

# *Seeds for Good Soil*

J R Dickey

Volume Six

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## Chapter 1

# Tough Crowd

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

(Luke 4:24)

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

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

(Luke 4:14,15)

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

The passage was from Isaiah 61:

*"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,  
Because He has anointed Me  
To preach the gospel to the poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberty to the captives  
And recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;  
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."*

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

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

(Luke 4:22)

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

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

*lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and **none of them was cleansed** except Naaman the Syrian."*

(v 25-27)

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

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

(v 28,29)

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

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

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

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

### **Peter and Paul**

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

### **Andrew**

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

### **Thomas**

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

### **Philip**

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

### **Matthew**

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

## **Bartholomew**

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

## **James**

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

## **Simon, the Zealot**

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

## **Matthias**

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

## **John**

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

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

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

(2 Tim 3:12)

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

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

(Rom 8:35)

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

(Rom 8:37-39)

## Chapter 2

# More Than Wonderful

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

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

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

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

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

(Mark 1:40-45)

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

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

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

(v41)

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

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

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

(Matthew 8:17)

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

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

(Matthew 15:9)

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

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

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

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

(Lev 16:21,22)

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

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

## Chapter 3

# Work and Rest

Work has always been a fundamental part of mankind's existence. Even before sin entered the picture in Eden, God gave Adam a job:

*Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to **tend and keep** it.*

(Gen 2:15)

Then after sin became the reason for Adam and Eve's eviction, God gave Adam another job:

*Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "**Cursed is the ground** for your sake; **In toil** you shall eat of it All the days of your life.*

*Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field.*

***In the sweat of your face** you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you [are], And to dust you shall return."*

(Gen 3:17-19)

And we can take this lesson back to our Creator Himself for it is recorded:

*And on the seventh day God ended **His work** which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.*

(Gen 2:2)

Thus, there is a distinction we need to put forth between God's work and mankind's. At his most basic level, man works because he (or she) lacks. There's a void if you would, and man's lust (i.e. desire) craves to fill it.

God, on the other hand, has no void, nothing is lacking. He is perfect, complete, Holy. So, He works for an entirely different reason. Now interestingly, He took a day of rest from His work but of course, because He is Almighty, He didn't need the rest so clearly, it's a **picture** for us; a **message**. What's the message?

The one thing the religious elite were always up tight about with Jesus was His 'working' on the 'day of rest' the Sabbath. For example:

*The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. For this reason, the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.*

*But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."*

(John 5:15-17)

Was Jesus being rebellious against the very Law He (the "I Am") gave to Moses? Ha! No, not at all. He was illustrating the fundamental truth of His answer, "*My Father has been working until now...*" along with the fundamental reason for this truth, "*it was Jesus who had made him well.*"

Let's review this before we move on. Again, man works (does anything) because he **lacks** and **lusts** to fill his void, and he **rests** because he **tires**. God works (that is, He does good just as in the creation) because **He is Love**, and His 'rest' is a **picture** of the agent of His Love, **Jesus**, through Whom (and in Whom) we must approach God.

*For **we who have believed do enter that rest**, as He has said: "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest,' " although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.*

*There remains therefore a rest for the people of God (the Jews).*

*For he who has entered **His rest** has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.*

(Heb 4:3,9,10)

Moving on. This is NOT a lesson on taking a day off. Let me explain.

In Matthew chapter 11, Jesus gave a huge lesson on works. It begins with John the Baptist inquiring about - not His words - but His works:

*And when John had heard in prison about the **works** of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"*

(Mat 11:2,3)

*Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."*

(Mat 11:4-6)

Christ's works weren't the works John expected. They didn't line up with what he had preached. But Jesus wasn't perturbed. In fact, He gave John a sincere 'At-a-boy':

*"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women **there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven (that is, born again) is greater than he.**"*

(Mat 11:11)

But then, He admonished the people listening, saying that they were like children in a marketplace playing insincere games:

*"For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children."*

(Mat 11:18,19)

Note, that last word, "children", should have been translated "works". So, it should read, "But wisdom is justified by her works."

After this, He tied into the three places where He had done mighty works:

*"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes."*

*"And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day."*

(Mat 11:21,23)

He was leading up to a majestic truth that only those in the kingdom of heaven could understand. These people, sadly including John the B, were focused on the miracles – the visible works. But they were missing the real work of God, the **eternal work**. And so, Jesus finished with this:

*"Come to Me, all you who labor and are **heavy laden**, and I will give you **rest**. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find **rest for your souls**. For My yoke is easy and **My burden is light**."*

(Mat 11:28-30)

You see, He directed their attention to something greater; this is by FAR the greatest work. Why are these people (all people) heavy laden? What burdens are they bearing? Jesus likened them to oxen.

King David spoke of this burden:

*For my iniquities have gone over my head;  
Like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me.*

(Psa 38:4)

Our iniquities were too heavy for us to bear as well. But Christ did the heavy-lifting for all of us:

*Surely, He has **borne** our griefs and **carried** our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has **laid on Him the iniquity of us all**.*

(Isa 53:4-6)

Yes, this eternal work is the seventh day. This is the true Rest, the true Sabbath:

*who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.*

(1 Pet 2:24)

This eternal work of Jesus Christ is the real “rest for our souls” and the reason for our contentment. Hallelujah!

## Chapter 4

# Come to Me

There are a few passages in the Bible that, though short, tell us volumes about the character of the Almighty. Verses like:

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

(Gen 1:1)

Or:

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

(Ex 3:14)

Or:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

*He was in the beginning with God.*

*All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*

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

(John 1:1-4)

But there are a couple in Matthew that you might not have considered:

*"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*

*"For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."*

(Matt 7:7,8)

These presented an 'ah-hah' moment for me as it struck me that they weren't just giving us instruction on persistence or getting 'stuff' or us – they're not primarily about us at all. They tell us something wonderful about God.

You see, in Eden, the serpent tried to convince us that God was holding back, that He was/is distant and kind of 'stingey'. And as with all the devil's lies, the opposite is true which is what these verses in Matthew Seven show us.

Bear in mind that Christ was speaking to His followers. He was describing the Almighty's 'posture' as welcoming and open. "*Ask, and it will be given to you;*" is unqualified. He didn't say "Ask, and if you have enough good works; or Ask, and if your faith is impressive." All He wants is for you to ask. Of course, asking implicitly means there is an expectation that God has what is asked for and that He will hear the petition. No one 'asks the air'.

Now, I did not say that you don't need faith. You do. That's what your asking reveals. You ask with sincerity, confidence and with an unwavering expectation. John wrote:

*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.*

*And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*

(1 John 5:14,15)

"*Seek, and you will find.*" This is simply saying that you need to acknowledge your lack, your need, your desire to find. Christ was saying that Abba is open and will respond to your seeking. He wants you to find Him, to find the glorious gift of Life in Jesus and thus, to find your way home. The heart that seeks is not lazy, not isolated or self-obsessed. Jesus said of Himself:

*"for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."*

(Luke 19:10)

You see, God does not lack, He does not need, but He does love. We are the ones who rebelled against Him and separated ourselves from Him. His love compelled Him to send His Son to seek and save us.

"*Knock and it will be opened to you.*" There's only one thing you knock on – a door; and the only reason you knock is for the door to be opened. Guess what? There is literally only One Door:

*"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."*

(John 10:9)

Now, some of you might be thinking, 'What about heaven? What about the door to God's kingdom?'

Good news! That's Jesus! He said:

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

(John 14:6)

And He did not say, 'you gotta knock hard' or 'you gotta have your money-bag with you'. He guaranteed, "*Knock, and it will be opened to you.*" Just open your heart and hear God's Spirit:

*"**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)

Yes, contrary to the devil's lie in Eden, God is responsive to your asking, He is responsive to your seeking and responsive to your knocking. We are conditioned by the deceptive delusion of this fallen world to expect the opposite, to believe what Satan believes – the lie. But the Truth is right there in our verses, the unconditional Truth:

*"For **everyone** who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."*

(Mat 7:8)

Asking, seeking, knocking – this is the VIP invitation to know the One Who's inviting.

## Chapter 5

### More

Want to be rich? That's a simple and direct question. Some would say, "Sure." And some would say, "OK, maybe. What's the catch?" Some might simply shake the head, 'No thanks'.

Jesus was not rich and did not pursue wealth. He told one wanna-be:

*"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."*

(Mat 8:20, Lu 9:58)

Another wanna-be thought he was doing all things well, but Jesus told him:

*So, when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."*

*But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.*

*And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"*

(Lu 18:22-24)

And that should raise our antennas really high because there is no greater 'mantra', ethic, pursuit, desire, ideal in this country than wealth. Everyone seeks it, from pastors to pewsters, from atheists to 'the faithful'.

The Bible calls this idol "mammon" which simply means wealth. Security, pleasure, temporary happiness, and other things come with mammon but there are also plenty of traps such as pride, obsession, fear, distrust and more which capture and torture and ultimately strangle the human soul/heart.

Sadly, the contemporary church is enchanted with mammon – increased with 'goods' but are in reality "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked..." In fact, many of the otherwise most godly people (including pastors) are addicted to wealth just like narcotics.

Jesus taught His disciples:

*"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You **cannot** serve God and mammon."*

*"Therefore, do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."*

(Mat 6:24,31-33)

Be careful how you read this. Jesus did not include wealth here; He spoke of food, drink and clothing. He did not advocate poverty but...

It comes down to where do you want your 'treasure'? You can have it here or you can have it in heaven:

*"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."*

(Mat 6:19,20)

Let me strongly encourage you – make your Savior your treasure. Make your love for Him your Life.

## Chapter 6

# Audience of One

*"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, **to be seen by them.***

(Mat 6:1)

*"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they **may be seen by men.***

(Mat 6:5)

*"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they **may appear to men** to be fasting."*

(Mat 6:16)

*...your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly*

(Mat 6:4,6,18)

Your heart is singular. By that, I mean you cannot **serve** two masters.

Now, you may disagree and think, 'I don't serve any master.' But that simply says that you are your own master or a slave to your self, your ego, your fleshly pride and thus your sin. Most, if not all Christians are caught in this dynamic tension.

If you are truly born again, your inner being deeply desires to revel in the unity of the 'new creature' with your Maker. However, by God's will, you are temporarily 'housed' or, as Paul puts it, 'clothed' in a corpse and it still listens to its master, the evil one.

Paul had an 'ah-hah' moment of revelation and wrote:

*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 6:4)

*But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you **became slaves of righteousness.***

(Rom 6:17,18)

*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.***

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

(Rom 7:18,19)

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

(Rom 7:21,22)

*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 7:24,25)

Yes, even Paul acknowledged this personal dynamic, and friends, no one 'beats the rap'. He said that though he wanted to do good, he couldn't make it happen on his own and the evil he hated, he wound up practicing.

And this is why it's especially important for us as believers to heed Christ's words in Matthew Six above and which He finished with:

*"No one can serve two masters...You cannot serve God and mammon."*

(Mat 6:24)

What He illustrated is that "to be seen by men" shows a commitment to the opinions of men while "in secret" shows a commitment to the viewpoint of the Father. Serving, at least from the heart, requires commitment. Your heart cannot be committed to two masters.

So, was Paul saying that he was committed to two? No, not at all. His commitment from the inner being was to God but he acknowledged that the frustrating commitment of his flesh was to sin. And he also said "that flesh is dead":

*And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*

(Rom 8:10)

That's why he thanked God "through" (but translated 53 times "**for**") Jesus Christ because we cannot solve or overcome this dilemma – only Jesus could and did! The simple, singular choice is to trust in Jesus, always trust Him, trust His goodness, trust His Blood, trust His amazing Grace. In unity and identification with Him, there is no condemnation, only love.

You don't need to "be seen by men". The only audience that matters is the audience of One.

## Chapter 7

# Knowing Him

You can know **how** or **who** or you can know **when** or **what** or **about** or you can know **something** or **nothing** or **for certain** or **the truth** or that you know that you know... there are a lot of '**knows**', different types of **knowing** but when it comes to your Creator, only one matters.

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

(John 17:3)

So put to the side your books on theology, at least for now. Put aside your sermon notes and tapes (or DVDs). God sent His Son to give us a different kind of **understanding**. Not theology, not philosophy, but a new "way of thinking and feeling".

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

(1 John 5:20)

You see, this word for "know" as in "know You" or "know Him" in Greek is pronounced "ghin-oce'-ko" and is different from "know" as in "know that" or know all those other things. This second type of know is pronounced "i'-do".

The first know is a **relational** know. In fact, in the Bible it can refer to the sexual union of a man and woman. It is to know someone by **experience** – to truly know them. The second know is based upon the word "to see" and is purely mental.

Now, this is important to "know" (i-do, pun intended) because to "i-do" Christ or God is the basis of **religion**. On the other hand, to "ghin-oce'-ko" Christ or God is the basis of our mutual **faith** and our **salvation**, our **eternal life**. Please understand, "i-do" can help bridge to "ghin-oce'-ko" but it can never displace it. Seeing Jesus, knowing about Jesus is the proverbial step in the right direction but it can never substitute for actually knowing Him.

So, the way to know Jesus is to be **one with Him**, to surrender your will to Him and "be saved", to be born again or literally "procreated from on high". Nicodemus was a theologian and "teacher of Israel". He came to Jesus wanting to know (i-do) more, but Jesus used his desire to "know about" as a bridge to introduce to him to becoming a new creature.

