

A night sky with a starry background and a single tree in a field of wildflowers. The sky is a deep teal color, filled with numerous stars and a faint, glowing band of light, possibly the Milky Way. The tree is a large, leafy deciduous tree, standing in the center of a field of wildflowers. The field is filled with small, white, daisy-like flowers, and the overall scene is illuminated by a soft, golden light, likely from a low sun or moon, creating a serene and magical atmosphere.

THE
SECRET PLACE
OF
THUNDER

JR DICKEY

The Secret Place of Thunder

J R Dickey



The Secret Place of Thunder

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Phone: 1-800-839-8640

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First published by AuthorHouse 9/1/2024 ISBN: 111-1-1111-1111-1 (sc)

ISBN: 111-1-1111-1111-1 (ebk)

Printed in the United States of America Bloomington, Indiana

Dickey, John. Fire Eyes: The Revelation of Jesus Christ . AuthorHouse. Kindle Edition.

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Acknowledgments

Thanks to my dear friend Dean Chiquette for his amazing help in putting these two volumes together and to the knowledgeable authors I have cited – to David Guzik, to Max Lucado, to Chuck Smith, and many others.

Thanks to my incredible wife, Darlene, who is my best friend and the *'love of my life'*.

Introduction

If you're like me, you've got a whole lot of memories – sadness, sorrow and grief as well as joy, loving friendship and adventure. And I've found that the Spirit of God, though the Word of God helps me place everything in context with trusting the Almighty. Embracing His presence in me, submitting to His perfect will and love, being holy, being perfect, being forgiven, being clean – this is knowing Him.

These devotions are 'new wine' inspired by and filled with His Word. They are simple lessons intended to bless your heart with joyful trust even as He has blessed my own. They are also green pasture, to help feed your soul and find rest.

Chapter 1

The Secret Place of Thunder

“You called in trouble, and I delivered you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah”

— (Psalm 81:7)

This is fascinating! Speaking to Israel (and Asaph the Psalmist), God says He answered them in the secret place of thunder. There are 28 mentions of thunder of thunders in the Bible and each one refers to God or another very holy creature speaking. In all but two cases, it is associated with a judgement of some kind. When God thunders, it’s a fearsome thing.

So where is this secret place of thunder? And what does it mean for us?

Simply put, the secret place is in God’s presence and it’s there that you can hear His voice, His thunder. Here are a few verses that speak to this:

The Secret Place of Thunder

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”

— (Psalm 91:1)

“For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock.”

— (Psalm 27:5)

“You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence From the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion From the strife of tongues.”

— (Psalm 31:20)

“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.”

— (Matthew 6:6)

Unfortunately, man’s natural tendency, since Eden, is to hide from God’s presence:

“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”

— (Genesis 3:8)

But when Moses told the Lord he couldn’t lead Israel without God, He answered:

“And He said, ‘My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.’ ”

— (Exodus 33:14)

And David sang:

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

— (Psalm 16:11)

And he prayed:

“Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.”

— (Psalm 51:11)

So, although the presence of God is terrifying to the sinful heart of man, it (He) is adored by the redeemed, by those who love Him. So for those of us who seek to know God better, to hear from Him—to hear His thunder even if it’s a still small voice, we must welcome His presence in our hearts and listen.

But understand as well that you may also encounter your own ‘Meribah’. Yes that second part of the verse is there as a message that God’s presence, His thunder will come along with or as the result of Meribah (strife). Do you remember the story?

Israel was dry, parched, crazy thirsty, but there was no water to drink. Instead of trusting or just asking the Lord for help, they whined and complained to Moses. So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying,

“What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!”

— (Exodus 17:4)

So God told him to strike this rock with the staff he used to split the sea. Moses obeyed and out gushed torrents of water, enough to slake the thirst of the whole nation.

Now that Rock was a wonderful picture of Christ and we are reminded of the verse-

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

— (John 7:38)

In other words, when you want to hear from, or receive from the thunder, the secret place is God’s presence which is Christ your Savior, living in your heart by His Spirit—the Rock of Ages. Because He was ‘struck’ for you, you can have abundant water.

Chapter 2

Daniel's Display

A Deeper Look

Historically, Daniel came on the scene coincident with the first dispersal of the Jews from Judah. In fact, he was a part of the first group of captives to be taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar's army. Of course, many of you already recognize him from the well-known Bible stories in the book that bears his name in the scriptures.

He was a prophet and one of distinction, as Jesus validated him in the New Testament. However, he not only recorded prophecy and interpreted prophecy but he himself lived or rather portrayed a prophetic picture. You see, in a very beautiful way, Daniel pictures the mostly gentile church which is unusual because all his prophetic writing focuses upon the Jewish people. I'll present some examples for you to consider and then explain why this is important.

First, by reason of persecution, Daniel wound up in a foreign land and never did return to Jerusalem. In like manner, it was principally persecution that resulted in the early church, which was comprised of Jewish believers, being scattered into gentile lands and since that time, the church has never really returned to take root or blossom in Israel.

Next, in this foreign land, Daniel's name was changed, and like manner, the Bible tells us that the believers were first called Christians in Antioch, a city in present day Turkey.

Next, Daniel's life spanned the entire time of the Jews' banishment from Jerusalem during which he was exalted to prominence, ultimately being promoted highly by each of four kings. We also note that his first promotion took place after a period of testing. Likewise, the church, after an initial period of testing and persecution, rose quickly to become the dominant cultural and authoritative body in the world second only to the sovereigns.

Next, in chapter six, Daniel was thrown to the lions and survived. Many

Christian martyrs were likewise thrown to the lions in Rome, but the church survived.

Next, Daniel is a rare figure in scripture in that he has no recorded sin and was only imprisoned with the lions because of his devotion. This mirrors the sinless state of sincere believers in God's eyes since it is the atoning blood of Christ that covers our sin. Meanwhile it is our devotion to Christ that generally brings the world's scorn and anger.

Next, in chapter nine, it was Daniel's understanding of the scriptures and the 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecy that drove him to his knees in prayer seeking God's forgiveness of His people and their return to Jerusalem. In like manner, it was partly by the instigation of many fervent praying Christians that the major governments of the world ultimately brought the nation of Israel back into being in May of 1948.

Next, Daniel, though we do not observe any sin that he committed, "confessed" his sins and asked for God's mercy and forgiveness, asserting that his coming to God was not based upon man's righteous acts but on God's great mercies.¹ God responded through the angel Gabriel and quickly told him that he was "*greatly beloved*". Of course, the similarity to the church is clear—as believers, we are instructed to confess our sins², even though we are sinless in God's eyes because of Christ) and to ask for God's forgiveness, trusting completely in the sacrifice of Christ—the expression of God's mercies. And, we are told by Jesus in the Word that we are greatly beloved because of Him.

Next, Daniel's vision of the divine messenger in chapter 10:4³ and 11:16—19⁴ is strikingly similar to John's record of Christ's appearance in Revelation 1:10- 20⁵ which we should also note prefaces Christ's detailed address to the seven churches of the "church age".

OK, so those are quite a few examples of Daniel's "display" or representation of the mostly gentile church. But the reason this is of importance for us beyond the interesting similarities is that there is another display that is yet to be fulfilled. We find it in Daniel chapter three. You may recall the story.

In the previous chapter (ch 2), Daniel and his three companions revealed the prophetic dream of Nebuchadnezzar and interpreted it for him. It was a dream of a large statue of a man with a head of gold, a chest and arms of silver, an abdomen of bronze, legs of iron and feet of iron and clay mixed. Daniel told the king that he was symbolized by this head of gold. That must have been an ego-stroke for Nebuchadnezzar. The downer, however, was the clear indication that his kingdom was to be replaced by others in successive order of the metals in the statue.

In chapter three, 'Nebby' had apparently decided to assert his own 'divine' plan by constructing what would appear to be his own version of the dream statue, you see he made it entirely of gold. In his arrogance, he was defying the prophetic dream-message and declaring that his kingdom would last forever—a messiah complex, if you would.

Well, he commanded everyone in the kingdom—all officials specifically—to gather around the immense golden idol and when the music played, to bow

down and worship this false god. Anyway, the music played, and all the people bowed except for three—Daniel’s companions—who remained standing.

When the king learned of this defiance to his dictate, he was incensed and had them brought before him. With the intent to utterly intimidate, he gave them another chance to bow or be thrown into a fiery furnace. Their response was awesome—in essence, they said, “God may or may not deliver us from you, king; but, we won’t bow”.

At that point, the king went ballistic and had the furnace heated up seven times hotter than normal—so hot that it fried to death the soldiers who tossed the three prisoners in. But then the king’s choler turned to confused amazement. He asserted to everyone around that he saw four people including the Son of God walking in the fire and they were all untouched by the flames—only their binding ropes were burned off.

Now, many of you know this story, and how it accurately foretells the coming seven year Tribulation time in which the Antichrist, portrayed by Nebuchadnezzar, will attempt to force the worship of his own idol—the image of the beast⁶ on the whole world and specifically the Jewish people and how only a ‘remnant’ of faithful, born again Jews will stand up against this, incurring the fire of his hatred.

This believing “remnant”, however, will be divinely protected by Christ and will in fact be freed from their bondage to death and sin to preach the good news worldwide.

So, what’s the big deal about Daniel??

It’s simple. Where IS he?

Remember, he was promoted by the king to be in charge of the whole province of Babylon.⁷ As the senior-most advisor of Nebuchadnezzar’s wise men, he of all people should have been present, but he is not even mentioned. Did he bow? NO WAY. He’s simply gone. Do you get the picture?

In like manner, we as the church, will not be present during the seven year Tribulation. Our calling to be a witness for the Lord to the world will soon be passed like a baton to the Jewish believers of this coming period. (Rev. chapter 7 specifies their divine anointing and the outcome of their evangelism.) The church will be in heaven—see our lesson “Breakpoint and Beyond” for more on this, and our exposition of the book of Revelation, “Fire Eyes”.

That’s great news for all believers. Even when Daniel is not displayed in his book, he’s prophetically portraying the church and God’s plan for us. Just as he stood courageously to speak the truth of God’s plan to Nebuchadnezzar in Chapter two, so must we speak the truth in love in this present age. We are racing toward the end when we will disappear! May we all faithfully display the Gospel!

1. *“we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments.”—(Daniel 9:5 NKJV)*

- “Now while I was speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God,”— (Daniel 9:20 NKJV)*
2. *“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 NKJV)*
 3. *“Now on the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, that is, the Tigris,”— (Daniel 10:4 NKJV)*
 4. *“But he who comes against him shall do according to his own will, and no one shall stand against him. He shall stand in the Glorious Land with destruction in his power. “He shall also set his face to enter with the strength of his whole kingdom, and upright ones with him; thus shall he do. And he shall give him the daughter of women to destroy it; but she shall not stand with him, or be for him. After this he shall turn his face to the coastlands, and shall take many. But a ruler shall bring the reproach against them to an end; and with the reproach removed, he shall turn back on him. Then he shall turn his face toward the fortress of his own land; but he shall stumble and fall, and not be found.”— (Daniel 11:16–19 NKJV)*
 5. *“I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,” and, “What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.” Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.”— (Revelation 1:10–20 NKJV)*
 6. *“He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.”— (Revelation 13:15 NKJV)*
 7. *“Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face, prostrate before Daniel, and commanded that they should present an offering and incense to him. The king answered Daniel, and said, “Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret.” Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon. Also Daniel petitioned the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel sat in the gate of the king.”— (Daniel 2:46–49 NKJV)*

Chapter 3

In Jesus' Name

“If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”

— (John 14:14)

This is one of the most amazing promises in the Bible. I mean, is it real? Is it literal? Is there a ‘catch’?

Yes, yes, and no; but we really need to understand something that I think has been trivialized for a long time. People nearly all the time pray, “In Jesus name.” as if it’s a magic trick or spell that requires you to say these words and thus it’s not much more than superstition.

Now, Jesus was absolutely sincere in making this promise but what does “in my name” mean? Do we just have to say the words or say them with the right intonation or with our brows furrowed?

Let me introduce or re-introduce you to something that’s been all but forgotten in modern Christianity—All the way back to the very first use of the word “name” in the Bible and throughout Old and New Testament history name is actually “character” or “nature”. Go ahead and look it up.

In other words, if you’re going to do anything “in Jesus name”, you have to know His character or nature because, to be authentic, you have to have the same character, the same heart, if you would, as Christ. So let’s identify His nature:

Clearly, He is tuned in to the Father—all the time.

Clearly, He is obedient to the Father—all the time.

He is loving, gracious, selfless, humble, kind, giving, forgiving, compassionate, prayerful, courageous.

His heart is pure, and he never sinned.

So “in Jesus’ name” meaning “in Jesus’ character or nature” implies all these things. You see, the Greek word used has, as its root, the word, “ginosko” which means to know by experience or intimacy.

Do you really know Jesus in this way? You cannot do anything truly “in His name/nature/character” unless you do.

Chris Tomlin’s song, The Name of Jesus is beautiful and even more powerful when you keep in mind our lesson here:

**The name of Jesus is a refuge
A shelter from the storm, a help to those who call
The name of Jesus is a fortress
A saving place to run, a hope unshakable
When we fall You are the Savior, when we call You are the answer
There is power in Your name, there is power in Your name
In the name of Jesus
There is life and healing
Chains are broken in Your name
Every knee will bow down and our hearts will cry out
Songs of freedom in Your name, oh, in Your name
Bring salvation, bring Your Kingdom
Let all that You have made bring glory to Your name
When we fall you are the Savior, when we call You are the answer
There is power in Your name, there is power in Your name**

Check out his video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZii7zjj3m4>

Chapter 4

Increase Our Faith

Read Luke 17:5-10

Now, the apostles had heard Jesus say many times, *“Your faith has saved you.”* So it was understandable when they petitioned Him, *“Increase our faith.”* (Luke 17:5) But rather than simply granting their request, the Lord decided to teach them and us something about having faith that unless you really think on it, may pass you by.

First, He tells them that faith, even as small as the puny mustard seed can do the miraculous; but then He seems to shift instantly to the topic of servanthood and the servant’s required attitude¹. So what’s the lesson and how does it address the apostles’ request?

Consider first that the servant in the lesson is out doing his work of plowing or tending all day—work that his master expects of him and commanded him to do. It can remind us of what Jesus told His disciples,

“If you love Me, keep my commandments.”

— (John 14:15)

Then He follows with,

“And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat?’

But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink?’

Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not.”

— (Luke 17:7-9)

Keep in mind, this is not a lesson on the master or some point of labor practices, but on the right attitude of the servant. He finishes with,

“So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’”

— (Luke 17:10)

You see, the lesson is on obedience and humility. In other words, it pictures that faith is the outcome of obedience to God’s commands and humility concerning the results.

You may remember Peter, James and John were aghast on the mountain top seeing Jesus transformed and accompanied by Moses and Elijah and they bumbled miserably with the offer to build three tabernacles—seeing the miraculous evidently really wowed them but ‘wowing’ wasn’t God’s desired outcome. He simply spoke from out of the cloud,

*“This is My beloved Son. **Hear Him!**”*

— (Mark 9:7 emphasis mine)

and we recall the verse:

“So, then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

— (Romans 10:17)

You see faith, the faith they were asking for, is never intended to make you a spiritual celebrity or to wow anyone but comes in response to hearing God’s commands to do His work and obeying—obeying with a very loving, humble, selfless attitude. You just don’t look for thanks; you do not expect back-slapping or any attention at all.

Of course, you may have experienced faith in situations or for certain things

that don't immediately seem to relate to "God's work" but trust me, faith is always the result of God working, and God deserves ALL the credit.

