounded by invisible spiritual beings, and they intently look upon us. Here, Paul draws back the invisible curtain that hides these beings just as Elisha prayed at Dothan, *LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see* ([2 Kings 6:17](#)). These angelic beings see us perfectly and know us far better than we know them. -- Guzik

"What then have they to learn *from us*? Ah, they have to learn something which makes them watch us with wonder and with awe. They see in us indeed all our weakness, and all our sin. But they see a nature which, wrecked by itself, was yet made in the image of their God and ours. And they see this God at work upon that wreck to produce results not only wonderful in themselves but doubly wonderful because of the conditions." (Moule)

"In his immortality, never touched by one drop of our cold river, it is instructive to him beyond all our thought to see his God triumphing over pain and death in some sufferer in the fire of martyrdom, or in the torture of cancer, or in the shipwreck, or just in the silent awe of any form of our departure from the body... They see these fallen and mortal beings, this Community of the lost and saved, not only bearing and doing for God here on earth, but spiritually present with Him in the Holy of Holies above." (Moule)

Sometimes Christians get the crazy idea that God saved them and works in their life because they are somehow such great people. The angels see right through this. We

might believe that it is because of us; the angels know better. We may think our lives are small and insignificant; the angels know better. We may doubt our high standing, seating in heavenly places; the angels see this spiritual reality with eyes wide open. – Guzik

Beyond this, they witness the power and value of God's love. They see that because of God's love in and through us, for unlike the angels, we are graciously united in one with Him and they witness that God chooses to **make His home with us**:

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

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

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

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

(John 14:20-23)

Do you think God is glorified by your successes? Your goodness, your righteousness, your wisdom? It's a subtle, sneaky thing and yet that's kind of what Job thought. God spoke to him:

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

Then adorn yourself with majesty and splendor, And array yourself with glory and beauty.

Disperse the rage of your wrath; Look on everyone who is proud and humble him. Look on everyone who is proud, and bring him low; Tread down the wicked in their place.

Hide them in the dust together, Bind their faces in hidden darkness.

Then I will also confess to you That your own right hand can save you.

(Job 40:9-14)

Or perhaps it's the other way around – you may think that you've failed miserably, that you're a mess, or that you're too insignificant for God's attention – like dust on the scales.

Either way, you're caught up in self-righteousness. Essentially, you're thinking you're the one who can judge yourself. And you figure that God's love has limits, after all. Job faced this realization about himself.

Then Job answered the LORD and said:

"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.

"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 42:1-3,5,6)

Yes, the principalities and powers in the heavens will learn lessons from our Holy Savior as He works in and through us, loving us forever.

Chapter 33

Warming at the Enemy's Fire

Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this Man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not."

Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself.

(John 18:17,18)

Only a couple of hours earlier, Peter had vowed, "*Even if I have to die with **You**, I will not **deny You!***" Yep, emotions get us in trouble sometimes. They are flippant, fragile, they rise, they crash and much of the time they are not really truthful. What we **feel** is generally a slippery path to tread.

That's because the human heart is like a swamp. Intense feelings can be utterly empty of follow through. Many, if not most of the people who "go to the altar" because of an emotional response to a call leave with a sense of dutiful response but are essentially unchanged because you cannot become a 'new creature' spiritually because of something **you did**. It is always because of what God does. Just ask Saul, stunned and blind, laying on the ground, late for his appointment in Damascus.

Of course, God doesn't treat us all the same way, but Peter in our verse above is a perfect example of noble intentions but with no power to follow through. I've been there; how about you? One moment, he's slashing his enemies (ineptly) with a sword and the next, he's warming himself at their fire, lying about his relationship with Jesus. Really, he pictures our whole human race.

With his last denial, Jesus looked at him and Peter wept bitterly – he wasn't the man he wanted to be, brave, noble, full of integrity. He was an emotional man, filled with emotional energy. He didn't stumble because of Jesus, He stumbled because of his failure. Christ didn't 'fail' him, he failed himself. How many believers do the same thing. They don't measure up to some personal standard labelled "Me". Too many are caught up in what they think is a noble pursuit of excellence spiritually but in reality they are simply self-obsessed, **trying** to be like Christ, like God.

However, the only one in the Bible who asserted that obsession was Satan:

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

(Isa 14:14)

Jesus knew Peter and his emotionally charged character, which btw did not disqualify him. But He knew it would lead his disciple to stumble so He said:

*"Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.
But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."*

(Lu 22:31,32)

I suspect that it was his shame which prevented Him from fully returning until on the shore of Galilee Jesus ministered to him His three challenging questions. Loving Jesus meant, and still means, humble obedience to His will.

But is that obedience accomplished through trying harder? No. It's obedience born out of love, **God's love** in you. That means you simply need to trust God to live in and through you – that's His work:

*Then they said to Him, "What shall **we do**, that **we** may work the works of God?"
Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that
you **believe** (trust) in Him whom He sent."*

(John 6:28,29)

Whenever it dawns on you that though you're **trying** harder but actually just warming yourself by the enemy's fire, remember what Peter learned. Remember Christ's love. Remember this life, called Christianity, is NOT about you, your reputation, your glory, your 'ministry', your efforts. It's simply a matter of trusting obedience to His will.