Alas Nicodemus, the confusion was driving him nuts. His whole life had been spent pursuing the wisdom of the elders and the knowledge of the scriptures. He knew the traditions better than

most Pharisees. In fact, he was known as the teacher of Israel. And for most of his life, he'd been quite confident about his knowledge.

But then came this itinerant rabbi doing these truly amazing signs. He gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, new limbs to the lame. Demons even fled at his word. Yet it was his word that troubled Nicodemus. His teachings confused him for though the signs were undoubtedly from God, his words didn't seem to jive with the traditions of the elders.

And so, here he was, approaching the 'Light' under cover of darkness. As he neared, he came to Jesus with sincere desire and doubt.

*"Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."*

(John 3:2)

But Jesus knew immediately the source of Nic's dilemma. And John presented it in his gospel because the poor Pharisee is not alone. We can all wear his sandals so to speak. Most of us at some time or another get caught in the same mess. (i.e. "i-do" verses "ghin-occe'-ko")

Jesus answered and said to him:

*"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

(John 3:3)

So let me explain a bit about procreation and the awesome parallel we see spiritually when someone is "born again" or literally "procreated from on high". I've spoken before on this wonderful process and if you heard it, you may remember the part on gestation which precedes expulsion.

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

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

(Luke 1:35)

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

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

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

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

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

(John 3:6-8)

What Jesus was referring to here is the conclusion of the spiritual gestation. Yes, "Born of the Spirit" is the key to knowing (ghin-oc'e'-ko) Him. Recall, before He died on the cross and rose again, Jesus told His disciples:

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

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

(John 14:19,20)

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

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

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

(John 20:21,22)

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

Knowing Jesus, knowing God, starts when you are spiritually inseminated "born of the Spirit". And this process of gestation continues until you are expelled from your 'womb' into the presence of **your Maker**.

Of course, your spiritual gestation period is all in God's control – it may be a day or many decades. But when you are "expelled" from the flesh, born into Heaven, what a joyous freedom you'll realize as a Child of God.

*For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.*

*We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.*

(2 Cor 5:4,5,8)

## Chapter 8

# Humility and Heaven

*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)

I've been thinking a lot about this subject. When you dig into the meaning of the word used here – sufferings, it is explained as:

“that which one suffers or has suffered; also the afflictions which Christians must undergo in behalf of the same cause **which Christ patiently endured.**”

And when you consider what Christ endured, your focus, of course, is the cross:

*And being found in appearance as a man, He **humbled** Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*

(Phi 2:8)

And concerning us, Jesus said:

*Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*

(Mat 16:24)

Which is recorded in all three synoptic gospels. Hmmm

And when I think of patient endurance for a lifetime, I think of the wilderness and 40 years of wandering in it. Moses and the Jewish nation endured this – why? Well, we know that at first, they failed to obey God and take the new land. They chickened out. But the wandering wasn't punishment, it was purposeful:

*“And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to **humble you** and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.”*

*“who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might **humble you** and that He might test you, **to do you good in the end—**”*

(Deut 8:2,16)

They were tested and Christ was tested:

*For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses but was in all points tempted (tested) as we are, yet without sin.*

(Heb 4:15)

They endured humbling and Christ endured the humbling of being found as a man and going to the cross. In both cases, God's 'end-game' was good:

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

(Heb 12:2)

Christ was **honored** with His exaltation to the right hand of the Almighty.

The scripture tells us:

*...**before honor is humility.***

(Pro 15:33; 18:12)

So, here's my point. Paul exhorted us:

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

(Col 3:12)

We "put on" humility, honestly and without reservation because it is Christ in us. Paul put it this way:

*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 6:4)

And so, speaking of His Seed in our hearts:

*It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in **glory**. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in **power.***

(1 Cor 15:43)

Yes! God's 'end-game' is indeed **good!**

*The LORD **lifts up** the **humble**;*

(Psa 147:6)

*He **will beautify the humble** with salvation.*

(Psa 149:4)

*The **humble** also shall **increase their joy** in the LORD,*

(Isa 29:19)

*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)

## Chapter 9

# HOW to Pray

Perhaps you've been in a church where it was said, "Now, let's pray the 'Our Father'" and everyone recited in unison the prayer found in Matthew 6 and Luke 11. In my youth, I said this prayer each night. It's a wonderful and perfect prayer to be sure. But I'm inclined to think that religion has 'sanitized' it by making it rote.

In Matthew six, before teaching the disciples this prayer, He prefaced it with:

*"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that **they may be seen** by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, **go into your room**, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, **do not use vain repetitions** as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore, do not be like them." (Mat 6:5-8a)*

In essence, He was telling them that their prayers should be absolutely sincere, personal and never for show:

*"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father **in spirit and truth**; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."*

(John 4:23,24)

And because I think the church, that is, all of us, is going to be doing a lot more prayer in the coming days, I thought it prudent to revisit the 'model prayer', not to pray it better but to understand His teaching and pray in the manner that He taught.

*"This, then, is **how you should pray**:"* Some translations says "the manner"; the point being it is **HOW**, not what you should pray. (See Matt 6:9-13)

**"Our Father..."** In coming before God, the first thing HE wants US to remember is that He is our **Father**. This is NOT a reminder for Him but for us. He is a true, a loving, a faithful Father, our Abba Father and ever will be. Although the world has indeed corrupted the image of fatherhood in its moral meltdown, God is unchanged – He's compassionate, capable and purely interested in our good. It was Jesus Who emphasized this and perfectly represented our Father. He doesn't want us to view Him as some separate, distant deity but Someone Who loves us dearly.

**"...Who art in heaven..."** There is a heaven and there is a hell. We are in neither place as yet, but ALL of us one day will be. God is in heaven, what the scriptures refer to as the "third heaven" – the sky and the cosmos being the first and second respectively. That is, God is above all, above all the mess of a sinful and cursed creation. At the same time, He is in you by way of His Holy Spirit. Jesus spoke of this when He said:

*"A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me.  
Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that **I am in My  
Father, and you in Me, and I in you.**"*

(John 14:19,20)

He Himself is untouched by sin nor can He be. Perfectly pure and forever holy, holy, holy, His character is not like ours – He is loving to the uttermost, all-knowing, all-powerful and all-present. Yes, even though He is in heaven, He is **also in the midst** of His creation everywhere – there is nowhere you can go that He will not be with you.

**"...hallowed be Thy name."** Gayle Erwin wrote a wonderful work entitled "The YHWH Style" in which he reminds us that from a biblical standpoint that "name" is synonymous with "nature". Now, hallowed comes from the Greek word pronounced 'hagios' meaning 'a most holy thing'. Therefore, here we are reminded that in addition to remembering He is our Father, we are to ponder that His nature/name is most **holy**. In a day in which the concept of holiness is so poorly understood, one might ask, 'Why is this so important?'

Being separate from all sin, special, above all – these attributes are a part of holiness certainly, but by no means do they constitute even the 'tip of the iceberg' so to speak. In the Bible, we note that the quality which moves all of heaven, even the highest created beings, to worship God is **His holiness**. Describing it with mere words is like trying to impress an ant with the Mona Lisa. Suffice it to say that this prayer leads us as believers to esteem His very nature as infinitely higher than our own and expresses the desire for the whole world to have **the same awe**.

**"Thy kingdom come..."** Someone once told me that this really says. "Come, Thy kingdom." Now, His kingdom has come in a measure through the spread of the church, but it is indeed in a limited measure. One day, God's ways will fill all creation and there will be a day in which sin and its rotten fruit are long gone -- no more evil, no more devil or demonic activity, no more sickness, pain, suffering or death. We'll know pleasures forevermore, glorious reunions, justice and truth, grace and mercy, overflowing joy, perfect peace, endless love – these wonderful things will no longer be the topic of sermons but revealed in God and in us forever as He reigns.

**"Thy will be done,..."** We sometimes need to be reminded that God's will applies not only to the means but to the end as well. God's will was the cross of Calvary (the means) as well as cosmic reconciliation (the 'end'). Tough 'medicine' for a tough situation but yielding the most tender of outcomes. Submitting to God's will for 'the means' means trusting that His will for the outcome is always worth it. And it is. Jesus submitted to the cross because of the joy set before Him on the other side. So, is His will as to 'the means' always a hard pill to swallow? No, but don't be surprised or even disappointed when it is.

**"...on earth as it is in heaven."** Did you know, heaven is coming to earth? For some radical and unfathomable reason, God will establish His very throne in our proximity. His heavenly city will descend close to earth and not only will He rule and reign our own once wayward planet but all of creation as well – from here!

*Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will*

*dwelt with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."*

(Rev 21:2-3)

Heaven is perfect because of God. His presence makes it heaven and one day, earth will be a part of it. What better way for Him to demonstrate who He is than to turn the devil's own stomping grounds into His paradise. Only He can do such a thing. Only God can clean up this mess – and that's exactly what He's going to do. Earth will be as heaven! Wow!

**"Give us this day our daily bread..."** This request applies to all our daily necessity. We must never look to our Father as grudgingly coughing up some scraps of stale crackers as we beg. Remember, He's the One who is giving us this **model** prayer in the first place. If He has told us to ask, you can be sure it is because He loves to give. Note, however, the **daily** part – 'oh, if we could just get ahead a little – you know, put aside a little stash so we didn't have to DAILY come to Him.' That's exactly what our flesh wants because every day you don't depend on God, you'll drift from Him. **This 'daily' business is more important than the provision itself.** Those who are in the greatest sense of material security, if they depart from the daily seeking of God, are rather in the greatest spiritual peril. Yet, we tend to see it the other way – we just want the stuff. We want to be stuffed with the stuff. Like a bunch of 'turkeys' we gobble, gobble, gobble and then want to kick back and check in with God next week or when the 'pantry' gets low. This applies to both material and spiritual needs. But daily-ness is the recipe.

**"And forgive us our debts..."** We owe God big time! We are in HUGE debt. Frankly we owe Him everything everywhere forever. And yet we are bankrupt. We can never pay for the forgiveness, the redemption, the eternal life He has provided. We can never ever, EVER compensate Him for His Son. Every sincere Christian acknowledges this – our sin has been paid for in full, by Christ's blood. You can't sincerely ask God to cancel your debt if you don't first accept that it exists. When I came to Christ, it was as the result of a 'search for meaning and truth'. God, however, loved me too much to leave me in that ignorance. It was after years of wallowing in the gutters of lust and misguided depravity (even as a 'Christian') that I realized how desperately I needed His forgiveness and redemption. It wasn't until then that I really knew I had a debt **and a Redeemer. There is no humility without humiliation.** And here's the kicker... Jesus said, *"to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."* (Luke 7:47) It wasn't until I began to fathom the extent of my forgiveness that I began to truly love my Lord. True, love is the driver behind obedience (John 14:15) but love is driven itself by the appreciation of mercy and grace.

**"...as we forgive our debtors..."** Oh-oh, look out for that "as". That little conjunction in the Greek means "and" or "also" or "indeed". Forgiveness is not really optional for the believer. The sense of forgiveness we enjoy in this life is directly related to the forgiveness we extend to others. Now, I **don't** believe this is a '**conditional addendum**' on the contract of the cross so to speak. If you have truly accepted the gift of salvation provided for at Calvary, you are covered by Christ's own righteousness – in God's view, you are as righteous as Jesus Himself. Your place in heaven is secure.

However, your **peace** on earth or **sense of rightness** with God will be impacted by a hard heart toward others who frankly owe you immeasurably less than you owe God. And He does that purposefully – you cannot fully embody the love of God or a love for God if your heart is hardened by unforgiveness. Many of you know the story of Corrie ten Boom who was undoubtedly one of the dearest saints to preach the gospel. You remember how she shared her testimony of surviving Ravensbruck, a torturous prison camp in WWII where her sister was brutally treated and eventually died. One day after the war, as she spoke to a crowd about the Lord, she was approached by a man whose presence made her shake – the very prison guard who so harshly treated she and her dear sister. He had come to Christ himself and now asked for her forgiveness. Corrie recalled that she

could not forgive him, she could not extend her hand to even touch his. However, she prayed for God's strength to do His will and slowly reached out her hand in greeting. As their hands were joined, she sensed a supernatural quality of divine forgiveness overflowing in her heart. Like her, you cannot escape it. Quit trying. Forgive that person. Do it now!

**"Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."** The word temptation literally means a test. This is interesting for although the Bible clearly teaches that God tests our hearts (Psa 7:9; 11:5; Pro 17:3; 1 Thes 2:4) and that He will not let us be tested beyond what we can bear (1 Cor 10:13), Christ seems to teach us to pray 'Don't do it, Lord'. Why? He says it again in Matt 26:41. Is Jesus saying something contrary to what God desires for us? No way.

There are at least a couple of reasons – first, the humble, broken person is not necessarily afraid of God's tests but is absolutely aware of the seriousness of them. Jesus is affirming the posture of the humble servant. In the garden of Gethsemane, He told the sleepy Peter, James and John *"the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

Next, there are unnecessary tests or trials that come to us when we are disobedient and sinful. Paul wrote:

*"But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."*

(1 Tim 6:9)

Jesus told us to pray that God would lead us away from such circumstances. That is made evident when he completes the sentence with "but deliver us from evil.(lit. the evil one)" God's tests may be difficult, but they are always for our good.