So Listen! Hear the Lord's voice—in prayer, in His Word, in the counsel of believers. Obey the guidance of His Spirit in love, humility and selflessness. Voila—your faith will increase.¹

1. *"So the Lord said, 'If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.'"*—(Luke 17:6 NKJV)

Chapter 5

The End of Evil

It seems that upon occasion, even as today, God allows evil dark hearts to abound. We can go all the way back to Noah's day where evil hearted beings virtually destroyed the planet and the human race; so much so that God decided to start over. We can consider the vile perversion of Sodom, or the myriad Canaanite races, or the cruelty of the Assyrians and Babylonians, or the worldwide oppression of Rome.

And of course, there's the more recent Nazi tyranny or Communist insanity of Russia or China and even the make-you-want-to-puke values of contemporary movie makers and the US society and political parties.

God sees it all and is not surprised. But why does He wait? Why doesn't He start over again as with Noah's society?

Huge question, and here's some of the answer.

God is going to start over anew, brand new, when He decides the time is right.

God is merciful and patient but when the final line is crossed, He will unleash His wrath upon those who trample the gift of His Son underfoot.

Believe it or not, the terrible ugliness of evil in this world, God is able to use even it to accomplish His good will.

God wants to save the evil and dark hearted people and gives them chance after chance after chance to wake up and come out of their stupor.

But evil will end. And those of us who love the light and struggle against sin and temptation will rejoice forever. You've probably heard of the battle of Armageddon which comes at the conclusion of the seven-year tribulation.

Horribly, hundreds of millions will die during both events, but wonderfully, Christ will afterwards reign over this planet for 1000 years—a time without war; a time of peace under His righteous rule. Then evil will be allowed to reemerge for a short time after which the final judgement from God will obliterate all evil forever.

The author of evil, Satan, and his followers will be thrown into an eternal lake of fire. That's when God will start over anew with a new earth and a new heaven filled with His goodness and life and light forever. Yes, evil will end.

And in the meantime,

“Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.”

— (Romans 12:21)

Chapter 6

The Unexpected

“Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things. And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to Jesus—

“When the men had come to Him, they said, ‘John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’”

— (Luke 7:19)

The very one who was commissioned to precede the Messiah, the one who told Christ, “I should be baptized by You.” The one who told John the disciple, “Behold the Lamb of God.” The one who witnessed the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus as a dove. And NOW he’s doubting Christ?!

How could that happen and what can we learn from Jesus’ reaction?

First, we have to recall that at this time John was in a prison cell. But he had lived in the wilderness as a firebrand for a long while—so not a ‘sissy’ or one easily discouraged by hardship. Also, Christ’s last statement to John’s messengers is revealing-

“And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”

— (Luke 7:23)

“Offended” means, “to see in another what I disapprove of and what hinders me from acknowledging his authority.”

So, it leads to a question—what was it about Jesus that John, in prison, either disapproved of or that hindered him from acknowledging His authority. Jesus later said of him to the people, “But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written:

“Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You. For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist;...”

— (Luke 7:26-28a)

It is very apparent that John expected to see a different Messiah. Perhaps, like the vast majority of the people, he thought Christ would cast out the Roman oppressors and establish His own rule immediately. After all, John had preached,

“And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

— (Matthew 3:10)

And...

“His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

— (Matthew 3:12)

Yes, it looks like John expected judgement and fire. But Jesus as we mentioned above, responded with specific actions to John’s disciples,

“And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight. And furthermore, Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them.’”

— (Luke 7:21-22)

Jesus was and is the unexpected Messiah. Our perspective of God is so skewed, so off, we expect Him to be like we imagine. And if He doesn’t do things the way we expect, we can doubt. For this reason, we truly need help perceiving the Father; perceiving Christ, as He is.

You see, He, that is His Spirit, can be right before us or in our midst and we can miss Him, because, like John the Baptist we can get down or discouraged by circumstances and/or have a preconceived idea of what to expect which may be inaccurate for the moment. Even Christ’s disciples struggled with this.

“Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.’ Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, “Show us the Father?”’ ”

— (John 14:7-9)

Now, hear me carefully on this. There are a lot of spiritual lunatics out there who would love to draw you away from sound doctrine into their own flights of fancy. You must know our Lord by His Word and by the guidance of His Spirit, by prayer and supplication. Test all things.

John was the greatest prophet but even he needed faith in this unexpected Christ that was beyond, or different, than what his own ideas had formulated. Without it, he was still outside the kingdom—Jesus said,

“...but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

— (Luke 7:28b)

Of course, I'm 100% sure we'll see John in heaven—that's why Jesus sent his messengers back with His response—it was what John needed to hear. Kind of like when Jesus dealt with Thomas' doubt by showing up and telling Thomas to touch His scars. That's what Thomas needed, and he responded,

“My Lord and my God.”

— (John 20:28)

Indeed, Christ is merciful to our errant expectations and even our doubts, especially when He knows we love Him.

Chapter 7

God's Kids

“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.”

— (Mark 10:14b-15)

Little children and the kingdom of God—Jesus, once again, shook things up when He made it clear that their receptivity to the kingdom is a model for us all. So, what is the essence of that receptivity? And what is the kingdom of God?

Now, in this circumstance the little children were coming to Jesus. This was not a matter of coming to anyone else and thus having to discern truth or falsehood. That's because we know that everything Jesus said/says is truth. He said of Himself,

“I am the way, the truth and the life.”

— (John 14:6)

So, the essence of this receptivity is receiving the truth of the kingdom of God with child-like faith and trust. Little children have a natural tendency to do just that; everyone else Not so much. For everyone else, apart from the work of God's Spirit, the natural tendency is to doubt, distrust and question. That's the impetus behind being 'born again'.

Now, the kingdom of God is fundamentally God's authority to rule all of creation. Contrary to Adam and Eve's first terrible decision, we are told to seek and trust in God Who is righteous in all that He thinks, says and does. Consequently, His kingdom is perfect. Little children can do this quite easily but

those who have acquired riches struggle because they tend to put their trust in their 'stuff'.

Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!"

— (Mark 10:2324)

We should note that in Greek writings this word for riches is literally "whatever is for use, whatever one uses, a thing, matter, affair, event, business." In other words, you may not be rich and so presume that this warning from Jesus doesn't apply to you. But if you are putting your trust for your life, your welfare, in anything, matter, affair, etc. other than Christ and His salvation, you have no assurance of entering.

Now the reason this was such a shaking up of Jewish theology was because since the time of Moses, getting into God's Kingdom was first a birthright because of being a descendant of Abraham, and second an uncertain matter of diligently keeping the law which of course no was truly able to do. Jesus addressed this when He said,

"And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."

— (Matthew 3:9)

and...

"Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law?"

— (John 7:19)

Thus, this teaching of getting into God's kingdom only by way of the receptivity of a child was a bombshell and it still is today. Christianity has been loaded up with morality, laws and church rules in much the same way. Child-like faith is sometimes set aside in favor of intellectual agreement with Christ or acceptable moral conduct or certain membership rules, etc.

But here's the bottom line. If you want the full assurance of Christ's welcome and 'well done' in the Kingdom of God, you must listen and follow Christ's words over and above these other things.

Chapter 8

The Cross Walk

“When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, ‘Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.’ ”

— (Mark 8:34-38)

Here’s the setting-Jesus had just dealt rather severely with Peter when the disciple spoke disparagingly of Christ’s dying on the cross. It was the voice of Satan in Peter. Soon afterwards, in this passage, his whole group of followers learned that the ‘death walk’ of the cross was not just for Jesus. It is for anyone who will follow Christ sincerely.

But of course, we don’t hear any of this today; it just doesn’t ‘preach well’. Donations dry up when you suggest that we might have to deny self and take up a cross. And what is this denying self anyway?

“Denying self is not the same as self-denial. We practice self-denial when, for a good purpose, we occasionally give up things or activities. But we deny self when we surrender ourselves to Christ and determine to obey His will.”

— *Wiersbe*

And taking up a cross—isn't that merely figurative? What it is, is a radical way of thinking; in essence, it's anti-establishment, spiritually.

“Most people think of following Jesus as conforming to the establishment. Actually, Jesus called us to rebel against the established order of this world. We are called to rebel against the tyranny of the flesh, against the fear and conformity of the world, against the traditions of man. Jesus encourages a slave rebellion, where the slaves of sin, Satan, and the world rebel against their masters.” — *Guzik*

Today, much of the church is soft and comfortable. If we don't get coffee and pastries, we're sacrificing. Carrying a cross which BTW is an instrument of death simply doesn't register. It's too serious, too severe. Frankly, the modern church is a bunch of spiritual wimps. Oh, God still loves us but there's a whole lot of waking up and strengthening necessary. He says to us, you “...do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”

Now there is an 'upside' as well. Christ didn't give up on Peter or his disciples. The church is still an object of His affection. What He does want is for all of us to truly consider what it means to carry a cross today, to be unashamed of our Savior and His words.

Chapter 9

Marvelous

“Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?” And He marveled because of their unbelief.”

— (Mark 6:2,3,6)

They thought they knew Him. They apparently thought they knew all about Him. But it gave them a type of self-righteousness that blinded them to the truth.

And Jesus marveled or wondered at it. Interestingly, there are only two times that the Bible says that Jesus marveled. In Luke 7:9¹ and in Matthew 8:10² He marveled at the great faith of a centurion, a Roman soldier and in this passage, He marveled at the lack of faith of His own neighbors.

Now everyone marveled at Jesus, His disciples, the people who saw His miracles, even the Pharisees and the Governor. But what relevance does this notion of marveling have for us?

The Centurion knew the power of Christ. In effect, he told Jesus, “You don’t have to come to my house to heal my servant. You can just speak the command.” On the other hand, those who thought they knew Jesus, actually had no clue. They said, “Is this not the carpenter...”

In today’s church, there are many who think self-righteously that they ‘know’ Jesus. Perhaps it’s because they were raised by Christian parents or they went to a Christian school or they strongly observe a moral code or they’ve attended a church. There are many possible reasons but they actually have no clue. What they presuppose about their knowledge of Jesus is in fact an inaccurate and prideful posture.

Friends, the Centurion, a man of power and position, actually had a humble posture towards Christ and it allowed him to express genuine faith, great faith. And Jesus marveled.

The ‘neighbors’ who watched Christ’s perfect life as he grew up manifested a prideful disdain and it blocked them from having faith. And Jesus marveled.

I think most of us would like to impress Jesus like the Centurion—with great faith. But at the same time, we’d like to do that on our own terms. That’s because sincere humility has no place in our churches or our society in general. Even some of our most well-known Christian ‘celebrity’ pastors openly lust for money and notoriety—they crave a ‘name’ for themselves. So sad.

But then there are some, admittedly few, behind the pulpits and in the pews who get it without even ‘trying’. Filled and guided by God’s Spirit, their hearts are truly upon the Savior and they believe like the Centurion. They’re not seeking a spotlight; however, the only spiritual light in the churches whether they have five or five thousand in attendance is in the hearts of these people.

And from heaven’s perspective, they are marvelous.

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1. *“When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, “I say to you, I have not found such great faith .Not even in Israel!”— (Luke 7:9 NKJV)*
 2. *“When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith .Not even in Israel!”— (Matthew 8:10 NKJV)*

Chapter 10

On the Floor

There I was, on the floor, face down. I couldn't get up and I was delirious. My wife called 911 and after a lengthy delay, the paramedics showed up but they wouldn't listen to her. She tried to get them to take me to the hospital but they said since I was conscious (sort of), I had to tell them where to take me.

That was pretty nuts because all I knew was that I was fading fast but I didn't understand what was happening. If my son had not interceded, I probably would have died.

Anyway, I'm reminded of this recent event as I read, He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.¹ I think that's because the 'world' was/is truly clueless when it comes to recognizing Who Christ is and their need for Him. And in these final days, the vast majority of people, sadly even those who identify as Christian are in this lost condition.

Instead of listening to the scriptures and taking heed, virtually everyone is defining for themselves their own god or their version of Christ. This is, of course, based upon pride and the folly of Satan's deception—exalting man above God. As a consequence, societal perversions of all sorts are being crammed down our throats so to speak. And what is ugly, dark and unabashedly evil is being promoted as good.

No sincere follower of Jesus Christ can be silent in these times. That's not to advocate protest but rather promotion of the Gospel. Now it is more important than ever to speak the truth in love, to pray fervently for God's help, to worship whole heartedly, to reach out to those in need and do so compassionately and humbly.

Christ is coming soon and many if not most will be surprised. When we, the church, are gone, the world's 'spin-machine' will go into hyper-drive. Delusion will be so pervasive, even the elect, that is the remnant of Jewish believers left behind to evangelize, will struggle to know and hold to the truth of God's salvation. But empowered by the Holy Spirit's anointing, they will faithfully

proclaim the truth. If you are here then, listen to them and join them. It will be your only hope.

You see, the world has never really known Him.

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1. *“He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.”*— (John 1:10 NKJV)

Chapter 11

Who Are the Godly?

After resigning his pastorate to go lead another church, a pastor was approached by an endearing older member of the congregation.

She wept over the pastor's decision to leave and said, "Things will never be the same."

The minister tried to console her by saying, "Don't worry, I'm confident you will get a new pastor who is better than me."

She continued to sob and replied, "That's what the last three pastors have said, but they just keep getting worse." — *source unknown*

Maybe you've heard that story before. It's a bit humorous but it presents a theme. People today just don't understand humility. It's scary because contemporary, let's say worldly, thought casts it in an extremely negative way. You see, humility is not just an act or a posture, it's a mindset, a whole way of thinking about God and about yourself. Look at the guy next to you—do you consider him better than yourself? Of course, you might think, 'You don't know who I'm looking at.'

"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." (Philippians 2:3)

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 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." (Philippians 2:5–8)

With **this** perspective, you are at peace with God and heaven is delightful—that is, your expectation now and your enjoyment later. That’s because humility is based in selflessness.

Likewise, pride is not just an act or posture but an opposite mindset. And all of humanity walks in this manner naturally. Thus, when you seek a definition of the word “humble” you’ll find: “having a feeling of insignificance, inferiority, subservience, etc.” or “low in rank, importance, status, quality, etc.” And, so, as people think of humility via the filter of sin, they don’t see it as God does. They see it only as a ‘downer’ literally.

But the Bible tells us that God lifts up the humble (Psalm 147:6)¹ to dwell with Him in the “high and holy place” (Isaiah 57:15)². There He beautifies them with salvation and revives their spirit (Psalm 149:4, Isaiah 57:15)³. So, in heaven, the truly humble are highly exalted and actually live in the Almighty’s presence.

And here on earth, contrary to what the dictionary says, it’s not really positional—Moses, who led millions and spoke face to face with God was

“very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.”

— (Numbers 12:3)

“When Jesus called the disciples to pursue greatness through the humility of serving others, he wasn’t merely calling them to be countercultural; he was calling them to be counter-natural— or better, to be supernatural. None of us is born with this character quality. If Jesus’s humility ethic seems alien, it’s because it is. It is the ethic of a foreign kingdom (Matthew 18:1)⁴, a better country (Hebrews 11:16)⁵.” — *Jon Bloom*

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.’”

— (Matthew 18:1-4)

But still, what’s so great about humility? Why does God esteem it as a high quality of human greatness? Possibly because humility is the only condition of the soul that enables us to perceive and value truth and glory for what they really are. Only the humble can truly view the heavenly.