Chapter 34

Heavenly and Holy

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

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

(John 3:11-12)

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

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

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

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

(John 14:21-23)

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

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

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

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

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

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

(2 Cor 1:22)

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

(Eph 1:13b,14)

God's Holy Spirit is present in us but that's not all. There's more to come. For that reason, I'm so looking forward to the marriage of the Lamb to the church (Rev 19:7) which will fulfill the mystery of which Paul spoke:

*For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.
"For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,
and the two shall become one flesh."
This is a great mystery, but I speak **concerning Christ and the church.***

(Eph 5:32)

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

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

(Gen 1:26)

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

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

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

Heavenly things indeed!

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

Chapter 35

Torrents

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

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

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

(John 7:37-39)

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

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

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

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

(V1,2)

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

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

(V3)

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

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

(V4)

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

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

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

(V5)

So, after the fourth set of 1000 cubits, the river is over the head of the prophet. He is not longer 'in control' but must swim and go with the flow. I suggest that this could picture the believer being fully submitted, being in **unity with** the river, the living waters.

And I'll suggest a prophetic picture for the Jewish people as well. Cubits can be representative of years in some passages such as Joshua 3:4. In like manner, this passage in Ezekiel mentions 4000 cubits followed by a full immersion in the living waters of the Holy Spirit. Since it has been about 4000 years since the call of Abram unto today and since we read of a holy anointing seal (the Holy Spirit) coming upon the 144,000 Jews in Revelation 7:3-8, this prophecy **could be** pointing to them.

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

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

(1 Cor 3:16)

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

(1 Cor 6:19)

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

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

(V8,9a)

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

(V12)

Living waters indeed!

Chapter 36

Life Food

*Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. "For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives **life** to the world."*

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

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

(John 6:32-35)

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

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

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

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

(John 4:13-15)

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

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

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

(John 4:29)

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

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

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

(John 20:31)

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

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

(John 6:52)

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

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

(John 6:56)

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

(John 14:20)

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

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

(John 6:47,48)

Selah.

Chapter 37

Burning Hearts

*Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.
Then their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.
And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"*

(Luke 24:30-32)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Today's churches are at least in some manner teaching their congregants the scriptures, but like Laodicea they are turning out only tepid hearts, not burning ones. Jesus is talked about, but He is not revealed. Why? What's the difference? After Jesus' encounter, these two disciples hurried back

to Jerusalem to share the news. After today's 'encounter' at church, the common response is to hurry off to Sunday brunch or the football game.

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

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

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

(Psa 39:3,7)

Chapter 38

Where Are the Nine?

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

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

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

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

(Luke 10:21)

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

(John 11:41)

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

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

(Psa 107 – 4X)

*Enter into His gates with **thanksgiving**,
And into His courts with praise.
Be thankful to Him and bless His name.*

(Psa 100:4)

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

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

(Rom 1:21)

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

(John 3:19)

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

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

(Col 3:17)

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

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

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

(Rev 7:11,12)

Chapter 39

Rejoicing Savior

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

(Luke:10:21,22)

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

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

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

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

(Luke 10:22)

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

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

(Mat 16:17)

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

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

(John 6:37)

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

(John 6:44)

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

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

(John 5:19)

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

*"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on **you know Him** and have seen Him."
Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us."
Jesus said to him, "**Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father;** so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*

(John 14:7-9)

So, Jesus rejoiced and not only was that rejoicing unique in the Gospels but also in the whole Bible. Check it out. God just doesn't seem to rejoice, at least **not like Jesus did here**, but there are countless commands and promises for God's people to rejoice. And that's understandable even for a lame-brain like me for you see, Jesus, His only Son was slain from before the beginning:

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

(Rev 13:8)

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

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

(Isa 62:5b)

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

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

(Isa 65:19)

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

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

(Rev 21:9,10)

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

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

(Zeph 3:17)

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

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

(Rev 19:7)

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

Chapter 40

Stumbling Block

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Luke 7:11-19)

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

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

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

- Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14)
- Messiah would inherit an everlasting kingdom (2 Sam. 7:12-13; Psalm 89:29; Isaiah 9:7)
- Messiah would proclaim good news to the poor (Isaiah 61:1; Micah 3:8)
- Messiah would offer physical healing (Isaiah 35:5-6; 42:7-18; 53:5)
- Messiah would ride a donkey (Zechariah 9:9)
- Messiah would be betrayed (Psalm 41:9; Zechariah 11:12-13)
- Messiah would provide atonement for sin (Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Malachi 3:3)
- Messiah would be a suffering servant (Isaiah 53)

And all these things we witnessed in the person of the Son of Man/Son of God, Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospels. But this was a stumbling block of sorts too because although what Jesus did

in fulfillment of these prophecies was clearly seen, the freedom from sin that He provided is spiritual first in nature and thus invisible, intangible to flesh and blood.

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

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

(Psa 68:35)

And they were counting on the fulfillment of promises such as:

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

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

"He will rule these nations with an iron scepter and treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty" (Isa. 63:1-6.) He is the Messiah, divinely chosen conqueror of all.

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

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

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

But immediately following this, John the Baptist, tossed the 'wet blanket' on the situation when he sent his own disciples to ask Jesus:

*"Are You the Coming One, or **do we look for another?**"*

(Mat 11:3)

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

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

(1 Cor 1:22-24)

Some got offended by the locals when they didn't receive Him:

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

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

*"For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives **but to save them.**"*

(Luke 9:54-56)

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

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

We must learn the lesson of trust.