Also, it could be that there is an eschatological application in this phrase for Jesus said concerning the trying tribulation events of the last days:

*"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 21:36)

**"For Thine is the kingdom,..."** "Kingdom" here is "royal power" not to be confused with an actual kingdom but rather **the right or authority to rule** over a kingdom. It may seem like Satan still rules our world, but after Calvary that simply has not been the case. The devil has no more authority to rule. He's a 'squatter'.

When Christ rose from the dead, the devil's goose was cooked if you would. What he connived to obtain from Adam and Eve, he lost through the just redemption of our world. It was a traumatic thing in heaven you know, at least for John. He observed it as recorded in Revelation:

*And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?"*

*And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. So, I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."*

*And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been*

*slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.*

(Rev 5:1-7)

What is this scroll? I agree with those who claim that it's likely either the divine inheritance and/or the deed to the planet. In the days this scripture was written such scrolls were used for these purposes. They had seals and notations linked to obligations or liens. You'll note John cried at first for no man could redeem earth from Satan's brutal rule for if in the set time a redeemer could not be found, Jewish law passed the right of ownership permanently to the one temporarily possessing it. (see Lev 25:30) Can you imagine a world ruled forever by Satan?? Talk about hell on earth! **But Christ's is the scroll, Christ's is the kingdom!! He alone has the right to rule our world.**

**"...and the power..."** Christ is no powerless monarch. He not only has the right and authority to rule, He has the power – unmatched and limitless. Jesus said in prayer to the Father:

*"...You have given him (the Son of God) power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as You have given him."*

(John 17:2)

*"And (after He had risen from the dead) Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All power is given to me in heaven and in earth."*

(Matt 28:18)

Wow, just think – total power combined with infinite love, wisdom, a perfectly pure heart and the desire to do good!

**"...and the glory..."** Although glory can mean a brightness or brilliance, it's probably more accurately understood here to mean a judgment, opinion or view. Because Christ has the right, authority and power to rule, His judgment or view is all that matters, really. Right? So why be hung up on man's opinions or what the devil tells you about yourself. In the NT, this word translated often as 'glory' always refers to "a good opinion concerning one, resulting in praise, honour, and glory" (Strong's). If you're His child, you can depend upon His judgment, His view of you as being good.

**"...forever."** That's a long time. For nearly two thousand years, believers have lifted up this prayer and many, many like it. But two millennia is a comparatively nonexistent wisp or vapor of time in the context of eternity. So, let's pray it like we mean it! Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!

Remember, this prayer is a **model**, it's **how** we should pray. Consider it a divine guide on interacting with our Creator. May your prayers be "acceptable":

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
Be acceptable in Your sight,  
O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.*

(Psa 19:14)

## Chapter 10

# Blessed Expectation

John was the one Gospel writer who recorded Christ's emphasis about His commandments:

*"If you love Me, **keep My commandments**. ...*

*"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."*

(John 14:15,21)

*"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.*

(John 15:10)

And thus, we all have the first inclination to think He was referring to:

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

(John 13:34)

Or:

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

(John 15:12)

And all that is great, but the vast majority of pastors and pewsters ignore the one command He gave to His servants concerning His return:

*"Take heed, **watch** and pray; for you do not know when the time is.*

*"[It is] like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and **commanded the doorkeeper to watch**.*

*"**Watch** therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming-- in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning--*

*"And what I say to you, **I say to all: Watch!**"*

(Mark 13:33-37)

I suspect that's because after 2000 years or so it is much easier to preach on loving, much more reasonable to believe and obey the 'love command'. After all, watching implies an expectation and requires trust that the expectation will be fulfilled.

The contemporary church, being 'infected' with myriad desires – desire for comfort, desire for notoriety, desire for safety, etc. is generally sleepy from religion and scared to really trust God for Christ's return. If you talk about it, you get yawns. Much of the church itself has scoffed at those who maintain that sincere expectation. But we should expect that because Peter told us:

*knowing this first: that **scoffers will come in the last days**, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."*

(2 Pet 3:3,4)

And Jesus warned us:

*"Watch therefore,... lest, coming suddenly, he find **you** sleeping."*

(Mark 13:35a,36)

Now, watching is **not** (as some have done) climbing on your roof and shouting at an asteroid. It is **not** at all a work of the flesh. It is a **heart-attitude** which is the result of abundant **grace** – trusting in Christ's truthfulness. Watching simply means that you're always **ready** because Christ's return and the rapture is **imminent**.

There are four aspects to imminence. They are:

- **Certainty:**

For an event to be imminent, it must be certain to occur.

- **Any-Moment Return:**

Imminence means that Christ could return at any time, and that there's no specific list of signs or events that must happen beforehand.

- **Emphasis on Readiness:**

This belief serves as a powerful motivator for us as Christians to live holy lives, remain alert, and be prepared for the day of Christ's return.

- **Constant Watchfulness:**

Rather than focusing on predicting a specific time, our focus is on living each day as if it could be the day of His coming, a concept emphasized by Jesus in passages like Mark 13:32-33.

Now, some of you may be thinking, 'But I know scriptures that say,':

*The sun shall be turned into darkness,  
And the moon into blood,  
**Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.***

(Joel 2:28, Acts 2:20)

But that and other similar verses are speaking of the tribulation time, the 70<sup>th</sup> 'week' of Daniel's prophecy in Daniel chapter nine. And in any event, Jesus told us:

*"But of that day and hour **no one knows**, not even the angels of heaven, **but My Father only**. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking,*

*marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ... "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. ... "Therefore you also **be ready**, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*

(Mat 24:36-39, 42, 44)

So, let's keep all Christ's commands. Love God and love one another and watch for His imminent return with trust and faith.

*He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly (without delay, suddenly)." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

(Rev 22:20)

## Chapter 11

# The Issue of Sin

A friend of mine asked, what's the point of the millennial reign of Christ here on earth if afterwards, when Satan is freed from his prison, the whole earth rejects the righteous rule of God's Son and joins with Satan in rebellion? And by the way, if they've enjoyed the benefits of this righteous rule, why reject it after a thousand years?

Good questions. The answer, though simple, has several 'facets' or aspects. First, the people still living after the Great Tribulation will be those who stubbornly held on to their adoration of evil. The scripture tells us:

*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)

They are not victors, not even sane. Their world is basically destroyed but God mercifully allows them to survive – barely. So, as they crawl out of their holes, they don't shake their fists at the Holy One. They limp and look for mercy. But their hearts are still black with SIN.

Next, their survival and continuance throughout the millennium are God's visual aid for the cosmos. SIN is not something that allows for rehabilitation. You cannot be healed from SIN. You see, SIN is the offense of Iniquity or Evil. SIN is the expression of that terribly dark disease. SIN destroys its host 100 percent of the time.

And sadly, SIN is wired into the heart of all mankind. Satan is also bound by it for he was found filled with iniquity:

*"You were the seal of perfection,  
Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.  
You were in Eden, the garden of God;  
Every precious stone was your covering:  
The sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold.  
The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created.  
"You were the anointed cherub who covers;  
I established you;  
You were on the holy mountain of God;  
You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.  
You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created,*

***Till iniquity was found in you.*** (Eze 28:12b-15)

Next, the millennium and the ensuing rebellion prove something. There is no 'getting better' from SIN; there's no amount of discipline or 'growth' that can drive it from you.

The ONLY way to be rid of its stench and blackness is to surrender all of it to Christ and absolutely trust Him. You see, He took the penalty for ALL of it that we surrender by faith on the cross of Calvary. He literally took all of it on Himself:

*who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.*

(1Pet 2:24)

Next, you might have thought that the root of mankind's problems is Satan. Nope. I mean, he is indeed our enemy. He shows up and the world again is rebellious to God, but **the root is iniquity (evil)** which produces SIN which produces death. Sure, Satan uses it against us, but he's also bound by it.

So, the millennium is God's final visual aid and lesson to all the cosmos on the whole issue of SIN and also on the glorious eternal character of our Creator.

## Chapter 12

# Coming Good

What are the attributes of God? The Bible is specific about a few and many of us are nodding heads when we hear, "God is love." I like to point out that there are what I call two categories of attributes – the What and the Who.

And when we 'know' Him, both are important but the Who attributes, and one in particular, are my emphasis right now. As Paul winds up his masterful book to the Romans, he also seems to spotlight this attribute:

*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)

Simply put, **hope is the expectation of coming good**. It's eternal because He's eternal and it's wonderful because He's wonderful. And it has several key characteristics:

**It's a Response to God's Nature:** It is a gift from God that enables believers to trust Him, even in difficult circumstances, leading to peace and power through the Holy Spirit. Worldly hope is often based on uncertain desires, like hoping for a lottery win or good weather.

**It's a Confident Expectation:** Unlike a simple wish, biblical hope implies a firm belief and certain expectation that a desired future good will be fulfilled.

**It's Grounded in Faith:** Hope is inseparable from faith, as it relies on believing God's word and the reality of His past faithfulness and future promises.

**It's a Joyful Anticipation:** This confident expectation gives rise to an irrepressible joy and a positive outlook for the future.

**It's Rooted in God:** True biblical hope finds its source and foundation in God's character, His redemptive power, and His unwavering promises.

So, let's consider what the scripture has to say to us about hope so that we can know, love and submit to our God ever more whole heartedly.

God cursed the ground for man's sake (Gen 3:17) and so the creation 'groaned' but Paul explained:

*For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of **Him who subjected it in hope**;*

(Rom 8:20)

So, God Himself had the absolute expectation of coming good because all His work, all His plan is good and absolutely sure.

Abraham is called the father of faith because of his great faith in God but he could also be called the father of hope for the same reason. Speaking of Abraham, the apostle wrote:

*who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be."*

(Rom 4:18)

We are told that "faith is the evidence of things not seen..." (Heb 11:1) and is the "substance of things **hoped** for...". And again, Paul tells us:

*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? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.*

(Rom 8:24,25)

So, hope is not seen but it was embodied in a person:

*Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the **Lord Jesus Christ, our hope**,*

(1 Tim 1:1)

He led the way into the presence of God:

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

(Heb 6:19)

This "anchor", this utterly amazing God-man, Jesus Christ, not only entered that "Presence" but also sent His Spirit into our hearts to provide not simply a 'wishful thinking' hope for eternal life but a living hope with an absolute expectation:

*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,*

(Pet 1:3)

So now each and every one of you who truly believe are a visual aid to creation because "the Hope", by His Spirit lives in you:

**... Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

(Col 1:27)

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

(1 John 3:3)

Just as I've written before, you cannot purify yourself. You cannot make yourself clean – only the blood of Jesus can do that. What this verse is saying is that **it's this Hope**, this **person** in you who believe – **He purifies you just as He is pure**. (See 1 John 1:9) It's having Him in you that purifies you.

So, what does this purification look like? After all, He left us in 'corpses' for a reason – when we yield **to Him**, He leads us **in Him**, to **Hope**, and to **the love of God**:

*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)

I hope you hear me on this. This is NOT religion. Hope does not disappoint.

## Chapter 13

# The Ultimate Choice

It's a truly sobering thought. When you turn away from knowing God, you are inhabited by darkness. And it's not a static possession but a wickedness that corrupts and devolves you ultimately into a tortured oblivion. Romans chapter one explains this condition:

*For since the creation of the world His invisible [attributes] are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, [even] His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 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.*

*Professing to be wise, they became fools and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.*

*Therefore, God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*

*For this reason, God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.*

*Likewise, also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.*

*And even as they did not like to retain God in [their] knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; [they are] whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.*

(Rom 1:20-32)

From the beginning of our world's creation, that is, the six days in Genesis which included mankind, God's divinity and power were clearly displayed and men did absolutely know He was God, but they refused to glorify Him as God and were not thankful.

As a result, their thinking, their minds, their imaginations, became wicked – demonically wicked, and their inner beings became terminally dark. This played out as they insanely worshipped idols made to look like men, birds, beasts, and creeping things.

But the darkness had only begun to devolve for wickedness drew doomed men into self-annihilating perversion. They defiled one another – men with men and women with women, women with demons and so on, so that they no longer regarded the truth of God but adored and served the lies of evil.

We witness this in Cain; we see it in the condition of the world before the great flood and we have record of it in every society from Egypt to Babylon to Rome, even the Jews.

The only thing that countered the devolution was the introduction and spread of the gospel. Wherever to good news sowed its light and life – where Jesus Christ was glorified, men's lives turned away from the corroding darkness.

But there is always a choice and really, it's the ultimate choice – believe God or believe the lie. To believe God is to believe that He took on human flesh, lived a perfect life and died on the cross, carrying the sins of all mankind. Then on the third day He rose again and is now seated on God's right hand.

To believe the lie is to believe Satan as he shrieks, "You will not surely die. God doesn't care about you. Sin is satisfying. Live for you." Every satanic thought and word is a lie and those who have embraced the darkness can't see it. They hate the light, they hate and twist the truth. They are shriveling into oblivion.

And even as you choose light, choose to believe God, you discover that God likewise has chosen you:

*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;*

(1 Pet 2:9)

At every moment, eschew the darkness because:

*You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.*

(1Thes 5:5)

Light is your life:

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

(1 John 1:7)

Take God's lifeline. Let Him pull you out of the flow of darkness that is circling down into the sewage pit of death and hell. Take His outstretched hand, now.

## Chapter 14

# The First Prayer

What took so long??