Yes, humility leads us into the mindset to be able to see and understand. Which is why God

“leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble his way”

— (Psalm 25:9)

Only the humble can be “pure in heart,” and therefore only the humble can “see God” (Matthew 5:8).⁶

“Why did Jesus say only the humble can enter the kingdom? Because only the humble can see the kingdom. Why are the greatest in the kingdom the servants? Because the more humble we are, the more reality we truly see, the more of God’s multifaceted glory we truly see, and therefore the more joy we experience, and therefore the more we want others to experience that joy. What makes humility so great is that it’s God-like.”—*Jon Bloom*

OK, let’s go on beyond the ‘theoretical’ to get a handle on this. What does real humility look like? If we are having difficulty perceiving real humility what do we do?

First, look to Jesus. He embodied and demonstrated for us the humility of God. Read the Gospels and ‘take notes’. Second and even more important, invite the Spirit of Christ into your heart, your life. Accept His gift of life and you will begin to appreciate and perceive God in a whole new way.

You see, ever since Eden, we’ve been duped into believing that God is fundamentally mean and withholding, that He is severe in character. Unfortunately, many Christians mistakenly still see Him as such, and it hinders their ability or desire to enjoy a truly loving relationship with Him.

“According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind... it is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.”—*C.S. Lewis*

“...humility is the root, mother Nurse, foundation, and bond of all virtue,”—*John Chrysostom*

How do we gain the mind of Christ and humble ourselves? To put on the mind of Christ, we will need to make a firm decision to ponder, understand, and adopt Jesus’ way of thinking; his values and attitudes must become ours. His strong emphasis on humility and meekness and his example of it must take hold of our thinking, our desires and our conduct. We must admire his humility and truly want it for ourselves. For this to happen, we need to earnestly and regularly pray for the Holy Spirit to change our hearts, and thereafter trust Him for it is

impossible to do it in our own strength. We will also need to understand what Jesus meant when he called men and women to humble themselves. We discover that from the Greek word Jesus and the apostles used, *tapeinos*, we need to have a right view of ourselves before God and others. If pride is an exalted sense of who we are in relation to God and others, humility is having a realistic sense of who we are before God and others. We must not think too highly (or too lowly) of ourselves. Rather, we must be honest and realistic about who and what we are.

Now God is just and holy but don't confuse that with severity and meanness. As we witnessed in Christ, God Himself is humble and loving. Some may point to Old Testament stories of war as examples of God's harshness, but they always leave out two important facts—first, those actions were taken after literally hundreds of years of violence and rebellion against God. Second, we only have the observation of our own time and space; we cannot know what is happening in eternity.

No, it is all too easy for our sin-nature 'lens' to attribute Satan's own attributes of pride and hate mistakenly to our loving humble Almighty God. We just don't see correctly, and consequently we don't understand the beauty and heavenly nature of humility. Only Jesus Christ by His Spirit can fix that in our hearts.

It's not the famous or the gifted that are necessarily the godly. Most often, it is the humble who actually are the godly.

I am the least of the apostles. (1 Corinthians 15:9)⁷

I am the very least of all the saints. (Ephesians 3:8)⁸

I am the foremost of sinners. (1 Timothy 1:15)⁹

Paul recorded these statements towards the end of his life.

Humility is a strange thing. The minute you think you've got it, you've lost it.

Without humility, we keep all our defects; and they are only crusted over by pride, which conceals them from others, and often from ourselves.

Developing the identity, attitude, and conduct of a humble servant does not happen overnight. It is rather like peeling an onion: you cut away one layer only to find another beneath it. But it does happen. As we forsake pride and seek to humble ourselves by daily deliberate choices in dependence on the Holy Spirit, humility grows in our souls.

Francois Fenelon said it well, "Humility is not a grace that can be acquired in a few months: it is the work of a lifetime."

1. "The Lord lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground."—(Psalm 147:6 NKJV)
2. "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."—(Isaiah 57:15 NKJV)

3. *“For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation.”*— (Psalm 149:4 NKJV)
“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.”— (Isaiah 57:15 NKJV)
4. *“At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ ”*— (Matthew 18:1 NKJV)
5. *“But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”*— (Hebrews 11:16 NKJV)
6. *“Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.”*— (Matthew 5:8 NKJV)
7. *“For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”*— (1 Corinthians 15:9 NKJV)
8. *“To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,”*— (Ephesians 3:8 NKJV)
9. *“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”*— (1 Timothy 1:15 NKJV)

Chapter 12

Courage in the Fire

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

—(Daniel 3:1)

God used the Babylonian empire as a tool of judgement upon the Hebrew nation. For many years the people of Judah had turned their backs on their Creator. They no longer worshipped Him, preferring the gods of the nations around them. They sacrificed their own children to achieve greater pleasure. Their military had become pathetic in the face of their enemies. The nobility shown and grandeur built by David, Solomon and their ‘founding fathers’ was long gone. The streets were filled with vile displays and crime was rampant. Prophets speaking for God like Jeremiah and Isaiah and others had warned them for generations to repent, but each generation became more self-righteous and arrogant.

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

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

“Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent word to assemble the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. Then the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces were assembled for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they were standing before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.”
(v2-3)

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

Then the herald loudly called out:

“To you it is said, O peoples Nations, and men of every tongue, that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe, and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire.” (v4-6)

A German philosopher is known for saying, “The only thing that we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history.”

And I do believe that at least as far as the Jewish people are concerned, that’s a major reason this story is in our Bible. The Tribulation time will be a fiery trial for them in particular but God will deliver those who turn to Him. The Bible says,

“And I will bring the third part (of the Jews) through the fire (of the Tribulation) And refine them as silver is refined And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are My people,’ And they will say, ‘Yahweh is my God.’”

— (Zechariah 13:9)

Anyway, our story continues,

“Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe, and all kinds of music, all the peoples Nations, and men of every tongue fell down and worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.” (v7)

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

Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him,

“All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me. Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”

— (Matthew 4:8-10)

You see, a ‘little bow’ is a big deal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Was it not three men we cast tied up into the midst of the fire?” They

answered and said to the king, "Certainly, O king." He answered and said, "Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!" Anyway, he called the lads to come out and when they did, only their binding ropes were burned off. They didn't even smell of the fire."

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

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

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

— (Psalm 37:23-24)

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

Chapter 13

Who Sinned?

“And His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’”

— (John 9:2)

You all are probably familiar with this story where Jesus made clay with his spittle, put it on this fellow’s eyes and told him to wash it off in the pool of Siloam. Well, he obeyed and came back seeing. And, of course, there are a ton of valuable lessons in the story but what I want to focus our attention on is what happened first, before the miracle.

What didn’t happen was anyone of the disciples trying to help this fellow. No one asked Jesus to heal him. Even after the miracle None of them offered to assist this guy to the pool of Siloam. Seemingly No help No compassion in action, only looking to assign blame.

“Who sinned?”

Not unlike Job’s friends who insisted that he must have done something very wrong to bring all the terrible troubles upon himself; but if you’ve read the story, you know that Job was simply an example of patient suffering even when his wife prompted him to, “Curse God and die.” It wasn’t his sin. It was the enemy of his soul.

And not unlike many today, even Christians, who shy away from the suffering they encounter both inside and outside the Church. Christ calls us to be His hands and feet so to speak but many of us simply want to be His mouth.

Now, we are indeed called to speak the truth in love, to proclaim His good news but we also need to be acting in love especially when we encounter those who are truly suffering. Bottom line—we need a reset. We simply do not

resemble today the active love of our Savior. Praise God for those who have got it right! But too many are simply pretending or are lulled by entertaining church programs.

God has placed all of us in this day and age, this last day, to do more than find out who or what is to blame for our messed-up wreck of a society. There's plenty of blame to go around and of course, I'm looking in the mirror as well. This blind fellow had not brought the blindness on himself by sin neither had his parents been to blame—Jesus explained that God was at work in this blindness in order to manifest His glory.

The disciples failed the test so to speak. They followed but had not yet learned to behave like their Master and were weighed down with their prejudice passed on by the Pharisees. I'm challenged on this point greatly and I'll bet many of you are as well.

Now the **Holy Spirit** brought about great changes in all these guys, and He'll do the same for us if we seek and submit to His help. Just like this blind man, God has allowed the stench of this rotten world to become more and more obvious because He intends to manifest His glory and He has placed us here to be part of the solution, to 'gently lead the way to Siloam'.

Chapter 14

Prisoners or Progeny?

“No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house.”

— (Mark 3:27)

Who is this “*strong man*” Jesus is talking about? And who is going to plunder his house? And what are these goods?

Satan is the strong man here, Jesus is the one Who is about to plunder his house (the world) and the goods are ... wait for it... us! The souls of God’s children. This plundering has been ongoing for some two thousand years now and is about to culminate in the upcoming resurrection of the dead and rapture of the church. Hallelujah!

But not everyone is being liberated, some of mankind have been prisoners of Satan so to speak and then some, tragically are simply his progeny, his children. Jesus made that clear and John recorded it for us:

“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”

— (John 8:44)

That’s right. Not everyone is one of ‘God’s children’. Everyone has the opportunity but many if not most will sadly turn it down for they love darkness and hate the Light.

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

— (John 3:19)

Ever since Eden, Satan has imprisoned mankind. He has wreaked havoc in the world and kept his prisoners locked up in darkness, both spiritually during life and literally in death. Isaiah spoke of this when he wrote:

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!”

— (Isaiah 14:12)

“Who made the world as a wilderness And destroyed its cities, Who did not open the house of his prisoners?”

— (Isaiah 14:17)

Enter into the scene Jesus who brought the light of life, both during His earthly life and then even into Satan’s prison in death. In rising from the dead, He opened the prison gates and lead out all who were God’s children who were waiting in the darkness. Again, the prophet Isaiah wrote of Jesus:

“I, the LORD (Father God), have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles, To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, Those who sit in darkness from the prison house.”

— (Isaiah 42:6-7)

And Jesus spoke of this plundering of Satan’s captives when He spoke:

“THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,

— (Luke 4:18)

Now, we all want to believe that everyone will be saved somehow, some day and it’s true that many, many will be saved during the tribulation when their world is rocked by the wrath of God. And it’s true that even now many will respond when their hearts are finally prepared to receive the truth.

But it is also true that most will never leave the prison because they are

progeny of Satan spiritually. They, like him, prefer the darkness, prefer hatred and lies, prefer the comforts of this world overall.

So, our job as believers, is to find and to minister to those who are God's children but since we cannot see clearly anyone's heart, we have to be patient with all, loving to all, reaching out to all, lifting up the Light. Along the way, we must ask the Lord for discernment and His guidance because He can see everyone's hearts and He knows His children.

May God shine His light in and through you to a dark and dying world.

Chapter 15

Honest Prayer

If you consider prayer as basically communication with God, you find its beginning in the beginning. In the Garden, Adam spoke to God and heard from Him. However, sin changed the nature of that relationship as Adam and Eve were no longer allowed in the Garden of Eden.

After this, we read that God spoke to Cain and Abel but besides those dialogs there is no record of any interaction with man until Enoch over 552 years later. And then hundreds of years later, just before the great flood and just afterwards, God spoke to Noah.

Upon exiting the ark Noah worshipped God with an altar of sacrifice possibly similar to Abel's many years prior and God pronounced, presumably to Noah, the covenant –

“And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma. Then the Lord said in His heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.’ ”

— (Genesis 8:21)

Then, as with Adam, God spoke pretty extensively to Noah and his sons concerning the covenant and His commitment to it. But after this there is no record of any verbal interaction between man and God for a long time until Abram. When he was 75 years old, God told him:

“Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

— (Genesis 12:1-3)

And throughout his life, Abram/Abraham interacted several times with the Lord. However, we encounter the first prayer as we tend to think of it, when Abraham’s nameless servant is sent on a mission to find a bride for Isaac. He prays for guidance,

“O LORD God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. Behold, here I stand by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, ‘Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink’—let her be the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master.”

— (Genesis 24:12-14)

After this, God expressed a special direct communication with Moses, the prophets and of course, Christ. And then there are the angelic messages to Mary, Joseph, Gideon, Hannah, Hagar and others all of which seem to be special circumstances. All that to say that since the beginning of mankind’s presence on earth prayers or communication with God has happened for many different reasons. But though the circumstances vary widely, they really fall into two major categories—petitions (which include confessions) and praise.

Christ taught us to regard God as our Father in heaven and with the “Lord’s Prayer”, He taught us to include that acknowledgement, praise and petition together and to come to the Father through Him. And since that time, serious and sincere believers have struggled, labored, enjoyed, wept, anguished and despaired in the course of prayer, seeking to communicate with our Creator.

That’s clearly because, we, as believers, know that relating to our God is paramount. We simply cannot be casual about it. And it’s also because, God uses it to nurture and grow us spiritually.

We don’t know why it seems that sometimes He’s near and listening and even present in our midst and sometimes we seem to be knocking on a door that’s never answered. However, when we ‘hear God’ we grow and when we don’t but hang on to our faith, we grow as well. And all our lives, if we are willing, we learn more and more about and via prayer. God never tires of teaching us.

So be aware that as you pray and as you hear or perceive an answer, you will not only grow in your relationship with God, but you will realize a need for

obedience and accountability which emerges from a grateful heart. I like what Lewis wrote:

...much of prayer is really a disposition of heart that is in tune with God's presence in one's life, so that the more our hearts are in tune with and obedient toward God, the less fuss do we need to make about how vocal and articulate we are in "saying our prayers". Like friendship with a dear friend, however, prayer is never forced or irksome. It grows as the relationship grows too.— *C.S. Lewis*

That means you don't gain by 'faking it'. Rote prayers are meaningless. You must be honest before your Maker and realize that He knows you and your heart. Don't bother just going through motions unless those 'motions' truly stir you to get real.

You can learn so much from the Gospels and the life of Jesus about prayer, you'll learn to get your eyes off yourself as much as possible. You'll learn to always trust our Father, always. You'll learn to forgive and to receive forgiveness. You'll learn to love even the unlovely just as the Father loves you. It's all the result of honest prayer.

Chapter 16

The 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.

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.

In fact, 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 were 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. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me."

— (Psalm (51:1-3))

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

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, sExodus 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 cleansing your heart/soul is part of a greater process 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 heart, 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 17

The End

Lambert Dolphin's Library online is a wonderful treasure trove of edifying Christian writings. As I was perusing its contents this morning, I ended up opening an article by Ray Stedman, the former pastor of Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, CA. Honestly, as I read it, I sensed it was a beautiful answer to a recent prayer and so, I am 'energized' to write the following message:

You've heard it said, "All things come to an end." In this world, it's a pretty much universal maxim; everyone knows this but virtually everyone lives in denial of it. The Bible speaks of "the end" in several ways that can and should bring hope to the believer and in contrast, can provoke terror to the deniers.

For example, the Apostle Peter wrote,

"But the end of all things is at hand; (lit. drawing near) therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers."

— (1 Peter 4:7)

And Paul told us,

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power."

— (1 Corinthians 15:22-24)

And the writer of Hebrews adds,

“For God is not unrighteous so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and continuing to minister to the saints. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not become dull (sluggish), but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

— (Hebrews 6:10-12)

Yes, this present creation has an end, the earth will melt.¹ Peter wrote,

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be found out. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens burning will be destroyed, and the elements will melt with intense heat!”

— (2 Peter 3:10-12)

The physical creation will indeed dissolve in immense heat and the spiritual creation that is rebellious against God will also end in heat—a lake of fire.

C.S. Lewis said,

“God will invade. But I wonder whether people who ask God to interfere openly and directly in our world quite realize what it will be like when He does. When that happens, it is the end of the world. When the author walks onto the stage the play is over. God is going to invade, all right, but what is the good of saying you’re on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else—something it never entered your head to conceive—comes crashing in; something so beautiful to us and so terrible to others that none of us will have any choice left? For this time, it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love, or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side. There is no use saying you choose to lie down, when it’s become impossible to stand up. That will not be the time for choosing; it will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen whether we realize it or not. Now, today, in this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last forever; we must take it or leave it.” — *Mere Christianity*

If you know the Lord, you sincerely believe in His sacrificial death and resurrection to eternal life. If you know Him as your Lord and Savior, then you

can live each day, each moment for Him and in the blessed expectation of His return. You need not ever fear the end because for you it will simply be a new and glorious beginning—But according to His promise we are looking for NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH, in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:13)²

But of course, denigration of our faith in God and hope for Christ's return is increasing, filling all public media and attempting to bully believers into a corner where we are supposed to suck our thumbs in tears—what a joke!

And this was to be expected for they are the devil's children:

...knowing this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."

But they themselves are going to be the thumb suckers for, by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. (2 Peter 3:7)³

So, are we focused on doing what matters? If not, it's all going to burn. Ask God what you personally are supposed to be doing and whatever it is, do it as unto Him. May He give you the heart and the eyes to be watching for Him and the faith to ignore the lies of this world. Be faithful unto Him, my friend. You will NOT regret it in the end.

"Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end."

— (Psalm 73:17)

"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.'"

— (Revelation 21:6)

1. *"When I choose the proper time, I will judge uprightly. The earth and all its inhabitants are dissolved; I set up its pillars firmly. Selah"*— (Psalm 75:2-3 NKJV)
2. *"Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."* — (2 Peter 3:13 NKJV)
3. *"But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."*— (2 Peter 3:7 NKJV)

Chapter 18

From all Unrighteousness

Speaking with a friend the other day, he brought up how thankful he was that God would forgive all the bad ‘stuff’ he’d done in his life. Like many of us though, he reminds himself of that from time to time. Of course, there’s a spiritual dynamic at play here in that on the one hand, remembering those former stains on his soul keeps him humble but on the other hand, it can also keep him in a sort of bondage of uncertainty. Possibly because he’s not grasping the big picture so to speak.

Now, honest comprehension of the wickedness of our sin is fundamental to the honest reception of God’s gracious forgiveness and the honest appreciation of what Jesus did for us on the cross and His following resurrection. However, knowing this, the enemy of our souls tries to ‘short-circuit’ this process in at least a couple of ways.

In speaking to our heart, he tries to transform that honest comprehension into deceptive condemnation. Thus, we can shy away from embracing God’s forgiveness even though we may give lip-service to it. There are many, many who are sitting in pews who are in this position.

In addition, he tries to convince us that, just as we cannot truly forget our misdeeds Neither does God. Because of this, many, many sincere Christians are expecting to get the ‘wood-shed’ talk from Him in heaven and thus are apprehensive as opposed to appreciative and adoring.

You see, it all comes down to faith and trust. Can you truly believe that Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection demonstrated the depth of God’s love for you? And can you believe that contrary to the lies of Satan, God’s nature and intent is completely forgiving, welcoming toward you in spite of knowing all about you.

Now many, many preachers like to talk about the beautiful process of sanctification, but they frequently confuse it with a self-imposed morality somehow tied to ‘Biblical law’. That’s too bad, because the purpose of real

sanctification is to grow us up so to speak into the ‘full stature of godly men and women’. It is totally a work of the Holy Spirit in us growing our trust in the faithfulness of our Lord. The ‘do’s and don’ts’ don’t sanctify us, the faith that draws us closer to Him does. The ‘natural’ obedience to His will is the fruit or the consequence of that sanctification process.

So where does this kind of faith come from? I’ll answer that in a moment.

“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)

There’s a type of spiritual legal proceeding pictured here in this verse that takes place concerning each of us. With Father God presiding, Jesus is our defensive attorney, and the devil is a sort of prosecutor. Now don’t take this too literally, but understand something very important to your spiritual well-being -

Fundamental to the operation of the entire cosmos, seen and unseen, is that God is just. You see, He could not tell us that sin will kill us and then simply say later that He changed His mind (Malachi 3:6-7)¹. That would be unjust. Neither can He say that He lied about sin because He cannot lie (Numbers 23:19)². So then, our continual rebellion against His ways—we lie, we cheat, we kill, we steal, we’re selfish, we deceive...establishes an enormous debt that must be paid if we are to be free. We don’t get to just walk away from it and we ourselves don’t have the resources to pay for it apart from our own lives.

In full view of all creation, God must show Himself to be just but at the same time He must remain true to His character of mercy, kindness and love. Enter Jesus Christ, the perfect man who never sinned, resisted the devil’s temptations and lived a life of selfless good. He offered Himself up as the payment before God and before the cosmos. His life sacrificed for us cancelled all debt of sin beginning with Adam and extending to all his descendants—everyone, every sin, for all time—past, present, future.

But God won’t force anyone to accept this amazing provision. Sure, it’s a glorious manifestation of the greatest gift of love ever. Sure, any sane person would gladly receive it. Sure, life beats death all day every day.

But God knows that if it is forced on us, then our gratitude is also forced and not real. Therefore, we all have a choice—to believe and receive this gift of complete forgiveness and life eternal or to doubt and die. So, to believe and receive, all we need to do is demonstrate that we know we are ‘on trial’ so to speak justly—we deserve it, we’ve sinned and there’s no escaping that fact. That is, we need to confess our failures to God.

So that takes us back to 1 John 1:9. There are at least three more main points to consider and appreciate in this beautiful truth.

First, the word “forgive” means to “send away”. Satan wants to use our sins as a club to continually beat us with and keep us under his thumb. But God sends them away. Where? As far from us as “east is from west” (Psalm 103:12).³ That is infinitely far away Never to return.

Second, “cleanse” means to clean the slate. There is no residue No leftovers Nada. So, there is nothing for Him to remember—like they, that is your sins Never happened. No, they’re not on a shelf somewhere that He’s going to pull out later. This word “cleanse” means they simply don’t exist anymore; not in His mind or with time, in yours.

Third, “unrighteousness” means “unlawful acts”. You see, His promise is to clean the slate from “all unlawful acts”. These are the consequences of living sinfully. You see, your sin invariably has ugly impacts upon yourself and others. Sometimes you don’t even know about it or see it, but God sees it all and He has committed to make it all right.

Now, faith to believe all this is simply a gift from God. So, ask him for it if you’re coming up short.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:”

— (Ephesians 2:8)

So, God’s promise is to utterly forgive and to fix or make right **everything** you’ve messed up when you confess your need and failures, and with His generous gift of faith, to believe. What an outrageously good God!!

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1. *“For I am the Lord, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you,” Says the Lord of hosts. “But you said, ‘In what way shall we return?’ ”— (Malachi 3:6–7 NKJV)*
 2. *“God is not a man, that He should lie Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”— (Numbers 23:19 NKJV)*
 3. *“As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.”— (Psalm 103:12 NKJV)*

Chapter 19

Ambassadors

“And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar.”

— (Genesis 13:10)

Abram gave Lot a choice and he chose the lush valley of the plain, so Abram took the mountains. For Lot, it was a huge mistake that destroyed his family.

Sodom really had it coming. Since the flood No place had devolved into such evil as to warrant utter destruction from heaven. But Lot, Abram’s nephew had gotten used to it, accepted it and had even become somewhat of a honcho in it.

When God’s angels came to see just how bad it was, Lot was sitting in the gate of the city which typically indicated a person with authority. Then in his conversation with them, he clearly seems to be preventing them from seeing the debauched condition of the society. Then, he doesn’t want to leave even when he knows destruction is coming. All this and more pointed to a man who was compromised even though his “righteous soul” was tormented.

Peter, speaking of God’s judgement and mercy noted that,

“...turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)”

— (2 Peter 2:6-8 NKJV)

This is what happens when you choose riches and comfort over love of God, and this is what has happened to much of our own society. You see, we too are living in a growing culture of Sodom, and few are making any stand, especially among our leaders. That's because they (and we) are taking on a 'Lot mentality'.

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

— (Ezekiel 16:49)

“And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”

— (Jude 1:6-7)

So much violence of thought, imagination and action. Pride and self-absorption dominate our characters because that's the 'air' of Sodom and as we are forced to breathe it in, it transforms even those who know better than to compromise. So like Lot, we sit in the gate with tormented souls.

The society around us is dead or near death and there is no healing it by any human means.

And so, we must remember that we who believe in Christ are not at home here, we are ambassadors of heaven, soon to be recalled to our real home. So where is the hope?

It's in the changing of a single individual by way of salvation.

It is in the promise of Christ's return.

It is in the eyes of someone you have encouraged or helped.

It is in honest worship and prayer.

Ambassadors, this is your role, your calling, your purpose, so press on and trust in your Savior.

Chapter 20

Is It Time?

When my kids were young, we sometimes would drive in the car to a park and the three older ones would ‘nudge’ our youngest boy into the back where he would bounce around and play driving us all nuts until all the older ones would finally say, “Dad, please do something. Gabe is going crazy!”

So, I’d say, “Gabe! Settle down.” And he would for about 10 seconds, but then he’d start with the “Are we there yet?” Many of you have experienced the same kind of thing, right?

And many of us would ask the Lord, “Is it time yet?”

Deception is such a fundamental part of our contemporary societies, we can’t be sure what to believe and we pray, “Lord, is it time yet?”

Sexual and gender perversion is touted everywhere as normal and promoted by even children’s theme parks and we pray, “Lord, is it time yet?”

Our political leaders compromise all their values and use their time in office to garner riches and create myriad foundations while they lie to and manipulate the rest of us. And we pray, “Lord, is it time yet?!”

Our churches are transforming simply into religious entertainment clubs, and we pray, “Lord, is it time yet?”

Amoral thugs grab control of all aspects of our lives to drive us toward serving their interests while the complicit media protects them and we pray, “Lord, isn’t it time yet?”

As we look around, we consider the world.

“And she has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean bird and a prison of every unclean and hateful beast.”

— (Revelation 18:2)

And we pray, “Lord, is it time yet?”
But the time is coming.

“And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ ”

— (Matthew 25:6)

Dear friends, don’t give in and become part of the problem. Don’t lose hope; keep your eyes on the promise. Our Lord told us these things would happen. He is coming and will set all things straight.

Chapter 21

Fear-free

It is painfully easy to manipulate people with fear. Fear of death, fear of sickness, fear of great loss, fear of certain people, fear of being an outsider, and so forth; the list is long indeed. Satan is very experienced in using this weapon, but his aim is to get us to fear any or all of these things rather than, or more than, we fear God.

And, as you would expect, this is entirely contrary to what Jesus told us —

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

— (Matthew 10:28—31)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;¹
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,²
The fear of the LORD is to hate evil;³
The fear of the LORD prolongs days,⁴
The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,⁵
The fear of the LORD leads to life,⁶

Fear—it was the first emotion of Adam and Eve after sinning.
It is the ‘natural’ reaction of sinful mankind to a holy God. Consider:
The Hebrews before mount Sinai.
Peter, James and John on the mount of transfiguration.

But not so with Abraham and the three angels after God told him, “Fear not, Abram.” (Genesis 15:1)⁷

Special note: It is at the top of the list characterizing those who will go into the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8)⁸

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”

— (1John 4:18)

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”

— (2 Timothy 1:7)

All that is to preface this—there are three main points to understand about fear:

1.If you are saved, you need not fear anyone or anything but God.

2.Regarding the fear of God—there’s a holy fear and an unholy fear; the difference being that when you are living in a sinful state, i.e. rebellious against God, your fear of Him when you face Him will be a torment, a terror. When you are living in the grace of God, covered by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, your fear will be a holy reverence fueled by love and adoration.

3.Whenever you see people being manipulated, terrorized, imprisoned with/by fear, the devil is behind it. That’s because he demands it himself and pollutes peoples’ minds with it so they will run from or abhor God. It’s the unholy fear that is fueled by sin. When you find people who truly reverence God in love, living in awe of Him, that’s the holy fear fueled by godly love.

Understanding the nature of fear, both kinds, is very important. Fear is mentioned in the Bible more than any other emotion, even love. In Eden, deception from Satan led to sin and then sin produced unholy fear which has imprisoned mankind ever since until Christ’s life provided the truth about God and set us free.

“Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself (Christ) likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.”

— (Hebrews 2:14,15)

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him,

“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth (about God), and the truth shall make you free (from sin and unholy fear and death).”

— (John 8:31,32)

-
1. *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”— (Proverbs 9:10 NKJV)*
 2. *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.”— (Proverbs 1:7 NKJV)*
 3. *“The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate.”— (Proverbs 8:13 NKJV)*
 4. *“The fear of the Lord prolongs days, But the years of the wicked will be shortened.”— (Proverbs 10:27 NKJV)*
 5. *“The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, To turn one away from the snares of death.”— (Proverbs 14:27 NKJV)*
 6. *“The fear of the Lord leads to life, And he who has it will abide in satisfaction; He will not be visited with evil.”— (Proverbs 19:23 NKJV)*
 7. *“After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.’”— (Genesis 15:1 NKJV)*
 8. *“But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”— (Revelation 21:8 NKJV)*

Chapter 22

Fortunes

*“And He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying,
Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the lowly, for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be
satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all
kinds of evil against you because of Me.
Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way
they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

— (Matthew 5:2-12)

You know that word, “Blessed” that Jesus used in this passage means “fortunate” or “prosperous”. Note also that the state of the “Blessed” is in the present tense BUT all the blessings point forward to an eternal future state as well. That is, they are guaranteed and perpetual. So, let’s consider those who are so blessed.

First, what does it mean to be **“poor in spirit”**? This is not material poverty. To be poor in spirit is to see yourself in the most honest humble terms. Here are some examples:

Gideon:

“So he said to Him, ‘O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.’ ”

— (Judges 6:15)

Moses:

“But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?’ ”

— (Exodus 3:11)

David:

“Then King David went in and sat before the LORD; and he said: ‘Who am I, O Lord GOD? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far?’ ”

— (2 Samuel 7:18)

Paul:

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,”

— (2 Corinthians 3:5)

Peter:

“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!’ ”

— (Luke 5:5-8)

Job:

“Then Job answered the LORD and said: ‘I know that You can do everything, And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. I have heard of thee, but now I have seen thee, wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.’ ”

— (Job 42:1-2, 5-6)

You see, this blessed state comes from the realization that the Lord Himself is our standard. In His presence, we discover our own poverty in spirit.

Next, the tragedy of death comes to everyone, but the tragedy of **grief** comes to so many more because for nearly all who die, there are more people who care and mourn, many very deeply.

I'm sure God first mourned when Adam and Eve died. For us, grief is a train wreck, a truly gut-wrenching emotion that triggers loud cries of anguish. And the pain doesn't pass but tortures the mind and heart of those closest to the deceased.

Now, the bible tells us that Jesus was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" and that word poorly translated as acquainted is 'knows from experience'. But as we look with hope to the future, He promises,

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death. Neither sorrow (grief, mourning) Nor crying. Neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

— (Revelation 21:4)

Next, His promise to the "**lowly**"—that is the meek and humble. Their future is to inherit the whole earth. Oh Not likely the presently messed up planet but the new earth that God promises to make-

"For behold, I am creating a new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come upon the heart."

— (Isaiah 65:17)

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea."

— (Revelation 21:1)

Next, His promise to those **who strongly desire for all things to be made right** –

The Psalmist, speaking of what the Father has done for His Son-

"You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet,"

— (Psalm 8:6)

Peter, speaking to the crowd after Christ ascended to heaven, said-

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

— (Acts 3:19-21)

Yes, the time will come when all things will be made new and right, all things, ALL things, ALL THINGS.

Next, His promise to the **merciful**. Of course, mercy is closely related to being forgiving. And as you all know, this is not a natural human response. Almost universally, our first reaction to an injury or injustice is getting mad, getting back, getting even. But this is not God’s way. Mercy, simply defined, is not getting what you deserve.