This one small verse tucked into the end of chapter four of Genesis:

*And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. **Then men began to call on the name of the LORD.***

(Gen 4:26)

Do the math and you'll see that this was 235 years after Adam's creation. It seems to illustrate that mankind was 'gun-shy' so to speak about relating to the Lord. Let's consider what had happened up to this point.

Adam and Eve, and consequently the whole human race, died spiritually which meant that they were separated from God – no connection, no fellowship. They listened to and believed the serpent. Then they were evicted (for their own good) from the Garden of Eden. Because of the poison of sin, they could no longer perceive anything correctly – what was innocent and good looked bad and vice versa. This condition became a permanent part of the human 'genome'.

Cain and Abel, for some reason, attempted to worship the Lord with sacrifices but Cain got it wrong. Maybe they picked that idea up watching Adam, but we don't know as there is no record of Adam ever worshipping. Maybe they were teenagers and thought they'd 'do it better than the folks' and came up with it on their own. Maybe they were instructed by God on what to do and Cain just thought that he'd do it his own way instead. This latter scenario seems to be the case since it's recorded:

*And in the process of time, it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.*

*Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.*

*So, the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? **If you do well, will you not be accepted?** And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."*

(Gen 4:3-7)

But Cain did not rule over it. Rather, it came to pass:

*... when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.*

(Gen 4:8)

Cain was hard-hearted and miserably self-obsessed. Here's what happened next:

*Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"*

*And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground.*

*"So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.*

*"When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth."*

(Gen 4:9-12)

But sin filled Cain had the typical narcissistic victim attitude:

*And Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me."*

(Gen 4:13,14)

So, in review, Adam and Eve were sent out by the Lord; Cain was disciplined by the Lord. And no one called upon the Lord for over 200 years or so – not until Enos (Enosh). Why?

We know from the scriptural record that men were turning, more and more prideful and violent. But Enos came on the scene and then men began to call upon the Lord. Was it something Enos did or was it something he inspired?

The name is important. All names were very significant at this time. Enos is derived from the word for **mortal** or **frail**. Perhaps Enos began to call upon the Lord because he was frail or perhaps his parents called on the Lord for him.

At this time, men typically lived more than 900 years probably because of the water shield around the earth which would have filtered out most if not all cosmic rays from the sun. In any event, mortality or frailty was likely the reason prayer, calling upon the Lord, started up.

When people are young and healthy, there is little thought given to God's presence or our need for Him. But I've been a chaplain in a hospital and believe me, many people want to believe in God's help and forgiveness when they're dying or frail.

As far as we know, no one except Abel had died but "mortality" means "death is inevitable". And when Christ conquered death, he conquered mortality. Thus, Paul wrote:

*But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give **life** to your **mortal** bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.*

(Rom 8:11)

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

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

(1 Cor 15:53,54)

And that reminds me of a story out of Joshua. Moses had died on the mountaintop and left Joshua in charge of the hosts of Israel. The people were camped on the east side of the Jordan getting ready to enter the promised land. Joshua called upon the Lord (just like Enos) and God told him exactly what to do.

He gathered the elders and told them that the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant would lead the way and that all the people would follow:

*Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and they set out from Acacia Grove and came to the Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they crossed over.*

*So it was, **after three days**, that the officers went through the camp; and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it.*

*"Yet there shall be a **space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure.** Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed this way before."*

(Jos 3:1-4)

So, the people were a bit nervous. This was the BIG day. The Jordan river was swollen, overflowing its banks. The name Jordan means "descender" which makes sense since it descends from the Sea of Galilee down to the Dead Sea where nothing, and I mean nothing grows or lives. The Jordan thus typifies Death and/or Sin.

Anyway, Joshua (whose name, BTW, is the same as Jesus) told them what to expect:

*"And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, that **the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off**, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap."*

(Jos 3:13)

And just as he said, the priests carrying the Ark stepped into the Jordan and:

*...the waters which came down from upstream stood still and rose in a heap **very far away** at **Adam**, the city that is beside **Zaretan**.*

(Jos 3:16)

So, you see, the Ark, which represented Jesus entered the Jordan (death, sin) and it was dried up all the way (far away) back to **Adam**. And **Zaretan** comes from the word which means to **pierce** or puncture. It is a picture of the verse on mortality I presented above:

***"Death is swallowed up in victory."***

Indeed, Christ's sacrifice by **piercing** conquered death and His resurrection swallowed it up **all the way back to Adam**.

And the Hebrews passed over dry shod about 2000 cubits (years?) later.

So, something about frail, mortal Enos caused men to call upon the Lord. If their prayers concerned frailty or mortality, they were answered in Christ. For all the reasons they MAY have been 'gun-shy' of the Lord, the real reason was sin and the only way to deal with sin is to call upon the Lord, accept the gracious gift of salvation provided by faith in Jesus Christ.

## Chapter 15

# Like God

*But **godliness** with contentment is great gain.*

(1 Tim 6:6)

*But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow  
after righteousness, **godliness**, faith, love, patience, meekness.*

(1Tim 6:11)

We've been deceived about godliness. To be **like God** is what Satan desired:

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

(Isa 14:14)

And, it is what he tempted Eve with:

*"For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will  
be **like God**, knowing good and evil."*

(Gen 3:5)

And yet, God promised it to the house of David:

*"In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; the one who is  
feeble among them in that day shall be like David, and the house of  
David shall be **like God**, like the Angel of the LORD before them."*

(Zec 12:8)

But the godliness that Paul wrote to Timothy about is **not** being like God but rather having "respect, reverence, or piety" towards God. Big difference.

Yet we still tend to think of godliness as in the form of the serpent's lure. We originally took that bait and we've been hung up on it ever since. As it ingrained itself into our sin-nature, the nature of the flesh, it manifested itself in religion. Consider the Pharisees. In fact, many if not most 'ministries' today are tainted with the 'P problem' – pride and ego. I know many really humble Christian leaders but many also get soaked in the limelight and really like the attention.

You see, I think God views our own desires for godliness based upon our heart attitude. The godliness Paul spoke of and which Jesus manifested was humble, reverent and respectful of the Almighty. On the other hand, the 'godliness' that wants to "be like God" a la Satan is self-elevating; it strokes the ego.

So why the prophecy about the house of David? Because the prophet is saying that one day David's house is going to have the heart of God. Remember, God said of him...

*"And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man **after My own heart**, who will do all My will.'"*

(Acts 13:22, 1 Sam 13:14)

When your heart is humble, like Jesus – in the right place so to speak, God wants you to be like Him to abide in Him, to imitate Him because He abides in you. Paul wrote:

*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*

(1 Cor 11:1)

Satan's heart was corrupted by sin and he, in turn, corrupted mankind with the same so whether someone unsaved does evil or tries to do good, apart from the working of the Holy Spirit, it is tainted with sin.

That's why so many people who hate Christ or are apathetic to Him still want others to consider them 'good'. Many thirst for that self-appreciation as well. It's not that the 'good works' that they may do are wrong or somehow bad, but rather it's that their hearts are dark thus their 'good works merit badges' so to speak can't save them.

For us, as believers to be like God, in fact to be IN God is already the Almighty's end game:

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

(John 14:20)

*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)

So, Satan's words to Eve were an empty promise and completely misleading.

## Chapter 16

# Renewal

*The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.  
And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

(Gen 1:2)

Four of the most used English translations of this verse say, "The earth was wasted..." Others say the earth was formless or without form. The point is that the earth was a chaotic mess, but this stands in apparent contradiction to God's word through Isaiah for in Isa 45:18, all translations say, in effect, that God did **not** make the earth wasted but intended it to be **inhabited**. (The same Hebrew words for wasted and chaos are used in both.)

For example, Young's Literal Translation reads:

*For thus said Jehovah, Creator of heaven, He is God, Former (to mold into a form;  
especially as a potter) of earth, and its Maker,  
He established it -- **not empty** (not wasted or formless)  
He **prepared** it,  
**For inhabiting He formed it:**  
*I am Jehovah, and there is none else.**

Now, many Bible scholars 'poo-poo' the notion of what is commonly called the 'gap theory' saying it isn't in the plain sense Hebrew and doesn't explain the fossilized remains. I don't intend to defend a theory, but it's evident that their 'poo-pooing' is not based on Bible interpretation but prejudice. Understanding ancient Hebrew is not an exact science, but rather a complex, interpretive discipline. As with any translation of ancient languages, it is both an art and a science, relying on methodical analysis but never achieving absolute certainty due to historical and linguistic challenges. Unfortunately, there are those who want to impress with their scholarship and use it to press their bias.

Of course, I'm not the expert in Hebrew – just a student and a student of the scripture for some 53 years so when I see that Isaiah records that Jehovah established the earth NOT empty which means NOT wasted or formless and I read that Moses says of the earth in Gen 1:2 it was indeed wasted, formless and in chaos, I conclude that something happened to the earth that God prepared for inhabiting.

And this observation is consistent with God's way of acting – for just as he created "good" in making a 'new' earth in Genesis in six days, we read that when fallen mankind again makes a mess of everything, God foretells in Isa 65:17:

*"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;  
And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind."*

After all, making a **new** creation is exactly what He's done in each of us who believe in Jesus. We were all 'wasted' in sin and then by God's grace, through our trust in Christ for salvation, we were made suitable for **inhabiting** by His Spirit.

You see, this is the demonstrated character of the God we worship. He doesn't create waste and chaos; rather He delights in bringing goodness and beauty to what is destroyed.

In addition, these same scholars propose that God must have made the earth already with fossils – it's called the 'old earth' theory. They cite that after all, Adam was made fully formed so then an 'old earth' could have been created as well.

But it is not a good practice to interpret the Bible to be alignment with your theory. Rather, use scriptural evidence as your support. For instance, although God made the **first** Adam fully formed, He also made the **last** Adam, Jesus, by impregnating Mary – that is, Christ **grew** to be fully formed.

Now, I have another translation issue in this verse. The word presented as "hovering" or "moved upon" (KJV) doesn't convey what I think is the intent. The ancient Hebrew word means "brooding" and can easily mean "move gently, also cherish, and brood" like a mother bird over its chicks.

What we see is the Holy Spirit **brooding** over the waste and chaos which clearly conveys an emotional attachment, a caring. Hovering or moving upon presents God's Spirit as stoic. That's not the Spirit of Abba, Father.

Worldwide, mankind has made another waste – societies are in a free-fall of failure. Birthrates have plummeted, emotional and mental craziness is rising, traditional values are routinely run down, whole cultures have been homogenized and dissolved. We all see it. So does God.

*It is better to trust in the LORD  
Than to put confidence in man.*

(Psa 118:8)

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding;  
In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.*

(Pro 3:5,6)

## Chapter 17

# The Old Old Story

### *A Lesson for Us and the Angels*

Judging by the style of the Hebrew it uses, some scholars judge Job to be the oldest book of the Old Testament. "Ancient it is beyond all dispute. It probably belongs to the period covered by the book of Genesis; and possibly, to the time of Abraham. Its lesson, therefore, is the oldest lesson we could have; and it takes us back to the first lesson taught in the Bible itself." (Guzik/Bullinger)

"It is fascinating to think that as we open this text we may be faced with the earliest of all written accounts of a human being's relationship with Yahweh, the one true God." (Mason)

Job must deal with the fact that in his life, God does not act the way he always thought God would and should act. In this drama, the Book of Job is not so much a record of solutions and explanations to this problem; it is more a revelation of Job's experience and the answers carried *within* his experience. (Guzik)

*There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil.*

(Job 1:1)

This strong statement of the godliness of Job is important to understanding the rest of the story. Recognizing this righteousness of Job "will save us from the mistake of thinking at any point of those experiences as having their explanation in the man himself. Nor for himself did he suffer. His pains were not penalties for wrongdoing: they were not even chastisements for correction." (Morgan)

One would not know it from the first few verses, but the Book of Job is about an *epic war*. Yet no city is attacked or besieged or conquered; no battles are won or lost; no oceans are sailed, or nations founded, or adventures recorded. The whole conflict happens on an ash heap — virtually a garbage dump — outside a village. It is an epic war, but one of the inner life; a struggle to make sense of some of the deepest questions of life. (Guzik)

The two great themes of the Book of Job, as explained by James, are **the perseverance of Job** and **the end intended by the Lord**, and it is important to learn *both* themes. The end intended by the Lord is God's eternal purpose as revealed in Ephesians 3:10-11 — *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*. God's intended purpose was to use Job to teach angelic beings, especially to teach them about His own spectacular wisdom. (Thanks, Guzik)

Now instead of presenting forty chapters of destruction, death, grief and self-condemnation, let me simplify in hopefully an inoffensive manner. Job's story is about a blameless (note, not sinless) man who righteously serves and worships God. Because of events that transpired in the heavenly realm, he suffered at least four waves of torment.

The first wave was the sudden destruction of all he had as possessions. The second wave was the death of all his children whom he loved (his wife remained, who continued to taunt him to simply curse God and die). The third wave was the disastrous torments to his own body and mind leaving him a pus-oozing unrecognizable heap sulking in an ash-pile. The fourth wave was the confrontation/consolation of his 'friends' who basically condemned him as sinful and in receipt of his justified judgements from God.

At the beginning of his torment, Job's reaction was amazingly humble and righteous but over time, he turned to self-loathing, cursing his own birth. In the end we witness self-righteous defensiveness, but we also see God's forgiveness and graciousness.