King David understood that he deserved a lot of this ‘evening of accounts’ both from God and from other people so he truly praised God when he rejoiced that,

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

— (Psalm 23:6)

When God passed before Moses on Mt Sinai and proclaimed His character, this attribute was first on the list. ... the LORD passed before him and proclaimed,

“The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,” (Exodus 34:6)

And Jesus portrayed this for us, when upon being brutally beaten and then nailed to a cross, He prayed,

“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

— (Luke 23:34)

The promise is that the merciful will be shown mercy not just once but forever for as Psalms 136 says twenty-six times, For His mercy endures forever. So, wonderfully, this is an everlasting promise.

Next, the **pure in heart**. In both Old and New Testaments, this purity means clean and in both Testaments there was/is one and only one way to be clean—blood. In the OT, it was the blood of the lamb or goat of sacrifice. Ever since the cross of Calvary, it is the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

So why blood? In the OT, it was considered a covering over of sin, an

atonement. In the beginning, mankind's sin brought with it death into this world so the spilling of blood (which is the life of the body) was a reminder of the consequence of sin. To individually recognize and appreciate that in the OT was prerequisite for God's forgiveness, His cleaning of your slate so to speak.

Since Calvary, God requires us to place our faith in the sin-covering power of Christ's shed blood but instead of an animal's blood which was only symbolic, we believe in the universal debt cancelling power of the life of the unique perfect man, Jesus—the permanent, perfect satisfaction in God's view.

So to be pure in heart, to be truly clean, the only way, is to be saved, to sincerely believe in the Son of God's death and resurrection which He did for you.

When you have that purity of heart, His promise is that you will see God. You will see God in those who, like you, have placed their trust in Jesus. You will see God in all His marvelous handiwork. You will see God in His Word and of course, you will see God one day face to face and rejoice forever.

Next, it's the **peacemakers**. This was a real shocker for the Jews. They were expecting their Messiah to make war on all their enemies. But real peace can never be found in a compromise with evil. You can never have peaceful co-existence with sin. Jesus was at war Not with the Romans but with Satan and sin.

“And the peace Christ brings is simply peace with God. He told His disciples, 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)

So as we have received, thus we give—“When I am doing the work of God by reconciling men to God and showing them the way to inward peace, and seeking to guide them in the path of the Spirit, I am called a child of God, for I have become like my Father.” — *Chuck Smith*

Finally, it's the **persecuted**. Notice that this is specifically the trouble that comes from living for Christ, for speaking of Him and actively serving Him. It is not from your own selfishness or unrighteous anger or other generally sinful behavior. The prophets were persecuted in their days, Christ was supremely persecuted, the Apostles and early church were persecuted also, many to the death. Sincere and active believers have always been persecuted in all sorts of ways. In the days ahead, believers will be beheaded for the faith in Christ.

And His promise is that, when such is the case, your reward in heaven is great. And since it is in heaven, it will also be forever.

Thus it is with all the Blessings or 'fortunes' of the sincere believers—they are both present and perpetual Now and forever, here and most importantly in heaven.

Chapter 23

The Path

You know, when I first came to the Lord, He led me in pretty miraculous ways—I guess it was because I was young and, well, stupid. But as I grew older, those miraculous signs got fewer and wondered if I had ‘lost’ my connection with Him or grown hard-hearted.

Then it occurred to me that He was still speaking to me all the time—through His Word and His still small voice. This has been so important to me because following God, hearing from Him, getting His guidance, knowing His will, is like a spiritual ‘heartbeat’. Not hearing, ambling without out His direction Not sensing His presence, is like bumping around in the dark.

Now, at the risk of exposing my lack of spirituality, I often do exactly the latter and I’ve got the bruises and scars to prove it. So how do we hear and know God’s guidance?

There are many ways; but first and foremost, you must be connected to Him through His Son, Jesus. Christ told us,

“No man comes to the Father except through Me.”

— (John 14:6)

Once you’ve established that relationship through genuine faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection, you can begin calling out and listening.

‘OK’, you may think, ‘I’ve placed my faith in Jesus. But what about this listening?’

I’ll give you the five main ways this works and some other factors to consider.

First and foremost-The Word of God, the Bible. Don’t listen to the enemies of the One in whom you just placed your faith. Read, ‘devour’ the Word every day. In fact, let’s briefly look at some of what it has to say about the path, the direction, you will take as a sincere believer –

“Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly Nor stands in the path of sinners Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;”

— (Psalm 1:1)

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

— (Psalm 16:11)

“You enlarged my path under me, So my feet did not slip.”

— (Psalm 18:36)

“Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, For I delight in it.”

— (Psalm 119:35)

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

— (Psalm 119:105)

“But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.”

— (Proverbs 4:18)

“Son of man, receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears.”

— (Ezekiel 3:10)

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”

— (John 10:27)

“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.”

— (Proverbs 3:5-6)

*“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with **all your heart.**”*

— (Jeremiah 29:13 emphasis mine)

Lots of good things have been written about the Word or about God or Jesus or His Holy Spirit, but there's no substitute for reading and obeying the unaltered Word of God. 'Live in the pages' so it becomes an integral part of your character.

Second, there's the Voice of the Word which is another way of saying the gentle voice of God's Spirit which you'll begin to hear in your heart more and more as you study the Word and sincerely seek God's will. Sometimes the Voice will just touch your heart in the course of your day—a verse or a part of the scripture will come to mind or a divine inspiration, and you'll sense it is a prompting from Him.

Take, for example, the story of Philip –

“Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, ‘Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ This is desert. So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go near and overtake this chariot.’”

— (Acts 8:26-29)

That leads us to the next, or **third** way of getting God's guidance-**Direct Revelation**.

I've had God speak almost audibly to me, He's literally shaken the earth, provided miraculous signs, heart-grabbing dreams, and such. These are all forms of direct revelation. Consider Moses and the burning bush in the wilderness, or Mary with the angel Gabriel, or Joseph her betrothed and his divine dreams, or Peter and his vision of the animals in the sheet while on the housetop of Simon. The Bible is filled with examples. Any time this has happened to me, it has moved me to take some step of faith in obedience.

Fourthly, there is Godly counsel. The apostles always or nearly always sought each other's council. Moses was advised by his father-in-law Jethro; we all need this help. Now, admittedly, some council even when given by well-meaning advisors is not from God—consider Job's 'friends' and even his wife who said that in his misery, he should just curse God and die. Wow! But you can indeed sense God's wisdom in much godly counsel given to you by those well connected to Him.

And **fifthly**, there's Divine Circumstances—including open and closed doors. Often times, the Lord sets up circumstances that seem 'out of nowhere' and you can sense His work. However, you have to seek confirmation because unusual situations are not necessarily set up by God. If you make that assumption, you can end up going in the wrong direction.

Now in all of these ways of getting His guidance, you must, of course, have a willingness to hear, a surrendering your heart and mind, believing that He wants you to hear. And even when you know you've heard, you'll be challenged by our

spiritual enemy to doubt. So, once you've heard, bear in mind that it's your faith that makes it sure, unshakeable.

Finally, you need to be obedient to His call even if it takes some sacrifice or enduring of difficulty. And it probably goes without saying, but you can never afford to be high-minded or self-righteous—humility is the only way you please God.

Sincerely seeking to follow God, day by day, rather than going with the flow so to speak is challenging but nothing is more fulfilling. So, may He bless you and lift you and lead you in His unfailing love.

Chapter 24

The Bond of Unity

You know everything, I mean Everything started in unity. God speaking to Job said,

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you know understanding, When the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God shouted for joy?”

— (Job 38:4-7)

And everything, I mean Everything will end in unity as well.

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

— (Ephesians 1:7-10)

So, what do we know about what happened in between to bring such chaos of disunity? In the book of Ezekiel, God speaks to the ‘covering cherub’ who He destroyed—Lucifer:

“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. By the abundance of your trading You became filled with violence within, And you sinned; Therefore I cast you as a profane thing Out of the mountain of God; And I destroyed you, O covering cherub, From the midst of the fiery stones.”

— (Ezekiel 28:12b-16)

Being perfect in beauty wasn't enough for this evil angel. He became filled within with violence and so God cast him out of heaven. It is likely that Jesus spoke of this when he told His disciples,

“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”

— (Luke 10:18)

Isaiah also prophesied about this:

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit.”

— (Isaiah 14:12-15)

Apparently, the perfect beauty God had given to him went to his head and he sought to challenge the Almighty by exalting his own throne above the other stars (angelic host). Yeah, pretty stupid but he was infected with iniquity with which he seems to have infected other angels, perhaps as much as a third of them:

“And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.”

— (Revelation 12:3-5)

From this, it would appear that the dragon (Satan) took a third of the stars (angels) with him to the earth. Now, many of you know that this section of the Revelation pertains to the tribulation time but for our discussion herein the lesson is that Satan, at some point after He was cast out, took many of the heavenly host with him. That is, he brought catastrophic disunity to the heavenly realm because of his prideful iniquity. Thus, God relocated him, so to speak, to planet earth where the consequences were also catastrophic.

And there he was found in Eden, the garden of God, seeking to destroy the unity of fellowship between God and mankind. He’s a ‘super-spreader’ of iniquity you see; his own sickness began with his vile pride and spread to others in the heavenlies. Then his insane hatred for all things Godly, motivated him to infect mankind.

The amazing thing is that God, being omniscient, allowed this, having already predestined the salvation of mankind in Christ.

“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...”

— (Ephesians 1:4-5)

Why? Well, I suspect it was to provide many valuable lessons to all His creation. For Paul wrote that he wanted,

“...to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord...”

— (Ephesians 3:9-11)

And so, after Eden, because of our listening to Satan, all of our history has been filled with disastrous disunity and distance from God Almighty. The ‘soup’

of our societies is wretchedly fouled by unbridled pride, hatred, and self-obsession. Even those who promise to be ‘unifiers’ are simply incapable of delivering. Mankind, infected with iniquity, is lost and self-destructing. But God provided the solution; the debt was paid on Calvary and those who receive that gift by faith look forward with great joy to the time of complete reconciliation -

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity!”

— (Psalm 133:1)

But understandably, we have no idea of the goodness and pleasantness of this unity. We’ve never seen or experienced it to a significant degree. Honestly, we can’t even imagine it. But we CAN follow Christ Jesus and in so doing,

“... as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience; bearing with one another, and graciously forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord graciously forgave you, so also should you. Above all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.”

— (Colossians 3:12-14)

Help us, Lord Jesus, to truly follow you walking in love, your love. And Lord, please come soon!

Chapter 25

What's Done is Done

“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.”

— (Ephesian 1:3-6)

The past tense used herein is absolutely intentional and a fundamental part of the Gospel revelation received by Paul. And what it tells us is that Father God has far, far more going on in His plan for universal reconciliation than we, with our limited understanding suppose. Before He even founded the world, He chose, He blessed, He predestined, and He accepted us in Christ.

It's been done for a very long time even though we are just experiencing some of it now.

It's a mystery that God gave us just as He gave Adam and Eve, freedom to choose and yet He did all those wonderful 'past tense' things for us. It's a conundrum for us—destined for salvation in Jesus yet free to choose. It's the kind of thing that would have thrown Nicodemus into a serious case of vertigo.

You remember in John's Gospel how Nic was thoroughly confused by the concept Jesus shared about being born again. And Christ told him,

“If you can't believe this being born again lesson, how will you understand spiritual lessons like-No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”

Just to believe it, you have to be spiritually minded. To understand it, you'll need to be in heaven—new body New mind, whole new perspective unlimited by the material world. Something wonderful to look forward to and yet it's DONE.

Yes, He has already blessed us with every spiritual blessing, in heaven, in Jesus. Now when a blessing is of God, it literally means to cause to prosper or to make happy. In addition, He has already chosen us in Jesus that we would be holy and blameless and loved. To boot, He predestined us to be His children and by His own kindness (grace) He made us accepted in His Beloved Son.

Yes, it's done but that doesn't mean it's over. On the contrary, it's eternal, it continues forever because it's in the person of the eternal Son of God. What an indescribably wonderful circumstance awaits us who are saved. And none of us merited it None of us deserve such eternal kindness.

Chapter 26

Being Known

Have you noticed? So much nonsense, so much manipulation fed to us that has nothing to do with scripture—it ‘sounds’ right, maybe even moral, but in the end, it is just made up out of human-centric ideas. It fills the world’s societies and sadly, even the churches as well. The seriousness of this situation is summarized in the words of Jesus when He said,

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, in Your name did we not prophesy, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

— (Matthew 7:21-23)

Let’s break this down to try to really understand what He’s saying. First, what exactly is the “will of My Father” so we can do it? Well, there is only one other verse in the Bible that uses these exact words—Jesus said,

“For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.”

— (Matthew 12:50)

From this, it is clear that doing the Father’s will is directly tied to relationship with Christ which is amplified in the first passage when Jesus said, “I never knew you;” because this knowing is not academic, it’s not head-knowledge; it’s experiential, or intimate relational knowledge.

Those in this passage who He turned away claimed to have prophesied, cast out demons and to have done miracles in His name and He did not deny it—He simply paid no heed. That’s because ‘getting in’ is never about performance in the sense of what they were claiming.

The “will of My Father” is about a real honest relationship with the Lord born out of faith.

And note that He did not say, “You never knew Me.” Of course, the relationship He’s talking about is indeed two-way, but it always, always starts with God. He is the originator. He is the One Who gives us the desire to be in relationship with Him, the faith to believe and to trust.

When we respond to Him, then He is the One Who gives us the good works to do—

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

— (Ephesians 2:10)

And so He knows us because we love Him, we desire His presence, we trust Him and so we walk together, we labor together. You see, the performances of those who He turned away **originated** from **themselves** Not God. Jesus said that He never knew them, so they were never in a relationship that God originated. They thought that their religious deeds would be appreciated by God, but Jesus said that they practiced (or literally worked, labored) lawlessness.

“Jesus did not seem to doubt their claims of doing the miraculous. He didn’t say, “You didn’t really prophesy or cast out demons or do miracles.” This leads us to understand that sometimes miracles are granted through pretended believers, reminding us that in the final analysis, miracles prove nothing. Connected to Jesus we are secure; without connection to Him all the miracles and great works prove nothing.” — *D Guzik*

What will He say to you? If you have sincerely come to Jesus, it’s because God drew you to Him and the good news is that He has said,

“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)

So, of course, He knows you and as His child you want to know Him more and more. That’s ‘the will of my Father’ and yours.

Chapter 27

Perfect Peace

“You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.”

— (Isaiah 26:3)

To most of us, this concept of perfect peace is absolutely foreign. Our minds and hearts are so conditioned to the ‘noise’ of angst, competition, anger, frustration, pride, and a host of other clamoring that we have no idea what it is like to enjoy this peace, so we tend to equate it simply with quietness or stillness.

Of course, at times, quietness and stillness are great but they fall so far short of God’s perfect peace that they just don’t come close. This peace lifts the mind above the pettiness of this world, above the heavens and into the presence of God because its foundation is a permanent trust in Him. It’s the trust that can say, like Jesus, “Nevertheless Not my will but Yours be done.”

This kind of peace is unshakable because it is not based upon your present circumstances or past performances. It comes to a mind that is stayed, riveted, unrelenting in its focus upon God. Not just the idea of God or the people of God but the Person of God and as a consequence, an eternal trust in Him, a trust in His character, His word, His love, His never-ending goodness and so much more.

This kind of peace is infectious because all of us ache for it and are strongly influenced by it when we see it lived out. Read the Gospels—people were always surrounding Jesus because He manifested this peace and told His disciples,

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you;”

— (John 14:27)

This kind of peace runs to battle because of the complete confidence of the heart. The shepherd boy, David, manifested this as he charged at the giant Goliath with nothing but a sling and some stones. Joseph manifested it as he stood unafraid before the most powerful man on earth. Paul manifested this as he stood up, having just been stoned, and returned to the city to continue preaching the truth of the gospel.

This kind of peace is untethered. All the bondages of sin and guilt are broken as salvation sinks in and perfect peace emerges as the triumphant response to God's promises and truth. This peace frees the soul.

This kind of peace grows like a mighty oak Never wanes or wilts.

“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the full knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;”

“For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature...” (2 Peter 1:2, 4a)

As your mind is stayed on Him, His grace and peace are multiplied in you and you become a partaker of God's amazing nature.

And with Jesus, this peace will never end:

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,...”

— (Isaiah 9:6-7a)

This kind of peace hears and sees clearly.

“I will hear what God the LORD will speak, For He will speak peace To His people and to His saints;”

— (Psalm 85:8)

As you walk every moment with God on your mind, increasingly you will hear His voice, recognize His handiwork, know His peace, know His hope, know His trust, indeed know God Himself.

So how do you recognize this peace?

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension (lit. mind), will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

— (Philippians 4:7)

It is beyond “all mind”; that is, beyond our power of thinking. It isn’t that it is senseless and therefore impossible to understand, but that it is beyond our ability to understand and to explain— therefore it must be experienced. This peace doesn’t just surpass the understanding of the worldly man; it surpasses all understanding. Even the godly man cannot comprehend this peace. — *Guzik*

“What is God’s peace? The unruffled serenity of the infinitely-happy God, the eternal composure of the absolutely well-contented God.” — *Spurgeon*

Therefore, you can’t figure it out or recognize it mentally, logically; it is spiritually discerned through experiencing it. The Hebrew term used for peace is pronounced shalom and means...completeness, soundness, welfare, peace.

Finally, where do you find it? It’s not a where issue, it’s a Who—this peace is a gift from Christ. You can’t buy it, capture it, discover it. You must receive it in **His face**:

“Yahweh lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.”

— (Numbers 6:26)

Chapter 28

Eternal Beauty

You know, at best, human beauty is fleeting and we have all witnessed the pathetic parade of those who just can't handle that fact. They simply cannot tolerate their own 'wilting'.

Nature's beauty is also temporal, though it tends to last longer. And of course, the old adage 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' is talking about what the eye can behold. That's because the grandest beauty is not in the 'skin' or the 'landscape'. You may behold it but not with your eyes.

David the king spoke of it:

*“One thing I have desired of the LORD,
That will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD
All the days of my life,
To behold the **beauty** of the LORD,
And to inquire in His temple.”*

— (Psalm 27:4)

He spoke of the beauty that only your soul and spirit can enjoy because only those parts of you desire it. And this is very important to you if you seriously want to know the Lord because you will ask yourself, what does one do “in the house of the Lord”; what do we do as we “inquire in His temple”?

Yes, you know. Worship. That's the purpose. And as we behold the Lord's beauty, guess what? It's contagious! Both His beauty and His Holiness!! That's why David proclaimed:

“Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness!”

— (Psalm 29:2)

What captured the king’s eye was the beauty of Bathsheba, but what captured his soul was the beauty of the Lord. The former led to catastrophe (though God, in His mercy, redeemed it), the latter led to eternity, that is, an eternal relationship.

The glorious thing about beauty is that it’s present with us now as we worship “in Spirit and truth”—that is, in the beauty of holiness, and it’s promised to us forever as Isaiah foretold:

*“Your eyes will see the King in His beauty;
They will see the land that is very far off.” (New Jerusalem)*

— (Isaiah 33:17)

You see (no pun intended), the “land that is very far off” will one day be very close. John saw this:

*“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the **New Jerusalem**, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.”*

— (Revelation 3:12)

*“Then I, John, saw the holy city **New Jerusalem**, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”*

— (Revelation 21:2)

Eternal beauty, the Beauty of the Lord, the beauty of holiness is simply indescribable, and you can only witness Him in the Spirit Who, if you are born again, is IN YOU.

Chapter 29

It Is Finished

*“Therefore, when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’
And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.” (John 19:30)*

Three words that were uttered from the perfect, pure heart of the God-man, the Creator Himself and only He knows all that they meant. There was yet more that would happen—He went to preach to the spirits in prison (1 Peter 3:19), He rose from the grave (Luke 24:1-7, John 20:11-17), He ascended to heaven (Luke 24:50-53), He sat down at the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33), He will return for His bride, the church (1 Corinthians 15:50-57), He will come to render judgement on the earth (Jude 1:14-15), He will rule the planet for 1000 years (Revelation 20:4), He will destroy Satan and death (Revelation 20:10, 14), He will make all things new (Revelation 21:5).

Now, in the Greek, which is what John wrote in, this proclamation was the singular word **τελέω τελῶ**, tel-eh'-o; to end, i.e. complete, execute, conclude, **discharge (a debt)**:—accomplish, make an end, expire, **fill up, finish**, go over, **pay**, perform. And thus, I am very inclined to believe that this awesome declaration was God the Son speaking together with what God the Father and God the Spirit would proclaim as well—the debt was paid to the full.

This was the total and complete cumulative debt due to the sin lade on all creation, perhaps upon the whole cosmos. With this, the types, prophecies and promises of the Old Testament concerning Christ were fulfilled. All the typical sacrifices in the Law were finished and fulfilled—the lamb, the oxen, the heifer, the dove, the goat. Christ's perfect obedience to the Father was complete. And the satisfaction of the justice of God Almighty was complete. Of course, all of these things pointed to the debt of sin, the debt of a broken world, the unimaginably enormous debt no other man could pay. God paid it with His own beloved Son.

And when He uttered those words, bowed His head and gave up His spirit, He carried the weight of all sin for all time. He became sin:

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

— (2 Corinthians 5:21)

It was the one thing Satan never thought could happen; the one thing that effectively stamped “DOOMED” upon his own existence. The holy angels were awestruck. The demons were terrified. The earth shook, the veil was torn open, the awesome holy character of God was displayed in His Son for all the cosmos to see. Soon, He would rise, for death could not hold Him. Soon, the Gospel would be spread throughout the whole world. Soon, the dead would rise, and the Son would be crowned in heaven as King of kings and Lord of lords. Soon, the Lion would open the scroll in heaven and bring worldwide judgement on planet Babylon. Soon, Christ would welcome His bride home.

All because the debt was paid. Because of **Jesus** it is truly **finished**.

Hallelujah!

Chapter 30

The Wilderness

Of course, if you have been there or seen a map you know that the Middle East land surrounding Israel is dominated by wilderness, that is, desolate desert regions. Very hot, extremely arid and virtually empty. Very few people live in the wilderness. It is unwelcoming to say the least.

But that is where Israel of old was tested. In fact, it seems like that's what God uses frequently to test His children:

*“Immediately the Spirit drove Him (Jesus) into the **wilderness**. And He was there in the **wilderness** forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him.”*

— (Mark 1:12,13)

*“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—*

— (Deuteronomy 8:16)

The wilderness is also a place of communing with God, of prayer, and of refuge:

*So, He Himself (Jesus) often withdrew into the **wilderness** and prayed.*

— (Luke 5:16)

*But the woman (the remnant of Jewish believers) was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the **wilderness** to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent (from the antichrist during the Tribulation).*

— (Revelation 12:14)

But God also used the wilderness as a place of judgement:

*So, the LORD's anger was aroused against Israel, and He made them wander in the **wilderness** forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of the LORD was gone.*

— (Numbers 32:13)

And He also speaks prophetically of a way that He will make in the wilderness:

*“Behold, I will do a new thing,
Now it shall spring forth;
Shall you not know it?
I will even make a road (**way**) in the **wilderness**
And rivers in the desert.”*

— (Isaiah 43:19)

Which arguably speaks of the Savior who said:

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

— (John 14:6)

And the wilderness is spoken of as a place of blessed transformation:

*“Then the lame shall leap like a deer,
And the tongue of the dumb sing.
For waters shall burst forth in the **wilderness**,
And streams in the desert.”*

— (Isaiah 35:6)

So, clearly, the wilderness, physically and metaphorically, is an instrumental part of Israel existence. But not only Israel; that's because this whole world is a wilderness spiritually. Satan has made it that way. Isaiah spoke of him...

*“Who made the **world** as a **wilderness**
And destroyed its cities,
Who did not open the house of his prisoners?”*

— (Isaiah 14:17)

Yes, he is the destroyer. All of his efforts, his thoughts, his twisted goals, are to create planet Babylon—a desolate waste, spiritually and physically; he works and schemes to destroy all that God has created. That’s his nature; he’s filled with hatred as are his offspring.

Yes, the wilderness is essentially the story of broken mankind as well as mankind’s redemption for although Satan will succeed during the tribulation in creating his hellish planet (see Revelation 18:2), Christ will crush him under His heal and ...

*“... the LORD will comfort Zion,
He will comfort all her waste places;
He will make her **wilderness** like Eden,
And her desert like the garden of the LORD;
Joy and gladness will be found in it,
Thanksgiving and the voice of melody.”*

— (Isaiah 51:3)

Jesus is our Way in the wilderness!

Chapter 31

The NAME

Contemporary Christian teaching and preaching doesn't put much focus on this topic and indeed it is something that contemporary societies don't emphasize either at least not the way people did in earliest times. Names.

Now if you think about it, it's really no mystery why—that's because if you truly know and understand the NAME, you're in for a blessing beyond description. You see, there have been only two sinless men to walk the earth, Adam and Jesus Christ and both of them were very involved in names.

Before Adam sinned, while his mind and soul were still pure and uncorrupted, God had him name all the land animals and birds. Jesus, during His life and ministry, was all about the Name. For instance:

“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, ‘God with us.’”

— (Matthew 1:23)

“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name...”

— (Matthew 6:9)

“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

— (Matthew 18:20)

“And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.”

— (Luke 2:21)

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:”

— (John 1:12)

“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

— (John 3:18)

“Jesus even gave new names to some of His disciples: Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter;”

— (Mark 3:16)

“James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, ‘Sons of Thunder;”

— (Mark 3:17)

Why even in heaven, some will receive new names:

“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.”

— (Revelation 3:12)

In biblical thought, a name does not merely identify; it expresses the essential nature of its bearer. In all probability, Adam named the beasts by observing their natures, as he had nothing else on which to base his judgments. From this arises a principle about how the Bible uses the term “name.” To know God’s name is to know God as He has revealed Himself, that is, to understand His nature.

When name is used in this way, it does not mean “the word by which a person is called,” but rather “the whole nature or character of the person”

as far as we know it or understand it. This is why the proverb says, “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches”

So then, to “believe in the name of Jesus Christ” means to believe in the nature and the character of Jesus Christ. It means to believe that He is the Son of God and that He stands in relation to the Father in a way that no other person in the universe ever has or ever will. It means that He can perfectly reveal the Father to us. It means that we believe He is the Savior, the High Priest, the Mediator and Intercessor, and our soon-coming King. It means that we believe that through Him we have entrance into God’s presence—not just entrance to Him, but actually, fellowship with Him. — thanks, *John W. Ritenbaugh*

In fact, when you “praise the name of the Lord”, it implies that you should know that name and the character of it. For instance:

“I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify Your name forevermore.”

— (Psalm 86:12)

*“Praise the LORD!
Praise, O servants of the LORD,
Praise the name of the LORD!”*

— (Psalm 113:1)

“I am the LORD (Jehovah), that is My name;”

— (Isaiah 42:8)

So, we know the name of the Lord, at least this one; He has several. What does it mean? — the one bringing into being, life-giver, giver of existence, creator, the absolute and unchangeable one, the existing, ever living, I am.

We also know Him as Jesus which means “Jehovah is salvation”. So, you see, all the way back in Eden, in tasking Adam to name all the creatures God was training Adam to know Him. Then sin entered our world, and it changed Adam’s ability to name, that is to perceive and know someone’s character. Consequently, he hid from God and mankind has hid from God ever since.

Enter, Jesus Christ. What Adam never understood, and what Jesus perfectly manifested—the character of God:

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

— (John 14:9a)

Quite simply, God wants us to know Him. In fact, He wants the whole cosmos to truly know Him.

The NAME says it all.

Chapter 32

On the Cusp

When the press is on and all around it seems like what is good is under attack while what is bad is being praised, that's when we need a reminder—God wants us to make a difference BUT the 'heavy lifting' is His role — our role is to believe and obey Him. I'll explain...

What lay before him was burnt, wasted ruins and a bunch of freaked out angry men. Ziklag had been their hide-out, the place where David and his men kept their families and spoils. Everyone knew that King Saul was hunting him and wanted him dead. He was an outcast from his own people, perceived as an archenemy by his king, untrusted by his supposed allies and now even his own men were talking of stoning him for all their families and possessions were gone, stolen by raiders while they had followed David on a fool's errand.

This was the bottom. Where could he turn? How would he ever make a difference again?

What lay before Moses was a desolate wilderness, hungry sheep and goats and a burning bush. He had barely escaped an angry king in Egypt, hid in this wasteland for 40 years tending his father-in-law's flocks and now God was sending him back to the same hellish pit from which he had run away. He couldn't even speak well, and now God wanted him to orate to millions of his people in order to lead them out of their bondage.

Frankly, he felt completely incapable. How would he ever accomplish what God wanted?

What lay around him were large threatening waves crashing against the boat as well as his own body. In eager almost jubilant faith, he had asked the Lord of creation Who was standing on the water to let him walk on the sea and had actually taken a few steps on top of the it. But then the frightening reality of his situation pummeled him, and he began to sink. Screaming out, "Lord, save me!" he knew he would go down like a rock. His glee had quickly turned to terror, and he expected to end up on the bottom of the sea.

He felt ashamed. What started as a spiritual triumph now looked like a catastrophe. How could he ever be used again?

Scripture is replete with examples of desperate people, tragic situations, dire and perplexing troubles for people of faith. Today, we can all relate for as we look around, we see the vile and perverted being lauded, our children being turned on their parents, everyone who stands up to the evil is attacked, cancelled, lied about. Many who we would have looked to for courage have sold out. The society is sinking lower and lower, ever more debauched.

But as with our three examples, hitting or fearing the 'bottom' is not the end if you know the Lord. You see, David rose up from the ashes of Ziklag and led his men to recover all that had been stolen and in only a week was crowned King in Hebron over the tribe of Judah and later over all Israel.

Moses overcame his self-concerns and obeyed God's commands triumphing over the doubtful hearts of his own people. God used him to bring ten plagues on Egypt, splitting the Red Sea, leading an entire nation across a barren wilderness, bringing forth the ten commandments and the law of God.

Peter felt the grip of God as Jesus raised him up out of the waves and his humiliation became for all of us a powerful lesson in God's grace, patience and character. Peter went on to lead the early church and bring thousands of people to Christ.

Indeed, as we become increasingly aware of the rise of evil in our society, we must continue to look to our Savior knowing He will ultimately turn the tide and, in the process, do the heavy lifting. It may look more and more like we are on the cusp of catastrophe but for sincere believers in Jesus Christ, we are rather on the cusp of His coming. With that in mind, be strong and hold fast to your faith.

Chapter 33

Forever Freedom

*“But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting
On those who fear Him...”*

— (Psalm 103:17)

Christ forgave Peter for his three denials and the disciple went on to serve the Lord for the rest of his life. He received Christ’s forgiveness and lived in it. Because he received it, he lived in the freedom that being forgiven produced. More on that in a moment.