**So, what was/is the lesson? What is the epic war all about? Who won, who lost?**

First, we have to understand that this war is not really about Job. Oh, he is in the midst of it and his behavior is on display, but all that he goes through is a vis-aid to demonstrate to the whole created order – spiritual and material - Who the Creator is. Even Satan is a pawn in this epic.

Jesus told us of the devil, that:

*He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.*

(John 8:44)

"Cyril and some others think it is the first murder, that of Abel, that is in view (1 John 3:15), but far more probably it is the introduction of death through the first sin." (Dods/Guzik)

I certainly respect these scholars and their points of view, but it was Cain that killed Abel and Adam that sinned and brought death into our existence. We can point the finger at the serpent just as Eve did for these things, but Jesus said "from the beginning" which prompts me to think of:

*God, 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**, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has **abolished death** and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,*

(2 Tim 8-10)

You see, God abolished death in Christ before time began. But in order to do that, Christ had to die:

*Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might **destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,***

(Heb 2:14)

Thus, in effect, Christ gave His Life for us before time began in order to destroy him who had the power of death. THIS is why the devil was a murderer from the beginning for THIS was the first murder.

Sin turned the being called Lucifer (light bearer, the covering cherub) into the awful, hateful being called Satan (Adversary) and the devil (false accuser, slanderer). At some point, iniquity was "found" in him and changed him:

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

(Ez 28:12)

*You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created,  
Till iniquity was found in you.*

(Ez 28:15)

*You became filled with violence within,*

(Ez 28:16)

It's easy for me to believe that filled with violence, Satan's influence in the heavenlies was to lie about the Almighty, to slander His Holy character. This evidently infected some one-third of the angels.

And this began an epic battle to enlighten the whole of the created order as to the true character of the Almighty. Even in Eden, Satan tried to thwart God's 'vis-aid' by enslaving His image and likeness bearers (mankind).

Of course, this was part of God's master plan for in doing so, Satan forged a 'binding contract' of sorts that required one perfect man to redeem (pay for) the failure of the one sinful man (Adam and his progeny). And we all know how that worked out! (Thank you Jesus!)

Back to Job. God knew Job. But Job didn't know God; not yet. Oh, he knew about God, he feared and revered God but he needed to know God in a way that all the angelic host needed as well.

I suspect that the devil used the same slanderous lies on Eve that he did among the angelic host.

*Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.*

*"For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

(Gen 3:4,5)

First, he said to the woman that God lied to them and followed up with a statement that conveyed, 'God's withholding from you. He doesn't want you to be like Him.'

So, the epic war was spiritual – either to trust God or to try to be like Him. The old trust versus try battle. What God demonstrated to the cosmos through Job was that Job was a truster, but his adversity drove him to turn to his works for justification - trying, trying to be good. Job described how his reputation for wisdom and goodness was *deserved*. He was a man full of good and noble works, especially to the poor and disadvantaged.

Concerning chapter 29: "Not once before this had he pointed to any of his good deeds as evidence of his faith, but rather he had taken his stand squarely upon faith alone and not upon works..." (Mason)

Concerning chapter 30: "Classically there are two ways of soliciting the favor of God. One way is by trying very hard to be very, very good and hoping that God will take notice. The other way is to beg God for His blessing and to refuse to let Him off the hook until He comes

through... It is those who refuse to give up on God (i.e. continue to trust) who end up with His blessing." (Mason)

Concerning chapter 40: Job, speaking from what he felt to be his God-absent agony, longed to contend with God. Yet after God appeared in His love and glory, Job now felt humbled about his previous demand. He rightly felt he was in no place to contend with the Almighty, much less to correct Him or rebuke Him.

We might say that Job fell into the trap of thinking that because he couldn't figure God out, that perhaps God wasn't fair. Yet in this larger section of God's revelation of Himself to Job, God has demonstrated that there are many things that Job doesn't know, and therefore was not a fit judge of God's ways. (Guzik)

Concerning chapter 41: This description of Leviathan – especially at this point – is so like that of Satan, that we may fairly suppose that God here was indicating to Job not only His great might and Job's vulnerability before Satan, but also alluding to Satan's role in Job's great crisis.

Concerning chapter 42: Job said many sad and imprudent things, both in his agonized cry of Job 3 and in the bitter and contentious debate with his friends. At times he doubted the goodness of God and His righteous judgment in the world; at times he doubted if there was any good in this life or in the life beyond. Now Job has come full circle, back to a state of humble contentment with *not knowing* the answers to the questions occasioned by his crisis and his companions.

The most powerful aspect of Job's encounter with God was not primarily what God said, but God's simple, loving, powerful presence with Job that changed him most profoundly.

Herein is the lesson: **God's character, His eternal attributes are ever good, ever trustworthy, ever Holy and perfect. All His creation can trust Him always.**

Herein is the epic war: **It's Try to be like Him vs. Trust Him**

Herein is the winner: **Trust wins!** Jesus settled it on the Cross and proved it at the empty tomb.

## Chapter 18

# Only One

In the beginning, there was One. (John 1:1, 1 John 5:7) Then there were many but the many sang as one. (Job 38:7, Psa 147:4) Then one among the many was no longer one with the many. (Isa 14:12-14, Ez 28:12b-15) And the one wanted to be like the One. (Isa 14:14) So the one was cast out from the many and dragged down some of the many with him. (Rev 12:4a, Ez 28:16, 17)

And there, the fallen one with his other ones caused chaos and destruction. (Gen 1:2a, Isa 45:18) Then the One saw it and created new that which was in chaos and in the process created a new 'species' specifically designed to be in the image and likeness of the One. Of course, the fallen one was furious and hated the new creature.

The One knew what would happen. The new creature stumbled and thus became a slave of the fallen one. At some point, war broke out in the cosmos between the unified ones and the fallen ones. But as planned, when the time was right, the One sent His Only One to the enslaved ones who didn't recognize Him or received Him, and being stirred by the fallen one, killed the Only One who willingly laid down His life.

However, the Only One could not be contained by death, and He rose from the grave. As a result, the enslaved ones who believed in Him became the blessed ones and were set free. They were recreated, clean, new and free. Then the blessed recreated ones became One with the Only One, the Holy One and the Almighty One for they became fully the likeness and image of the One. In addition, they are at home in the One and together became the permanent home of the One.

Boy, that's a lot of ones, right? But the point is that from before time began, God's plan was to unify all His creation in His Only One, His Son. The underlying principle of fallen mankind is separation from God and individual hubris. That principle is a dead end literally.

In contrast, oneness or God's unity is not the loss of identity but rather the participation of all His family in the perfect love and purposes of the One. We will be filled with all the fullness of God, ever increasing, ever loving, ever living. (John 1:16, Eph 1:10, 23, 3:19, 4:23, Col 1:19,20)

## Chapter 19

# The 4-Fold Blessing

- *that He would **grant** you, according to the riches of His glory, to be **strengthened** with might through His Spirit in the **inner man**,*
- *that Christ may **dwell** in your hearts through **faith**;*
- *that you, being rooted and grounded in **love**, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what [is] the width and length and depth and height--to **know** the love of Christ which passes knowledge;*
- *that you may be **filled** with all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:16-19)*

### Part 1 – The Inner Man

The first part of Paul's blessing (actually the Holy Spirit's) to us is that Father God would give us something. It's important to start with this understanding – that it is indeed a gift. And it is not a meager gift. It is according to, or in the measure of, the riches of His glory.

Now glory is generally thought of as a splendor or brilliance, but its primary meaning is a view, opinion or judgement and in the New Testament, it is always a positive view. Of course, this is understandable for when God sees you, He sees His Son Jesus in you.

In other words, this gift is as great as God's opinion about His Son and that greatness cannot be accurately described with words, can it? It's just ...

Anyway, this amazingly HUGE gift is to be strengthened with power (dynamis in the Greek from which we get our word dynamite) BOOM! And specifically, this strength is through or by way of His Spirit and more specifically, this 'BOOM' is in your inner being – it's where He has built you together along with other believers as a dwelling place for the Godhead.

Unlike the strength of the flesh, this power never fades, never grows weak with age. When you are born again, your inner being, the real you is one with God's Spirit, God's Son and God Himself. In fact, the scripture tells us God will bring ALL THINGS together in unity in Jesus:

*that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather **together** in one **all things** in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.*

(Eph 1:10)

So do NOT identify with that rotting corpse, your body, which hangs on to its sin and sinful ways. When you trusted in Christ as your Savior, your redemption, you died with Him and were also raised with Him. You truly are a new creation.

What this power is all about is the ultimate power, but its nature may surprise you. It's the power to **trust** God at all times, at every instant. It's the power to **love** those your flesh doesn't. It's the power to **rest**, to be at **peace**. It's the power to **see** Father God as Abba, Father. It's the power to be in absolute **unity** with God and His family.

This power makes you suitable for Paul's second blessing –

## **Part 2 – Christ's dwelling**

This is **more** than amazing, but if you accept Paul's (actually Christ's) first blessing, you have the power to trust it:

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

(John 14:20)

*And to Judas, (not Iscariot) 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)

Read it again if you missed it – your dwelling is in Christ and His dwelling is in you. This is not someday in the future 'by and by'! It's the moment you first trusted in Jesus as your Savior:

*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,*

(Eph 1:13)

So, understand that this word for dwelling is NOT a tent. It is NOT in any way temporary. It's a permanent residence. And get this, it's not a dwelling that you can measure in square feet or meters. Its dimensions are made for God Himself and how vast is He?

The Bible says that God fills both heaven and earth and that you can't go anywhere that God isn't!

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

(Eph 4:10)

So, by definition, the size of this spiritual dwelling defies description and guess what it's filled with? God. And John tells us:

*And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. **God is love**, and he who **abides in love abides in God, and God in him.***

(1 John 4:16)

So, our wonderous dwelling in and with God is filled with love.

### **Part 3 – Measureless Love**

And that leads us to Paul's third blessing. You see, if you dwell in the midst of measureless love, you are definitely rooted and founded in it. You are one with it/Him. Thus, I expect that we'll spend eternity exploring it/Him in every 'direction'.

I wish the translators had used the more sensible word here, that is, "to eagerly seize" or "to possess" instead of comprehend because we can and will, throughout eternity, eagerly seize and possess this mind-boggling love but we don't have to comprehend it. Paul (or rather the Holy Spirit) tells us it's beyond knowledge.

Now, you might think, 'but he also says that we will "*know the love of Christ*". Yep, but that word for know means to know by **experiencing**. It's not mental; it's relational.

So, he's saying that we will **experience** the wonderful Being of Love in all 'directions' if you would throughout eternity, He Who far surpasses knowledge. There is **no limit, no boundary, no end to our God, our Savior, our Helper**.

### **Part 4 – Filled with God**

Which leads us to the fourth blessing – to be filled with **all** the fullness of the God. Filled means filled, topped off and fullness is repletion. Our forever is being filled up to the top with God, all of Him. In this, God fulfills His plan. He made us in His image and likeness and herein He fills us **with Him** – His love, His joy, His peace...

## Chapter 20

# Done Deal

*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.*

(Eph 1: 3-6)

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

(Eph 1:9,10)

*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved), and **raised [us] up together**, and **made [us] sit together** in the heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus,*

(Eph 2:4-6)

God doesn't deal in 'crisis management'. That's for at least two reasons – first, His knowledge is infinite, so He has complete understanding and awareness of all things past, present and future at all moments of eternity. And second, what He says will be is actually already accomplished in and through His only begotten self – Jesus Christ.

Even when we talk about accepting Christ, the precedent and primary reality is that He chose us and made us (note the past tense) accepted in His Son before time began:

*...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)

Are you tracking with me? Every spiritual blessing! Accepted in the Son! Seated with Him! Made eternally ALIVE! It's all a done deal.

So why all the 'fuss'? Why the tribulations and sorrows and grief? Why the sacrifice, why the cross? The full answer to that is way beyond our meager minds. But one thing we can know because we are told:

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares [us], and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of [our] faith, who **for the joy** that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

(Heb 12:1,2)

It was, it is and it will always be – JOY. It was set before Him and that made it worth everything. And you, my friend, are a part of that joy, forever. It's a done deal, God's deal, and you will never have done anything to merit it. In Christ, you are the forever recipient of God's lavish love, made in His image and likeness. Hallelujah!

## Chapter 21

# Never Alone

*"And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him."*

(John 8:29)

*"Indeed, the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."*

(John 16:32)

I don't know how anyone could be so mean. He said to her, "You're going to die alone." Being alone, truly alone, forsaken by those you love is something both she and I understand and so does Jesus.

I lay awake through the night, and this weighed on me. Then the Lord showed me that many if not most of His people have known this aloneness as well. Even Moses, usually surrounded by hundreds of people, in the end, died alone on a mountain top.

Both birth and death are uniquely solitary for all of us (unless, of course, you're a twin). But aloneness compounded by forsakenness is doubly solitary. Jesus knew this and His pain included being forsaken by Father God. On the cross He cried:

*And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*

(Mat 27:46)

Some theologians claim that this was simply Jesus quoting Psalm 22:1 but I thoroughly reject that. He was fulfilling scripture!

Being alone, or feeling that way, can be terrifying to some. To others, it seems normal. But being truly alone because of being forsaken or abandoned, 'ghosted' as they say, is progressively disheartening. It is part of the pain of hell.

But there is good news for those who have been born anew in Christ – forever and ever, you will never be alone again, never utterly forsaken or abandoned because God's Holy Spirit is IN you and won't leave:

*Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "**I will never leave you nor forsake you.**"*

(Heb 13:5)

*"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)

But listen to me on this – it's NOT a matter of how you feel. In this matter, do not trust your feelings. You can, in this life, feel terribly alone. You can wonder, 'Where is God?' King David felt that way more than once and Jesus, on the cross, did as well:

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

(Psalm 22:1)

Your feelings emanate from your heart which can be deceitful. As believers, we 'walk' by faith, by/in trust, not by feelings.

*"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;  
Who can know it?"*

(Jer 17:9)

In Christ, you, my brother/sister, are never alone. You **belong** in Him and to Him and forever, you are a **tremendously loved member of the family of the Almighty**.

## Chapter 22

# Inexpressible

*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)

God brought you forth twice; first, in the flesh and second, in the Spirit. The first was doomed to death; the second is to a living hope. Now, as has been said before, hope is the expectation of coming good and when it's living, it's eternal. That means your eternal state is with an expectation of coming good – the goodness never ends. Do you think that's a bit much? Perhaps that's why Peter followed this with:

*to an inheritance **incorruptible** and **undefiled** and that **does not fade away, reserved** in heaven for you,*

(1 Pet 1:4)

Yes, this blessed state is reserved for each of you who are saved:

*who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be **revealed** in the **last time**.*

(1 Pet 1:5)

And this reservation will be revealed soon. Peter rehearses this for us because life can be tough:

*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by **various trials**, that the **genuineness** of your **faith**, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet **believing**, you **rejoice** with **joy inexpressible** and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the **salvation** of your **souls**.*

(1 Pet 1:6-9)

What he's saying is that for us who are saved, this life is a test of our **faith**, to show us that it is **real** and that during, and as a consequence of, these test(s) you can have joy so wonderful it cannot be expressed. That's a benefit of living hope.

*Therefore **gird up the loins of your mind**, be **sober**, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought **to you** at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."*

(1 Pet 1:13-16, see Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7)

Now, the **only** way to be **holy**, by definition, is to **be God** or **connected to God**. Of course, if you are truly saved, Christ's Spirit is in you, and you are in Christ (see John 14:20) so you 'qualify'. With this in mind, he exhorts us to 'sober up' and conform our lives to the model Christ gave us. That's basically what Jesus told Peter (when he needed to 'mind his own business'):

*Jesus said to him, "If I will that he (John) remains till I come, **what is that to you? You follow Me.**"*

(John 21:22)

That is, conform your ways to mine. You see; you don't 'follow Jesus' by walking after Him but by Him living IN YOU (by faith) and you fully submitting to Him/His Spirit. So, again by definition, where He goes, you go. Do you follow?

Now, if you're like me (and you probably are), you're thinking, 'that's a tall order; I stumble every day. My conduct can never be as pure as Christ's'. But here's some encouragement for all of us. The very gates of heaven are most certainly pure and John described them:

*The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.*

(Rev 21:21)

Can you envision a pearl large enough to be a gate? They have to be huge. The very entrance into the heavenly city, each one, is a perfect pearl, amazingly beautiful. But hold on, as we all know, a pearl starts out as a gritty grain of sand or dirt that is covered over and over and over and... with nacre.

In like manner, you and I are covered by God's grace every time we stumble yet continue to trust in Jesus. And each time that pearl is more beautiful and we are conformed to the conduct of Jesus which was at all times fundamentally all about trusting God.

## Chapter 23

# The Turmoil

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

(John 14:27)

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

(John 16:33)

With 400 or so mentions in the scriptures, "peace" is clearly a big deal; but why? What did Jesus mean by "My peace" and "not as the world gives"? In my youth, they used to raise two fingers in a V and say, "Peace, Bro." But that was basically meaningless. We did it because it was 'cool'.

But real peace for the soul is meaningful because our hearts are, apart from Christ, in turmoil. It's a fundamental part of the human condition – this turmoil. This fear inwardly, ever present though usually subtle, is what anthropologists would say keeps us alive, on guard against myriad threats to our safety, our psyche, our self.

Yet it also tears at the soul. It keeps us in a perpetual solitary state wherein though we desire to connect, to relate to God and to others, we cannot. As Jesus pointed out, we are innately "troubled" and "afraid". Of course, this is a condition we've grown so accustomed to that we often lose the ability to even recognize it.

Often, the turmoil lies dormant until something triggers it and we respond, "I'm not ready." Or we think, 'That's not for me. I don't need a crutch'. Meanwhile we reinforce the mental walls our turmoil has built since our birth. The ever-present inward 'tension' is the result of rebellion against the Creator and distrust of His character and motives.

Jesus' peace, the peace He freely shares with us, is not some state of 'higher consciousness' but a direct connection and intimate relationship with the Source. The Abba Father, the One and only Creator. This peace is IN Him and THROUGH Him. And joyously, it's PERMANENT.

When people "get religion", they imitate this peace and can make a good show of it, that is until the trigger comes and upsets the apple-cart so to speak. Religion cannot give peace, only a show of it. This show is the world's peace – simply a thin cover over the ongoing turmoil inside.

Now, you'd think that anyone would gladly receive this kind of peace but many if not most people are insane in that they cling to their 'turmoil' like a warm blanket. The 'turmoil' has become their identity, their comfort zone. Frankly, the flesh clings to sinful rebellion against God.

Christ's peace means death to the turmoil. While peace expands, sin-fueled turmoil shrinks – it shrivels into the nothingness of hell. This peace is a fruit, a benefit of salvation. Do you want it?

*"Ask and it shall be given."*

(Mat 7:7)

## Chapter 24

# No Boundaries

John the apostle had a seemingly difficult time articulating the glorious environment of the heavenly scene. As you study his words in the first chapters of Revelation you can tell that he's overwhelmed by the vision. Daniel was wiped out for a period of time after what he witnessed in chapter eight of his book (Dan 8:27). Paul testified that he knew a man caught up to the third heaven "*and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*" (2 Cor 12:4)

Conveying the glory, the beauty, the awesomeness of God is like trying to use your legs to jump into orbit. We can try and try and try but we will always fall short. I think David found himself in that position when he penned (or sang) Psalm 21:

*The king shall **have joy in Your strength**, O LORD;  
And in Your salvation how **greatly shall he rejoice!**  
You have given him **his heart's desire**,  
And have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah  
**For You meet him with the blessings of goodness**; You set a crown of pure  
gold upon his head.  
He asked life from You, and **You gave it to him--Length of days forever and  
ever.**  
His glory is great in Your salvation; Honor and majesty You have placed upon him.  
For You have made him **most blessed forever**; You have made him **exceedingly  
glad with Your presence.***

(Psa 21:1-6)

Now, David became a military man and you can see that apparent mindset evident in the latter part of this Psalm as well as others. But this is not simply a celebration of military victory; it's David trying to 'jump into orbit' from the joy and gladness of encountering the **presence of God**.

He sings that the Lord has met him with the "blessings of goodness"; he praises that God answered his prayer for life with eternal life and made him "most blessed forever" and "exceedingly glad" with His presence.

Let's consider these great gifts. What do the blessings of goodness look like? The wording indicates that they have no box or boundaries. I suggest that that's because they are directly tied to the Lord's presence. God has no boundaries and thus neither does this blessing. His goodness has no boundaries and neither does this goodness.

For this reason, the blessings of goodness cannot be a part of this material world; they are part of the eternal unseen world. These blessings are indescribable, for mere words would never do

them justice. You cannot touch them or measure them or show them to anyone else. They are simply experienced as you abide in Christ.

And it seems that David's expectation is that this blessing will never end. He explains that as God answered his prayer for life, his expectation is consequently **eternal** life – again, no boundaries. Not eternal existence, but a forever quality of **life** that fulfills, expands, thrills, builds, and remains fresh, ever filled with hope and satisfaction.

Now, maybe you think I'm taking this too far, but his final joyful praise is:

*For You have made him **most blessed forever**; You have made him **exceedingly glad** with **Your presence**.*

(Psa 21:6)

Everything he rejoices in is eternal, **boundless** and this one is the 'kicker' – God's presence or face. Here, he is not just glad or joyful but **exceedingly** so. That's what the Lord's presence does and for that reason he exclaims that he is **supremely** blessed – not momentarily, not just for a while, not even for a long time, but **eternally**.

David wrote this psalm and I do think it expresses his personal experience but as with other psalms, the next one, Psalm 22 as an example, I'm confident that it is also prophetic about Jesus and not only so but about each of us who are saved in Christ.

This boundless exceeding joy is for all God children throughout eternity – blessings of goodness INDEED.

## Chapter 25

# Clean Heart

When you want to learn more about grace and forgiveness one of the characters in the Bible you can reference is David the king of Israel. For all his courage in battle and sincerity in worship, his life was filled with messes, and he often was their maker. Can you relate to that? I sure can.

In this life we don't often if ever get do-overs, but we can look forward to one day getting a complete make-over as we are brought into Christ's presence in the sky:

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

(1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

And in the meantime, as we recognize our messes, we can and should echo David's call to God:

***"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."***

(Psalm 51:10)

In fact, all of Psalm 51 is a lesson in this godly attitude. It starts with the explanation, "A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone into Bathsheba." Now, you probably recall the story. David's army was at war, but the king decided to stay home. One day as he was walking on the roof of his palace, he espied a beautiful woman bathing on the roof of a nearby home—the home of one of his most loyal men —Uriah. Yep, this gal was his wife.

Well, David proceeded to make one of the biggest messes of his messy life. He was captivated by this beauty and commanded that she be brought to him. Subsequently, he made love to her (with no mention of her consent) and wouldn't you know it, she got pregnant.

So, then the king was embarrassed and did not want his mess to be discovered so he first recalled Uriah from the war and then told him to enjoy a little 'R&R' with his wife. But the soldier was not about to have a conjugal visit with his wife while his comrades were in the midst of battle, so he slept separately and didn't touch his wife, Bathsheba.

When David found this out, he was alarmed and sent orders back to his general to place Uriah at the very front of the battle and then call for a retreat of everyone but him. The result was reported back to the king—Uriah is dead.

One terrible mess compounded by an even more vile tragedy with yet more and more messes on the way as a consequence. Later, the prophet Nathan, by direct revelation from God revealed to the king that God saw what he had done. Nate related a story to David of a poor shepherd who had

one lamb, just one, who was most dear to him, and this other dastardly man took the shepherd's lamb and slaughtered it for his own purposes. Well, this incensed David who wanted the vile man to be killed for what he did. At that point, the prophet pointed his finger at the king and said, "You are the man!"

David was shocked, exposed, and probably aghast. But to his credit, he confessed his sin and that is the background of this Psalm which starts:

*"Have **mercy** upon me, O God,  
According to Your lovingkindness.  
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,  
**Blot out my transgressions.**"*

(Psalm 51:1)

Immediately, David knew he needed to dump the cover-up and beg for God's mercy:

*"**Wash me** thoroughly from my iniquity,  
And **cleanse me** from my sin."*

(Psalm 51:2)

*For I acknowledge my transgressions,  
"And my sin is always before me."*

(Psalm 51:3)

Sin leaves a 'stain' on the heart, its existence makes us feel 'dirty' and that feeling persists. But David understood that acknowledging his transgression was key to obtaining God's mercy. And he knew that only God could give him a clean heart and renew a right spirit. In fact, the writer of Proverbs 20, probably his own son, Solomon, recorded:

*"Who can say, 'I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?' "*

(Proverbs 20:9)

Therapy won't clean your messy heart. Neither will escaping into drugs, sex or any other 'distraction'. Denial of the mess doesn't make it any less messy. But in **confessing** and surrendering our sin **to God**, we can expect that His Spirit will continue the work He began from the moment we first opened our heart to Him.

The cleaning of your heart is part of a greater process of increasing glory that will continue until you stand before Him face to face:

*"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 Corinthians 3:18)

Yes, just like David and me, your life is undoubtedly filled with sin-spawned messes. But we can each take comfort knowing that they are all cleaned completely by the blood of Jesus Christ.

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

(1 John 1:9)

## Chapter 26

# Persistent in Prayer

Ever since I was a young believer, I learned some important lessons about prayer:

1. John taught us that if we ask anything **according to His will**, He **hears** us and
2. If He hears us, we know that we have what we've asked for
3. That we should pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us
4. That we are not to use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.
5. That if we ask anything in Jesus' name, He will do it.

These and many other principles have always stood out. But there's another that doesn't seem to be so 'popular' – I call it **persistence** in prayer.

Some consider this a sign of "lack of faith". They say God is all about "Yes, No, or Wait" but as I study the scriptures, I read such things as:

*For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, **do not cease** to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;*

(Col 1:9)

*pray **without ceasing**,*

(1Th 5:17)

*Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and **continued all night** in prayer to God.*

(Luk 6:12)

*"but we will give ourselves **continually** to prayer and to the ministry of the word."*

(Act 6:4)

*Peter was therefore kept in prison, but **constant prayer** was offered to God for him by the church.*

(Act 12:5)

*rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, **continuing steadfastly** in prayer;*

(Rom 12:12)

*praying **always** with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with **all perseverance** and supplication for all the saints*

(Eph 6:18)

***always in every prayer** of mine making request for you all with joy,*

(Phil 1:4)

***Continue earnestly** in prayer, being **vigilant** in it with thanksgiving;*

(Col 4:2)

So, you see, these as well as other verses are clearly telling us that God wants us to never stop praying. I submit that it is rarely 'one and done'. Perhaps you've noticed this yourselves. To punctuate this, Jesus gave us a parable:

*And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves;*

*'for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him';*

*"and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'?*

*"I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his **persistence** he will rise and give him as many as he needs."*

(Luke 11:5-8)

*"So, I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*

*"For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."*

(Luke 11:9,10)

Ask, seek, and knock are all presented with the sense that they are done as persistently as necessary. But why?