Now the vast majority, in fact nearly all, lessons on forgiveness deal with the much-needed command to each of us to forgive others versus the blessing, the eternal blessing, of truly receiving God’s forgiveness for ourselves. Of course, that emphasis is appropriate. However, I’d like to focus our attention on the blessing because it truly impacts our ‘walk’ and ultimately, our ability to obey the command.

You see, when we do not really receive the Lord’s gracious gift of forgiveness, we don’t have the inclination to respond by passing along our own. We continue to walk in darkness and bondage in our hearts. Christ gave us a parable lesson on this:

*“Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.
 But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’
 So, his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’
 And he would not but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.
 So, when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done.
 Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.
 Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’
 And his master was angry and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.
 So, My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”*

— (Matthew 18:27-35)

This servant had begged the master for forgiveness and yet when it was granted, he did not pass it along. Now his Master called him wicked because of his behavior.

As believers, I'll submit that we can forgive others because of fear of what will happen to us if we don't or we can forgive others because we truly know we have been forgiven and we cherish that—just like salvation, we want to share it. “Truly know” is the same as truly receive or truly believe. Quite simply, if you don't truly believe in Christ's gift of eternal salvation, you cannot genuinely share it, at least not from a heart that is free from sin and condemnation. This really has to sink in—to rejoice in God's forgiveness is the same as rejoicing in your salvation.

The man in the parable clearly did not value his forgiveness but simply used the opportunity to imprison his fellows. That is, he remained unchanged and wicked.

We can also learn about this from observing the Apostle Peter. The dear Apostle carried the guilt of having denied Christ three times and even though he saw the resurrected Lord and had the scriptures opened to him, he did not obey Christ's command to stay in Jerusalem until the Spirit was given¹. Instead, he decided to go fishing and several of the other disciples, likewise feeling ashamed, joined him.

You remember the story, they fished all night and caught nada, zippo Nothing so when the morning came and this ‘stranger’ on the shore called out to them out on the lake, “Children, have you any food?” To which they the one-

word reply, “No.” Unperturbed, Jesus simply said, “Cast your nets on the right side of the boat.” And they must have figured, ‘All right. One more try.’

Then they were inundated with fish, so many that they couldn’t pull the net into the boat. At that point, the proverbial light bulb went on for John and he told Peter, “It’s the Lord!” So, Peter then did something very telling; he grabbed his outer garment, put it on and dove into the water to swim to shore.

Now how many of you know that if you want to swim safely and quickly, you don’t put an overcoat on. In fact, the one time this kind of happened before, Jesus was walking on the water, you remember, and Peter wanted to do the same. Bravely, he stepped out of the boat and for a short while he walked on the water to Jesus but then his faith failed, and he sank like a rock. He cried out, “Lord, save me!” and of course, Jesus did.

This time, he didn’t need to walk on the water, swimming to shore would do (about 100 yards or so) but he did need his outer garment. Why?

Guilt, disobedience and shame. It’s the same reaction to the Lord that Adam and Eve had. They had to cover themselves as well. But just like Peter’s cloak, their coverings were ineffective. That’s why God gave them coverings of animal skin. In Peter’s case, Jesus gave him the covering of forgiveness and grace. See John 21. And later, he received the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit and led some 3000 people to faith in Christ with one ‘sermon’.

He had seen the resurrected Lord, but now he knew and received His wondrous gift of forgiveness. He was freed from the weight of guilt and condemnation and went on to serve the Lord for the rest of his life.

Friend, if you have truly received the faith to believe in Christ’s atoning death, resurrection and eternal reign overall, trust me—you are forgiven. Let that sink in. You are free from sin and its consequences, really and truly free. Let that fact take root and grow in your heart. When you do, that plant will produce good fruit. There’s amazing freedom in realizing your forgiveness.

1. *“Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”*—(Luke 24:49 NKJV)

Chapter 34

The Lesson - To Eternity and Beyond

Boom!! That's the 'sound' in your heart when this message sinks in.

The first interaction God had with man after creation was to have him name the animals by which he, almost by definition, had to determine something about them. In other words, it was a lesson for him and apparently, he got the point because right after that God put him under and then created his mate to which he reacted saying,

*“This one finally is bone of my bones,
And flesh of my flesh;
This one shall be called Woman,
Because this one was taken out of Man.”*

— (Genesis 2:23)

So we can say that right from the beginning, as soon as God made man “in his image”, His intent was to teach us. And He set the stage for the next lesson when just prior to this He planted a garden in Eden, a true paradise, and placed man in it to tend it. He also planted two trees in the center of the garden, one being a source of life and the other, a source of the knowledge of evil.

Now you may say, “Wait a minute. That other tree was the source of the knowledge of good and evil.” But bear in mind, man was at this point good. God said so, and since he knew fellowship with God, he definitely knew good; so what remained was the knowledge of evil. Thus, it makes sense that to remain at peace in paradise you would want to obey God's command to abstain from eating its fruit.

But we all know the story, Eve disobeyed Adam and Adam disobeyed God and they both ate of it. And just as God promised, they died—first spiritually and ultimately physically.

So, the immediate lesson was the consequences of disobeying God are, hmmm, well let's just say not good.

But the much bigger lesson is God's 'end game'—to teach us and I submit, the whole of the cosmos, seen and unseen, God's nature. Just as Adam understood something of the animals' natures in order to name them, so he needed even more to understand some of God's nature for he and Eve had believed the serpent's lies about God, His nature and His motives.

You see, Yahweh God commanded the man, saying,

“From any tree of the garden you may surely eat; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat from it; for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

— (Genesis 2:16,17)

However, the serpent told Eve,

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

— (Genesis 3:4-5)

The serpent was planting the thought in her that God was holding back, that He did not want her to be like Him. In this way, he was intentionally denigrating the Lord's character and motives. Of course, in the process, he was lying. Jesus said about Satan, “... *he is a liar and the father of lies.*”— (John 8:44)

But the truth is just the opposite, God does indeed want us to know Him, to intimately know His nature, to know Who He is. And this lesson is deeply integrated into our entire existence.

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

— (Genesis 3:22-23)

So clearly, we can see that part of God's nature and motive is to protect us for if we lived forever with evil in our 'knowledge' or being, we would become like Satan and his demons. Even in exile and becoming 'mortal,' man increased so much in evil that by the time of Noah the world became a hell hole -

Now the earth was (or became) corrupt before God, and the earth was (or became) filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was (or became) corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. Then God said to Noah,

“The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them;”

— (Genesis 6:11-13)

Nevertheless, those who want to still believe the serpent’s lies say, “You see, God is cruel. He doesn’t love man. He exiled us so we would not live forever.” They miss the whole point. But God is patient, and His purposes are never thwarted. He corrected the desperately downward spiral of man with the flood and started over with Noah. Meanwhile, He shortened man’s lifespan to rein in the growth of evil and continued to fulfill the plan of salvation through the coming of Jesus Christ.

You see, it was always God intention to give us eternal life. In fact, before any of the creation, He promised, seemingly first to Himself and then later to us, to do just that for the scripture records,

“... in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began,”

— (Titus 1:2)

“And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.”

— (1 John 2:25)

Yes, the two-fold lesson was and is, evil will kill you, but God is life, eternal life:

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

— (Romans 6:23)

Yes, Jesus showed us the true nature of God the Father—the love, the mercy, the kindness, the forgiveness, the grace, on and on it goes. He showed us the way, the truth and the life. And He told us plainly

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

— (John 17:3)

Contrary to the serpent’s lies, God wants us to be like Him, to live forever with Him and to spend eternity knowing Him better and better. It’s an eternal existence with a quality of life beyond description for –

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

— (1 Corinthians 2:9)

And the only way this is accomplished is when you accept by faith the grace found in Jesus Christ.

Boom!

For further contemplation, Jesus said:

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”

— (John 6:51)

“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.”

— (Matthew 19:29)

“And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.”

— (John 10:28)

Chapter 35

That's a Wrap

*“But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Children, have you any food?’ They answered Him, ‘No.’ And He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.’ So, they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish. Therefore, that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’
Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it) and plunged into the sea.”*

— (John 21:4-7)

Fascinating! How many of you know that if you want to swim well, you don't drape yourself in a coat or cloak. What was Peter thinking?

Was he trying to prove something to the Lord? Why was his outer garment necessary?

Obviously, he was so thrilled that he didn't want to wait for the boat to get to shore and the fish were the last thing on his mind. But he wanted that covering. He didn't want to approach his Lord 'in the buff' so to speak. He was zealous to come to Jesus but careful to be covered. I suggest that it was another indication of the self-consciousness born from the awareness of his failures and sin.

Adam and Eve did the same thing back in the garden of Eden.

“So, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”

— (Genesis 3:6-8)

Adam and Eve are a very interesting counterpoint to Peter in this. Peter rushed to come into the presence of the Lord while Adam and Eve hid. Both felt the urgent need to cover themselves. I submit that the difference may have been that Peter better understood the character of his Lord. You see, he had just spent three years listening to and observing Jesus. Adam and Eve had just been listening to the serpent.

In any event, the awareness of sin tends to make us feel the need to cover ourselves before God. Part of that is because we think God doesn't really know who we are or that we can somehow disguise our true nature from Him. Another reason is that due to the awareness of sin, we are ashamed and/or embarrassed before Him. In both cases, when that happens, it's because we're listening to the lies of our true enemy.

Understand, and let it sink in—God knows you, inside and out. He cannot be surprised by our sin or failure. He knew the entirety of your life story from beginning to end before He chose to love you fervently and relentlessly and forever.

And He wants us to know that although He understands our feeling like we have to cover our sin, the only effective cover is the blood, the life our Savior Jesus for it is a permanent and perfect cover—it covers and eradicates our sin. Our own coverings inevitably just weigh us down like Peter's or are flimsy and irritating like Adam and Eve's.

God's desire is to restore and to heal your fellowship with Him. Yes, you've failed; yes, you've sinned. And it probably won't be the last time. But come to Him, don't hide; and surrender your weight, your load of guilt. Lay it down at the foot of the cross and realize His abiding love for you.

Chapter 36

Self

There are some passages of scripture that make me soberly shudder. Take for example Judas betraying Christ with a kiss or God shutting the door of Noah's ark or Armageddon. But the passage we're going to go over also moves me to the point of tears. That's because it speaks of our days and of the corrupted body of 'believers'.

You see, the very group of people who we would expect to exemplify the character of Christ—loving of others, kind, humble, respectful of parents, thankful, honoring of good and so forth are projected as becoming just the opposite. The sickness is sin, the allure of evil, and especially the extreme love of self. In fact, self-indulgence and self-absorption which we call narcissism is now so commonplace in society and in the church that psychologists have removed it from their 'list' of aberrations.

Our society is being pounded by all kinds of messaging, in the media, in schools, everywhere and yes, in church as well to value self-interests above all else.

Here are the verses:

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

— (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

You see, men in general have always been behaving like this but what makes

the last days so perilous is that those who are supposedly lovers of God and appearing to be godly are behaving the same way. So those who want to hang on to their faith in Christ will have to be especially discerning for Paul followed these verses with: But evil men (the unsaved) and impostors (the supposedly saved) will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived¹.

That means, dear friends, you can't take for granted that anything you hear or read or see is to be believed. You must personally know your Savior, Jesus, and follow His Word. The worldwide deception is just going to get worse and worse. Sincere believers will be marginalized, then vilified, then hunted.

So, what will you do? Look out for number one? Buy into the persuasive lies and self-absorption? Or will you stand for what is right and true even when the cost is high.

1. *"But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."*— (2 Timothy 3:13 NKJV)

Chapter 37

God's Thoughts

I'd like to say that my thoughts are spiritual and pure but a lot of the time they are simply not. Now, the Lord says to,

“Set your mind on things above Not on things on the earth.”

— (Colossians 3:2)

And, of course, I try to do that but life in general is filled with ‘stuff’ that draws my attention away from the heavenly.

That does not mitigate the Lord’s command but rather highlights why it is so important. You see, our lives are simply a protracted war for control of our thoughts, our minds and it all started back in the garden of Eden.

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

— (Genesis 2:7)

There you have it—God made us in three parts, the dust of the ground (the flesh), the breath of life (the spirit), and the resultant living being (the soul). And before man sinned, the soul (how you think) was influenced by both the ‘flesh’ and the ‘spirit’ in a way that balanced perfectly making Adam a soul that God fellowshiped with regularly. However, when man sinned and rebelled against God, the spiritual side of this equation diminished and that left the flesh to influence or dominate his soul. After that, very few people really heard from the Lord, so few that they were highlighted throughout history as special.

Fast forward to Jesus Christ. He came as the ‘second Adam’ and lived in

perfect harmony with God the Father and God the Spirit. He had no sin and was always in submission to the Father.

When He rose from the dead and became the giver of eternal life, He gave to those who believed, the presence of God's Spirit in their hearts. Thus, the struggle for influence over the soul continues between the spirit and the flesh. Paul wrote,

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.”

— (Romans 8:5)

“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.”

— (Galatians 5:16-17)

And so, we who are redeemed indeed have the power to obey Christ's commands, but that obedience is frequently a struggle as well because we have a sin 'nature'. And so here I am, two thousand years later, wishing it was easier; but it's not and God has allowed that for several reasons:

- It humbles me
- It reminds me of God's mercy and grace
- It teaches me that God is right, always right
- It strengthens me and my love for Him and His ways
- I can relate to the believers who have gone before me

Now, I better understand what He means when He says,

“‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD.

‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.’”

— (Isaiah 55:8-9)

You see, God has no conflict in His thoughts. They are eternally pure, untouched by sin and are perfectly good. He says,

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

— (Jeremiah 29:11)

So as long as we are still here, let's walk in the Spirit and when we stumble or stray, let's reassure one another that God's not surprised and then keep going. Remember, as a believer in Jesus Christ, God's thoughts toward you are always good.

*“Many, O LORD my God, are Your wonderful works
Which You have done;
And Your thoughts toward us
Cannot be recounted to You in order;
If I would declare and speak of them,
They are more than can be numbered.”*

— (Psalm 40:5)

Chapter 38

When the Truth Hurts

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

— (Matthew 16:23)

Alas, Peter. Though he was always meaning well, he came to the Lord in the wrong spirit. Here’s what happened:

“From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!”

— (Matthew 16:21-22)

Peter spoke pridefully to Jesus; he actually rebuked the Son of God. Hearing Satan’s influence coming from the mouth of His disciple, the Lord did not mince words and it must have shocked Peter. However, Peter did not stop blowing it. Subsequent to his bravado in front of the other disciples, he later denied the Lord three times in front of His captors.

Called out by the Lord Himself as a mouthpiece of Satan and as denier, yet Peter did not stop following Jesus.

“Then Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.’ ... ‘Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight?’ ”

— (Jeremiah 18:10)

Like Peter, David was filled with indignation and prideful anger when he heard the story Nathan the prophet had just told him.

“Then the Lord sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: ‘There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.’ So David’s anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, ‘As the Lord lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity.’ Then Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man! Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.’ ”

— (2 Samuel 12:1-7)

Called out by the Lord Himself as a murderer and adulterer, yet David did not stop following.

God spoke of Job as a model of righteous living before Satan and as a consequence Job suffered amazing hardships and loss. His wife told him to curse God and die and his ‘friends’ offered terrible counsel. His patient faith and forbearance became legendary. However, at the end, Job revealed the sin in his heart.

Moreover, the LORD answered Job, and said: “Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it.”

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

— (Job 40:1-2)

Called out by the Lord Himself as prideful and self-righteous, yet Job did not stop following his Lord.

On another occasion, Satan influenced one of the disciples of Christ, Judas Iscariot, to act against the Lord. He betrayed his master to the temple guards with a kiss and sold Him out for 30 pieces of silver. Unlike Peter, David and Job, he did not stop following and hung himself.