Many times, He has said that when we pray, He will answer, but He never put a response time on the table. Of course, we always want our prayers answered immediately. We desperately want instant gratification but, hold on, that's not what prayer is for is it? Consider the Lord's prayer:

*And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.*

Notice that Jesus told us to **start** with acknowledging Who God Is, where He is, then praising Him and then submitting to His will. **After** this, we ask for our needs, forgiveness and protection from evil.

*Give us day by day our daily bread.*

*And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.*

(Luke 11:2-4)

Clearly, the Lord's priority is **right relationship** with Him.

It is also critical that we have faith, faith in Him and faith for what we ask:

*"Therefore, I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, **believe** that you receive them, and you will have them."*

(Mar 11:24)

You could say that this is the 'one-two' punch of prayer and God is the only One who truly knows where you are at on these two. You need faith and faith comes by hearing from the Lord and you will hear from the Lord when you are in right relationship with Him – loving, honoring and submitting to Him.

This is why most all of us need to persist in prayer because we need a holy heart attitude, uncluttered by the world and our own 'flesh'. It's in that time 'on the mountain' like Christ (see Mat 14:23 and Luke 6:12) or in your own Gethsemane, whether fellowshiping and/or agonizing with the Almighty, that you arrive at the 'one-two'.

And really, this is the purpose of prayer. God is not our 'butler' to give us what we want when we want it. I think we all realize that, but sometimes we wonder 'Where is God?' or 'Does He hear me?' or other doubtful thoughts.

Some may think, 'But I'm saved, born again; I know I'm in right relationship with God.' And that being the case, yes you are – positionally. You also may be married to a wonderful spouse but there's more to your relationship with him/her than your wedding ring or your vows. (Yes, I'm being trivial)

God wants **ongoing**, more and more **intimate relationship** with His family. The 'one-two' of persistent prayer draws us into that. So don't let any discouragement deter you. Satan is always ready to push his lies about God's intentions.

*Then He spoke a parable to them, that **men always ought to pray and not lose heart**, ...*

(Luke 18:1)

## Chapter 27

# Encounters

*When Simon Peter saw it, **he fell down at Jesus' knees**, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"*

(Luke 5:8)

It is truly intriguing to observe the encounters of various people with Christ, especially when they are aware of His power or divinity. You can always tell when it's genuine, that is honest. There's no feigning of respect, no pretense of self-importance. Here, Peter is fully aware of his own depravity. We know from other gospels that he had already met Jesus before and Jesus even called him Peter (a rock) rather than his given name, Simon (basically, go-with-the-flow). In this case, though, Peter himself was 'rocked' by the supernatural authority of the Lord and his sinful heart and rebelliousness to God were 'in his face'. He could not handle the truth of his condition and assumed Jesus couldn't either.

But all that changed.

*And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."*

(Luke 5:12)

We don't know this fellow's name. Since he was a leper, maybe nobody did. They certainly didn't want to be around him. And again, he was cognizant of his condition – not just outwardly but undoubtedly, his heart was filled with pain, pain of rejection, isolation. He was 'untouchable' and he felt unlovable.

But Jesus loved him and Jesus touched him:

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

(Luke 5:13)

This guy had been a testimony, so to speak, of God's judgement, the Almighty's displeasure but Christ demonstrated the true heart of His Father and...

All that changed.

But not everyone who encounters Christ does so with sincerity. Some see themselves as morally superior to everyone else. The power of God's Son does not impress them because they actually are not just bound by sin but devoted to evil:

*Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him.*

*But some of them **went away to the Pharisees** and told them the things Jesus did.*

*Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs.*

*Then, from that day on, they **plotted to put Him to death.***

(John 11:45-47,53)

Jesus had just amazingly raised Lazarus from the dead. Many people were elated and praised God for it, but others simply ran like rats to inform the religious cabal – the Pharisees, who hatefully plotted to kill the Lord. They thought, 'if we just put Him down, that will end it. We will continue to rule.' But...

All that changed.

In each case, there was an encounter, a reaction to the Lord, and then a reply from the Lord.

To Simon Peter, Jesus said:

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

(Luke 5:10)

To the leper, Jesus said:

*"I am willing; be cleansed."*

(Luke 5:13)

To those who fall before Him in humility, He speaks lovingly. To the Pharisees (and those like them):

*And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?"*

*But Jesus **kept silent.** And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!"*

*Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man **sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.**"*

(Mat 26:62-64)

...He is silent or speaks of judgement.

God knows who you are even when you don't, and when you encounter Him, you'll show who you are. You can't get away with 'faking it' and you don't need to try. Always be real with Him. He knows who you are. When you love Him, you can always trust Him.

## Chapter 28

# Aghast

*"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,  
Because He has anointed Me  
To preach the gospel to the poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberty to the captives  
And recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;  
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."*

(Luke 4:18,19)

Right after being tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Jesus returned to his hometown. On the Sabbath, in the synagogue, He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled it to the section we know as chapter 61 and He read from it. If you were in the audience, you would have been aghast, not simply by the power of His speaking but by what He said afterwards:

*"Today this Scripture is **fulfilled** in your hearing."*

(Luke 4:21)

Everyone knew what He had read was the prophetic declaration of the Messiah. Let's break it down to understand it better. The **Spirit of the Lord** came upon Jesus in the form of a dove as He rose up from being baptized by John in the Jordan river. This was the anointing.

His anointing was to proclaim the **good news or good tidings** to the **poor or beggarly or humble** but understand, this did not mean those without money materially but rather those who are "poor in spirit" inwardly. Jesus preached:

*"Blessed are the **poor in spirit**,  
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

(Mat 5:3)

This word "poor" literally means those who are so impoverished that they beg on the street. These are the ones inwardly for whom Christ's message hit home.

So, what is this gospel, this good news? A new social program? Better welfare or veterans' benefits, a boost in social security? Lucrative jobs for all? Nope.

The poor in spirit look for mercy and love, forgiveness and truth. They beg for life, eternal life in everlasting relationship with our Creator. They hope for freedom from the plague of evil and the redemption of all creation. The good news, the good tidings that Jesus brought was/is "I've brought it. I AM it." Believe Me and receive it freely. He said, It is, I AM, your kingdom.

Jesus healed miraculously many, many people. He even rose some from the dead. But His greatest healing was and is the mending of the **brokenhearted** – resulting in a clean or pure heart. This is an internal, eternal healing – not just eyesight or hearing or even a resuscitated body. Those are temporary at best. A soul/heart that is broken is one separated and distant from God, from the loving Father. Alone in the void of darkness, this child is desperately loved by the Almighty and begins to realize and receive that love with Christ's healing.

These poor are also **captives** in need of freedom. They are captives to the devil, in desperate need of **freedom/liberty from sin**. In that condition, they **cannot see** God's love. They are **blind**.

*"Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: 'Now I will bring back the **captives** of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name—"*

(Eze 39:25)

*'And **I will not hide My face from them anymore**; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel,' says the Lord GOD."*

(Eze 39:29)

*And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the **snare of the devil**, having been **taken captive** by him to do his will.*

(2 Tim 2:24-26)

*Blessed are the **pure in heart**,  
For they shall **see** God.*

(Mat 5:8)

*Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is **born again**, he cannot **see** the kingdom of God."*

(John 3:3)

And how about those who are "oppressed"? Well, the translators perhaps should have used the literal meaning of "crushed", or "broken in pieces" or "shattered". You may have read the novel, "The Count of Monte Cristo" wherein, the protagonist, a young French sailor, Edmund Dantes was falsely imprisoned in the horrible Chateau D'if. Each year, the 'warden' chained Edmund up and beat him nearly to death. Finally, when he is able to escape this monstrous hell, he takes with him immense wealth from a pirate treasure but sadly, he is still bound up in his heart in Chateau D'if. He is never truly free of the grip of his loss and torture.

This pictures everyone of humanity spiritually. Jesus came to truly set us all free of this oppression, this shattering of the soul.

And what is the "acceptable year of the Lord"? Some suggest that it refers to the year of Jubilee. You can see more about that in Lev 25:9-15. In the year of Jubilee slaves were set free, debts cancelled, and things set to a new start. Many consider Jesus as emblematic of Jubilee.

So, you can see that choosing this passage to read certainly caught their attention, but the real 'kicker' was His statement following:

*Then He closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "**Today** this Scripture is **fulfilled** in your hearing."*

(Luke 4:20,21)

Now, most of us would pin the fulfillment of these things to His death on the cross, resurrection and ascension into heaven wherein He "took captivity captive" (see Eph 4:8).

But Jesus stuck a 'pin' in that balloon. This was at the very beginning of His ministry. So, as believers, we may be aghast as well.

But that's because, for the moment, we are trapped in the flesh and that's how we perceive time and events. The Son of God viewed these fulfillments as **completed** at that moment – "in your hearing". And that's also **how He sees you** for the Bible tells us:

*But God, being rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive together with Christ**--by grace you **have been saved**--and **raised us up** with Him and **seated us with Him** in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

(Eph 2:4-7)

*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, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, **reserved** in heaven for you, who are **kept** by the power of God through faith for salvation **ready to be revealed** in the last time.*

(1 Pet 1:3-5)

Jesus could tell you the same thing - **these Scriptures are fulfilled in your hearing**. From heaven's perspective, it's done!

## Chapter 29

# Abandon

*The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ).*

*"When He comes, He will tell us all things."*

*Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."*

*And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why are You talking with her?"*

***The woman then left her waterpot,** went her way into the city, and said to the men,*

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

(John 4:25-29)

Many of you are familiar with this story of Jesus with the woman by the well in Sychar. What she illustrates is that when you truly encounter the Lord, everything you once thought was important, perhaps critical to your well being, is suddenly trivial in comparison. As such, it is often tossed aside or forgotten or 'abandoned'. There are several examples of this in the Word. For example...

Early in His ministry, Jesus roamed the shore of the Sea of Galilee and encountered two fishermen, Peter and his brother Andrew. He simply said, "*Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.*" The result was:

*They **immediately left their nets** and followed Him.*

(Matt 4:19,20)

Nearby, He also found two more brothers, James and John, fishermen as well:

*He called them, and immediately **they left the boat and their father,** and followed Him.*

(Matt 4:21,22)

Luke records a fuller rendition of this incident:

*So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets.*

*Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat.*

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

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

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

*So, they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.*

*When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"*

***For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken;*** *and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men."*

*So, when they had brought their boats to land, **they forsook all** and followed Him.*

(Luke 5:1-11)

Now, if you study the Gospels, you'll realize that though it appears to be a sudden encounter in Luke, John records in his Gospel, chapter two, that before this, John and Andrew met Jesus just after His baptism and they subsequently brought Simon Peter to Jesus. That's when Jesus called him Peter. So, they all recognized Jesus from before but then they beheld His divine power and were "astonished".

On another occasion, a poor blind man heard that Jesus was passing through and cried out for mercy. He was told to be quiet, but he persisted. When Christ heard him, He called for him to be brought near:

*Then they called the blind man, saying to him, "Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you." And **throwing aside his garment**, he rose and came to Jesus.*

(Mark 10:49,50)

You know the story. This excited fellow was healed and he followed Jesus. Bear in mind that this garment he tossed aside would likely have been the only thing he owned and the only thing that kept him warm at night.

And then there's the story of Levi. He was a tax collector, a person that was despised by most of the Jews. This was because tax collectors had a government mandated quota but usually collected far more than that and pocketed the overage. They had the reputation of getting rich on the backs of the rest of their countrymen. Levi (later called Matthew) sat at his collection location. Jesus had just miraculously healed a lame man that had been lowered through the roof of a house by friends. Perhaps Levi was sitting nearby and watched this. Whatever the case, Jesus wasn't 'done for the day':

*After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me."  
So, **he left all, rose up, and followed Him.***

(Luke 5:27,28)

An abandoned waterpot, abandoned nets and boats overflowing with fish, abandoned father, abandoned garment, abandoned tax money – these and other stories just touch on the observable **external** response to and encounter with the person of God. What follows the 'touch' is

eternal - a forever **inward** change in a person that eventually becomes an eruption of a torrent or fountain of living water.

The shocking reality is that this 'abandoning' is an inevitable outcome in the life of every true believer and follower of Jesus Christ. The Lord said:

*"So likewise, whoever of you does not **forsake** all that he has cannot be My disciple."*

(Luke 14:33)

What holds you back? What hinders you? What are you trying to take with you? A garment, a boat, your comfort zone? I submit that this forsaking, this abandoning, is not simply a rule or requirement, rather it is an unavoidable outcome of the inward transformation. This word "forsake" simply means separation.

So, if you're holding on to anything that hinders you from surrendering to God's Spirit, you simply won't be a disciple - that is, a "learner". Submit to the separation from the hindrance and hold on to the Holy. That's when you learn from Him.

## Chapter 30

# Always New

*"And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins."*

(Mark 2:22)

"There's a time for old and a time for new, but in every case it must be true." - Anonymous

There were those around Jesus who came with a sincere question:

*"Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"*

(Mark 2:18)

Part of His answer was the statement we opened with. The new wine He referred to is most likely the result of the Gospel or Good News of the Kingdom of God. More on that in a moment. But as another Bible commentator put it:

A wineskin expanded under the pressure of fermentation. So, if new and unfermented wine was put in an old and brittle wineskin, it was sure to burst.

You can't fit His new life into the old forms. Jesus traded fasting for feasting; sackcloth and ashes for a robe of righteousness; a spirit of heaviness for a garment of praise; mourning for joy; and law for grace. – Guzik

The Old was the Law and the myriad traditions the religious Jews had come up with 'surrounding' it. The New was and is the gracious salvation provided through faith in Christ – His Words, His sacrifice and His resurrection and of course, the gift of His Holy Spirit poured into the new wine skins – you.

And the wonderful thing about the New that Jesus brought – it is forever New, forever life-giving, forever joyous, merciful, loving, forgiving. It never 'ferments', never rots. Unfortunately, mankind, in particular, religious mankind is still in the business of trying to surround it with man-originated traditions as well as interpretations of Christ's Word that can't hold or handle God's Spirit.

Much of the so-called church of today consists of old wineskins – they've left the Way, the Truth and the Life of Jesus and His Spirit outside so to speak because He's too much, too honest, too good, too 'uncontainable'.

I do not advocate the 'crazies' who claim to have a new gospel or a new Jesus. Don't you listen to them! Just as the religionists are always wrapping themselves in their traditions and interpretations, there are those who claim to have the 'new' but are really only about self-promotion, notoriety and power. That's their 'wrapping'.

Like I said, the new that Jesus brought and brings is **always New and always True**.

The Gospel Jesus taught is based upon faith and trust in an Almighty God Who offers eternal life freely. Contrary to this, the Law never saved anyone. That's because mankind has always been powerless to keep it – only the Son of God Himself could do that and the Life of faith and trust He brought is empowered by the indwelling of His Holy Spirit.

The New that Jesus brought us is this transforming power:

*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)

But hear me on this, the Old always says, "You can do it! Just keep trying." While the Truth of the New says, "**He** will do it. Just trust **Him**."

## Chapter 31

### Picture This

*And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him,*

*Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God,*

*rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.*

*After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.*

*Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?"*

*Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this."*

*Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."*

*Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!"*

*Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."*

*For He knew who would betray Him; therefore, He said, "You are not all clean."*

*So, when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?"*

*"You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am.*

*"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.*

***"For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.***

(John 13:2-15)

Jesus, the Living Word, gave us many pictures, many examples to learn from. Taking on the menial task of washing the **disciples'** feet, including Judas', was one such picture. I thought of this as I read:

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to **My brethren** and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and [to] My God and your God.' "*

(John 20:11-17)

It was those two words "My brethren" that caught my attention. Another picture. Jesus could have said my disciples or my closest followers or even my friends (or those 'Bozos' who won't believe you) but He chose the familial term, **brothers**.

And that, in turn, sent me back to one of my favorite stories in Genesis. I'll summarize for you – Joseph was one of twelve brothers, sons of Jacob/Israel. He was Jacob's **favorite son** and the others who were older hated that. He had dreams of being promoted over his brothers and when he shared them, the brothers were not happy. One day, having been sent by Dad to check on his bros who were tending the flocks, they threw him in a pit and consequently sold him to traders as a slave.

He ended up in Egypt in the house of a notable man as a servant and was treated well – everything was put in his care. The wife of this notable man however was intent on 'bedding' Joseph and when he refused, she claimed he had raped her. Again, Joseph wound up in another pit – a prison. But there also, he ended up being put in charge of the care of all the prisoners.

Well two of Pharaoh's servants, a butler and a baker, were also thrown into this prison and they both had dreams. Now, Joseph was known as an interpreter of such dreams and so they sought him out. His interpretations for both men came true and later, upon being restored to his office, the butler told Pharaoh about Joseph when the king had troubling dreams.

Joseph was brought out of the prison, cleaned up and presented to Pharaoh and greatly impressed the king with his interpretive ability. In fact, the king was so impressed that he promoted Joseph to the Prime Minister role in Egypt – he put him in charge of all the king's assets and was second only to Pharaoh and all the land.

Well, this is where Joseph's own earlier dreams concerning his family came true for as he had foretold to Pharaoh, a severe draught forced his Hebrew clan to journey to Egypt for food. They did not recognize Joseph, but he recognized them and also noted that his one younger brother, Benjamin, wasn't among them.

Long story short – he put one brother in prison and forced them to bring Benjamin to Egypt. When they did, he finally revealed himself and they were aghast. They were sure that he would kill them all or throw them in prison for their treachery against him years earlier, but Joseph completely forgave them and reunited their temporarily imprisoned brother. Later, their old father was brought to Egypt, and he too was reunited with his favorite son.

The **picture** is the **brothers** and the **message** is **forgiveness**. For many reasons, Joseph is a prophetic picture of the other favorite Son of the Father, Jesus Christ. And I think the primary application is to the Jewish people, but every believer is included. As the brothers of our Savior, we are charged with following His example, His picture. We are to serve each other in humility rather than seeking notoriety.

Whether it is in the pulpit or in the pews, most if not all Christians today are desiring recognition from others, pats on the back, 'successful' ministry. How many do you know truly serve others in selfless humility every day? When we toss Christ's example to the side while claiming to serve Him, we are behaving like Joseph's brothers and like His disciples before His resurrection.

We are called to serve and to minister forgiveness – our mindset should be 'it's not about me, not as a believer. It's about **Him in me, living** in and through me, **loving** others, **speaking** truth in love, **washing** (i.e. serving) others through me. We have to let go of the 'me-me-me' mindset, in pulpits and in pews. That's the only way the church is healthy.

## Chapter 32

# Upheld

*And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest.*

*But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in.*

*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 18:15-18)

There's hope for all of us who sincerely love the Lord and trust in His salvation. That means that there's hope for all of us who stumble though we mean well. Peter is presented to us as an example of this.

The failure of all religion is that it cannot save. The best it can do is to demand a code of conduct that, though righteous, is actually unattainable or unsustainable. Peter promised Jesus that he would never deny Him, but he did – three times. He deeply desired to do everything right for Jesus but only ended up endangering the Holy sacrifice of the cross. In misguided desperation, he slashed off the ear of one of the attackers in the garden.

Earlier, he had offered to build three shelters for Jesus, Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration which led the Almighty to simply say, "This is My Son. Hear Him." (I paraphrase.) Yes, Peter stumbled numerous times but God still used him mightily in the early church.

David, in Psalm 101 seems to have had a similar desire to please God. He says:

*I will behave wisely in a **perfect** way.  
Oh, when will You come to me?  
I will walk within my house with a **perfect** heart.  
I will set nothing wicked before my eyes;  
I **hate** the work of those who **fall away**;  
It shall not cling to me.*

(Psa 101:2,3)

However, it would seem that his "perfect way" and "perfect heart" led him to hate and eschew those who swerve or stumble (fall away).

And this is important for us to consider because for the contemporary Christian religion, trust or faith has taken a back seat to conduct and performance. Love, Godly love and mercy are in the back seat as well while notoriety and fleshly comfort are front and center.

In many of our churches, Jesus, the real Christ, is standing on the outside (See Rev 3:14-20). How did he get there? Possibly, because like Simon the pharisee, we did not honor Him when He was with us, even in our 'house'. Now, don't get me wrong – if you truly invited Jesus into your heart (house), He won't leave. But if you read the story (see Luke 7:36-47) Simon was very religious and yet he was not righteous because he did not truly love or honor the Lord. A lot of contemporary Christianity can be like this.

Now, like Peter, Jesus still loves us but His "perfect way and perfect heart" are based on trust, humility and submission to His Spirit. And that love reminds me of Psalm 37. It says that our steps are ordered by the Lord.

The translators blew it though when they insert "good" in verse 23 because no man is good. Jesus Himself said:

*So, Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? **No one is good** but One, that is, **God**."*

(Mark 10:18)

That man whose steps are ordered is a "valiant" man, someone with courage. Courage takes **trust** and even when that man falls or stumbles, he is not "utterly cast down". Rather, God upholds him. This is Peter; this is David; this is every sincere believer.

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

(Psa 37:23,24)

## Chapter 33

# The Voice

Do you recognize Him? For most, if not all of us, to recognize is something visual. But as John wrote:

*No one has **seen** God at any time.*

(John 1:18)

So, recognizing the Almighty is not primarily based on what we see but rather it's His voice. All the way back to the garden, we read about Adam:

*So, he said, "I **heard** Your **voice** in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."*

(Gen 3:10)

And since then, voice recognition is noted throughout the scripture. For example:

*So, Jacob went near to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The **voice** is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau."*

Genesis (27:22)

*Then Saul knew David's voice, and said, "Is that your voice, my son David?" David said, "It is my voice, my lord, O king."*

(1 Sam 26:17)

Even with babes in the womb, that is Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist with Mary the mother of Christ. When Mary approached her, Elizabeth said:

*"For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy."*

(Luke 1:44)

And then there's Peter after the angel set him free from prison:

*When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate.*

(Acts 12:14)

So, what about the Lord's voice?

*The LORD thundered from heaven, And the Most High uttered His voice.*

(2 Sam 22:14)

*The voice of the LORD is powerful; The voice of the LORD is full of majesty.*

(Psa 29:4)

So, we know the Lord's voice can be thunderous and powerful, but it's not always so:

*Now when Moses went into the tabernacle of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the **voice** of One speaking to him **from above the mercy seat** that was on the ark of the Testimony, from between the two cherubim; thus He spoke to him.*

(Num 7:89)

*Then He said (to Elijah), "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was **not in the wind**; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was **not in the earthquake**; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was **not in the fire**; and after the fire a **still small voice**.*

(1 Kings 19:11,12)

*So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a **voice** came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

(1 Kings 19:13)

Again, do you recognize Him? Do you know/recognize His voice? You do if you're one of His sheep. Jesus said:

*"And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, **for they know his voice**."*

(John 10:4)

And:

*"My **sheep** hear **My voice**, and I **know** them, and they follow Me."*

(John 10:27)

That's why even the Apostle Paul, before he was saved was 'clueless':

*As he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a **voice** saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"*

*And he said, "**Who are You, Lord?**" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."*

(Acts 9:3-5)

And the same was true for the Prophet Samuel before he knew the Lord's voice. See 1 Samuel chapter three.

And so, if you were wondering, being His 'sheep' and thus hearing/recognizing His voice is due to the condition of your heart:

*"Today, if you will **hear His voice**, Do **not harden** your hearts."*

(Heb 4:7)

*"Behold, I stand at the door (of your heart) and knock. If anyone hears  
My **voice** and **opens the door, I will come in to him** and dine with him, and  
he with Me."*

(Rev 3:20)

God will speak if we will listen. 138 times, the Bible records that the Lord spoke to someone. 136 of those times are in the Old Testament while only two are in the New Testament. Why do you suppose that is?

Probably because **the Word** was made flesh in Jesus Christ and He said everything God wanted to say. Yep, God made this clear to James, John and Peter on the mount of transfiguration:

And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. **Hear Him!**"  
(Luke 9:35)

So, if you want to hear from God, now you know – soften your heart, be His sheep, read your Bible and listen with your inner being. You'll hear.

## Chapter 34

# His Deal

*But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew **what was in man.*** (John 2:24,25)

*"For **from within, out of the heart of men,** proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness." (Mark 7:21,22)*

This really sets the stage, doesn't it. Jesus didn't want/need any accolades from men because He fully knew what men are inside, under the wraps, behind the phony smiles and pats on the back. Mankind's muck and mire, the stench of evil permeating our beings individually is quite literally the stage on which the Son of God portrayed the Almighty, the beautiful light that shone in darkness.

How absurd that two wretched men, bumbling followers of the Christ asserted that they wanted and deserved to sit on His right and left in His kingdom. And others argued amongst themselves who would be the greatest.

But Jesus told us that He came for a something quite different than promoting or even saving our pathetic fallen race. He brought the truly 'nuclear' option:

*"but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him **will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.**" (John 4:14)*

He came for **Life**. But not simply a new jump in the step or a real smile on the face. Rather, an explosion of His own Life erupting as a fountain, spreading life, **eternal life**.

Upon the cross, He simply said, "It is finished." Then, at the conclusion of the age when the old earth has passed away, it is recorded:

*Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."*

*And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."*

*And He said to me, "**It is done!** I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. **I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely** to him who **thirsts.**" (Rev 21:5,6)*

What is this fountain? Jeremiah referred to the fountain of living waters in his book and by the Holy Spirit, said that it was **the Lord**. (See Jer 2:13 and 17:13)

So isn't it amazing that even though Jesus knew what was **in mankind**, He gave His own precious Life to **exchange** all that vile and pernicious **darkness in us** with His wondrous **Light**. What a deal!

When anyone recognizes that their life is indeed dark and futile, Christ called this 'thirsting', and believing Him, He called 'drinking'. This 'thirsting and drinking' is transformative – inside, the Holy Spirit turns darkness to light and the deadness He turns into life and not only so but life that overflows – the Lord Himself abides in you, and it is **He** Who overflows:

*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 (torrents) of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive;" (John 7:37-39a)*

So, this is His deal. It's free to you just for the sincere asking but it cost our Heavenly Father more than can be described.

## Chapter 35

# 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.