The Bible tells us:

*“Faithful are the wounds of a friend,
But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”*

— (Proverbs 27:6)

Yes, Peter, David and Job were wounded by the Lord’s rebuke, but they pressed on, more humbly and more in tune with Him. Self-righteous pride was the main reason for their stumbling and humility was the power behind their recovery. It seems that Judas was rebuked by Jesus for dissing the woman who poured her very expensive perfume on Jesus. Shortly afterward, he went secretly to the Pharisees and agreed to betray Him. His pride led to anger and betrayal and ultimately to self-destruction.

I just cannot overstate how critical a humble walk with the Lord is to the believer. Self-righteousness is common among us all but when we take that poisonous attitude to the Lord, we should be ready to repent in true humility realizing just how unrighteous we really are, because He is going to call us out one way or another. That’s because He loves us and is committed to our spiritual growth.

Christ illustrated, that is lived out, this humility before the Father. Humility is a part of His divine character. I hope it is increasingly a part of mine and yours. God bless you all.

Chapter 39

Band of Brothers

There's a world of meaning in this little word, trust. No, a universe of meaning. In the scriptures, we are both commanded and exhorted to place our trust in the Lord.

Daniel stood in a deep pit among starving lions and kept his cool. David charged an armored giant twice his size with nothing more than a stone and sling. Samson pulled a massive pagan temple down on himself. Noah watched the Lord close the door of his huge ark. Paul arose after being stoned and went back into the same town to preach. The list is long and impressive—the people who have placed trust in the Lord in the past. What about today?

Day by day, in the midst of a godless society, we are challenged to place our trust in God while most people not knowing any better are trusting anyone but God. But people fail, institutions let us down, moral values are turned upside down and increasingly people will say, “I only trust myself.”

Now trust is similar to faith but is more tuned in to protection and overcoming danger or death. Let's look at what the Bible has to say on it:

*“As for God, His way is perfect;
The word of the LORD is proven;
He is a shield to all who trust in Him.”
(2 Samuel 22:31)*

This says God is perfect and His word has been tested and proven true. So, what does He say that's proven? He is a protector to ALL who trust in Him.

“Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.”

— (Psalm 2:12)

You want to know the blessings of God? Trust Him—not just lip-service but in truth.

*“But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You;
Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them;
Let those also who love Your name
Be joyful in You.”*

— (Psalm 5:11)

When you’re threatened, you can be tense and reactive but when you are trusting that the Lord will defend you, you can be joyful.

*“And those who know Your name will put their trust in You;
For You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You.”*

— (Psalm 9:10)

This word, “know” can mean to know by experience and “name” means nature. In other words, those who have known by experience the nature of God, trust Him. For it is in His very nature not to “forsake”, that is to leave, abandon or neglect those who seek Him.

*“Oh, how great is Your goodness,
Which You have laid up for those who fear You,
Which You have prepared for those who trust in You
In the presence of the sons of men!”*

— (Psalm 31:19)

Now, God’s goodness is one of His infinite and eternal attributes. So, the greatness of His goodness is truly beyond description. And reverence and trust are the keys to obtaining it.

*“Commit your way to the LORD,
Trust also in Him,
And He shall bring it to pass.”*

— (Psalm 37:5)

What a powerful promise! “It” is His promise. Commit your way to Him and trust Him—He’ll make “it” happen.

“I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever.”

— (Psalm 52:8b)

The ‘older’ you are in the Lord, the more you realize how much you need His mercy and it’s not a small club—we all desperately need it. The good news is that mercy is a part of Who He is and thus it’s forever. You can trust in His mercy; all His children can.

“Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.”

— (Psalm 56:3)

One of Satan’s primary weapons against us is his fear. He wants us to fear man, to fear failure, to fear God’s punishment even when God has forgiven us, to fear death. But trusting God is our shield and it’s the perfect defense.

*“Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning,
For in You do I trust;
Cause me to know the way in which I should walk,
For I lift up my soul to You.”*

— (Psalm 143:8)

You want to hear from God? Do you need guidance? With all your heart, put your trust in Him.

*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding.”*

— (Proverbs 3:5)

Don’t just be guided by what you see or hear or think you know, and definitely not how you feel. Fill your heart, your thoughts with trust in Almighty God.

*“The LORD is good,
A stronghold in the day of trouble;
And He knows those who trust in Him.”*

— (Naham 1:7)

Yes, God is good; even when trouble surrounds you and He knows when you’re trusting in Him.

So do not trust yourself. Do not put your trust in your institutions. Put your trust in God and only in God; He’s the only one Who is worthy and by all means, keep an eternal perspective! This chaotic, sin-filled world is not our home. Many, many others have gone before us and put their trust in the Lord and for all eternity they will never regret it. May God bless you with this trust.

Chapter 40

Courageous

“Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands? If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods. Nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”

— (Daniel 3:17-18)

“Then David said to the Philistine, ‘You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.’ So it was, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hurried and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. Then David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone; and he slung it and struck the Philistine in his forehead, so that the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth.”

— (1 Samuel 17:45, 49)

“But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’ ”

“And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”

— (Acts 7:55-56, 59-60)

The courage of Daniel’s friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the courage of David, and the courage of Stephen—fearless in the face of death; I know we’ll see them in heaven.

All of us are inspired by stories of courageous people. And this is even more so when we know they had to deal with fear or had reason to fear. Many, many times in scripture, the Lord tells individuals or the nation of Israel or the Church corporately not to fear. Examples are:

Nation of Israel¹, Daniel², Isaac³, Jacob⁴, Gideon⁵

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”

— (2 Timothy 1:7)

So we may boldly say:

*“The LORD is my helper;
I will not fear.
What can man do to me?”*

— (Hebrews 13:6/Psalm
118:6)

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”

— (1 John 4:18)

So, what does this mean for us today—those of us who sincerely believe in Jesus Christ?

One thing we have to realize or be reminded of is that we are in a war, a war against spiritual evil. It assails us individually and within our societies continually, manifesting itself in sin, hatred, deception, violence and the denigration of good. Our enemies are not people—we have to recognize the spiritual source of evil

and courageously fight against it with spiritual weapons which are manifested in loving, doing good, prayer, faith and simple obedience to the Lord.

Each of us will at some point or points by challenged to face our fear(s) and be courageous and all of us who do will also need to face our Father in Heaven because He is the one Who gives us the strength and courage to stand our ground and fight His fight. That doesn't mean anger or retaliation but rather humble forgiving love, truth nested in His love, kindness that is genuine.

Do you want to hear, "Well done!" from our Lord? Be courageous. Fight the "good fight". Fight it His way and with His weapons. May God bless and be with you as you do.

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1. *"Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."*— (Isaiah 41:10 NKJV)
"For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, Saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'"— (Isaiah 41:13 NKJV)
"'Fear not, you worm Jacob, You men of Israel! I will help you,' says the Lord And your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel."— (Isaiah 41:14 NKJV)
 2. *"And he said, 'O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!'"* So when he spoke to me I was strengthened, and said, *"Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me."*— (Daniel 10:19 NKJV)
 3. *"And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, 'I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake.'"*— (Genesis 26:24 NKJV)
 4. *"So He said, 'I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there.'"*— (Genesis 46:3 NKJV)
 5. *"Then the Lord said to him, 'Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die.'"*— (Judges 6:23 NKJV)

Chapter 41

There's a Difference, a Big One

The nature of miracles in the Bible reveals a lot about the miracle-maker(s). Some miracles impacted many people—for instance, Elijah stopped the rain in Israel for three years and Moses split the Red Sea for millions of Israelis to pass through. Jesus fed many thousands bread and fish with only a few loaves and fillets.

Then there are the ‘smaller’ more personalized ones. Elishah healed Naaman the Syrian leader, the three Hebrew captives in Babylon walked unharmed inside a flaming furnace, Jesus raised His friend Lazarus from the dead.

From these and many others, we can see that the ‘size’ of the miracle is not where we glean the most insight into the miracle-maker. No, the real point of interest is the purpose and/or outcome of the wonder. Now, fundamentally, miracles break the boundaries of the so-called normal. Because of that, they grab our attention and change the way we think and consequently, what we believe.

Jesus, after he was baptized by John the Baptist, three days later began His ministry with a miracle. Interestingly enough, it signified or pictured the very essence of what He would accomplish on earth but only a couple servants who were involved knew what he had done and evidently told Christ’s disciples about it. You probably know the story—He turned ritual wash water into the “best” wine at a marriage feast. However, the real purpose or outcome was not the wine—

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

— (John 2:11)

This and every miracle He did fostered belief, belief in the truth of who He is. He glorified His Father in heaven and the Father glorified His Son. This is the purpose and outcome of God's miracles.

But the time is upon us in which miracles will be done by others for other reasons. Jesus foretold their arrival in the days leading up to and during the very last days. It is a time commonly known as the tribulation or time of Jacob's trouble. In Matt 24, He spoke of these people and the intended purpose and/or outcomes:

“Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.”

— (Matthew 24:11)

“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”

— (Matthew 24:24)

Jesus started small—they will go BIG. His signs glorified God and nurtured faith in Himself as Christ. And the same is true today. But contrary to this, the false prophets and false christs intend to deceive everyone, even the elect. They will not glorify God, our true God. They will magnify themselves and their own false god or gods.

Already, we are immersed in a worldwide flood of lies and deceptions on all fronts—our faith, our conduct, our sexuality, our schools and judicial systems, everything is steeped in deception. So I am convinced that the devil's influence is being allowed to run freer. We all need to be vigilant to follow the Lord and look for His appearing. We cannot allow ourselves to be suckered and duped by deceptions. Trust in Jesus. He is coming to make all things right. Be faithful and trust in Him no matter what.

Chapter 42

It's a Leap!

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

— (Matthew 25:21)

Here is a fundamental quality to eternal life that we don't often talk about. We usually ponder life, light, truth, eternity, grace, forgiveness, worship and other things but let's spend a little time considering joy. Now before we simply turn to a dictionary or lexicon for a definition, let's examine in the scripture the relationships of this term, joy, to other things in order to glean insight.

Maybe one of the most powerful verses that so many of us read and treasured is in the book of Hebrews—

“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.”

— (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Now, Jesus knew heaven. He was from heaven. Nevertheless, it wasn't heaven's brilliance or beauty that empowered Him to endure, it was heaven's joy. So clearly, it is extremely powerful and compelling to the pure of heart.

OK, so what fuels this joy in heaven? Probably many things but in His parables of the lost coin and lost sheep, Jesus told us, “...*there is joy in the presence of*

the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” And, “I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.” So clearly, those in heaven are joyful over each and every one of us who truly repents from sin and follows Christ.

And Jesus tied His joy to loving others. He said,

“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

— (John 15:10-12)

In heaven, in God’s presence, we will know boundless joy—

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

— (Acts 2:28/Psalm 16:8-11)

Thus, we see that joy is:

- The quality of heaven that compelled Jesus to and through Calvary
- Something that is displayed in heaven when even a single person repents from sin
- Connected tightly with simply loving others as Jesus loves us
- Is complete in God’s presence.

People can leap, shout, sing, weep, be in shock and many other things, because of joy but that’s earthly joy. None of us yet knows heavenly joy Not in its fullness. We can catch glimpses—when your child is born, when your spouse says, “I do”, when your loved one returns safely from danger. But heaven’s joy is not fleeting, it’s permanent and ever increasing, that is it’s something we can’t really even imagine.

And the best news is that it’s only one of the many, many blessings our Father will give to us who have known and loved Him now.

Chapter 43

What a Mess!

It's at the root. It was at the beginning. It permeates all of our history and existence. It's the thing Christ warned us about concerning the last days. It fills our language, our minds, our businesses, our schools, our homes, our media, our government, our very hearts. Those who are trained in it wield it as a weapon. When you 'handle' it though, it's sticky and pretty soon you're stuck.

It's not violence but that's a good guess. It's not lust Not even hatred. Nevertheless, it fills our societies worldwide. We hate it but embrace it when we need to. Sadly, many religions depend on it while campaigning against it. When you start to look for it, you're shocked at how prevalent it is everywhere, in everything, all the time. It's like the air we breathe.

Deception

From the subtle and comparatively 'innocent' to the overt and overwhelming. Your parents, your siblings, your children, your spouse, yes, even your 'sweetie' is infected with this ugly character. Who's responsible? Where does this emerge from? Where did it originate? Who made this mess?

Satan!

Jesus said,

“He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

— (John 8:44)

What do we do about this? What can we do? What are we called to do?

- Be discerning. If you lack that ability, just ask God for it.¹
- Speak the truth in love.²
- Deception has no place in the heart of a honest believer and when you see it, call it out.
- Tear down evil spiritual strongholds through prayer.
- Disengage as much as possible from the media. Frankly, most of the entertainment media is just poison.
- Seek the truth in the scriptures and live it out.
- Encourage one another, and strengthen each other.

In a very real sense, we are in a war. If you're a sincere believer, you know that Christianity is not the cozy feeling of a campfire with roasted marshmallows. That's a parody. Yet, sadly, ages of on-going deception all day, every day has marginalized our faith and alienated many who observe the shallowness and insincerity of some 'christian' lives. We won't fix this tragic situation by physical violence, simply protesting or politicking, but we do need more targeted spiritual warfare. We need to exercise more sincere fervent prayer, more aggressive living out the truth, standing strong for what we know is true.

Start or continue fighting this good fight NOW. Destroy deception with loving truth and don't back down ever. May God guide you in this and strengthen you, His coming is sure.

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1. *"My son, if you receive my words, And treasure my commands within you, So that you incline your ear to wisdom, And apply your heart to understanding; Yes, if you cry out for discernment, And lift up your voice for understanding, If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, And find the knowledge of God."*—(Proverbs 2:1–5 NKJV)
 2. *"but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—"*—(Ephesians 4:15 NKJV)

Chapter 44

Vulnerable

“Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”

— (Isaiah 53:1)

Isaiah 53 is perhaps the most poignant declaration of the character and faithfulness of God the Son in all of the Old Testament. And as with nearly all prophetic passages, it is spoken to the Hebrew nation. Nevertheless, because of the continued influence of substitutionalism, a false doctrine actually started by the influencers of the early church, Christians still often see it as spoken to themselves, the congregation of believers.

Substitutionalism claimed that since the Jewish people did not receive their Messiah, the promises given to them, and their forefathers were nullified and were redirected to the church. But God was not surprised by their rejection of His Son; He is never surprised. His Word speaks many times of how His salvation would be received by the gentiles and that the Jews, though first favored by God would be the last to accept His grace and enter His kingdom.

So, bearing that in mind, “Who believed Christ?” John the apostle wrote,

“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.”

— (John 1:11)

His own people, especially the religious ones, did not. And they did not recognize the strength of His forgiveness, mercy, and restraint even as they crucified Him and, in the process mutilated and berated Him.

“...the arm of the Lord” always speak of strength, but Christ’s strength was

in His humble obedience to the Father's will and His love for a rebellious humanity. However, the evil and dark-hearted couldn't see it-

"And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

— (John 1:5)

*"For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant,
And as a root out of dry ground.
He has no form or comeliness;
And when we see Him,
There is no beauty that we should desire Him."*

Now, "tender plant" and "root out of dry ground" are both expressions of something fragile, certainly not hearty or strong in the eyes of men. Simply by becoming a man, God made His Son vulnerable. Think of that. The wording also indicates that Jesus was always 'facing' the Father as He grew. His entire life was dedicated to God Almighty. And when we read, "no form or comeliness" and "no beauty", the Holy Spirit wants us to understand that although His character was amazingly beautiful, His outward appearance was ordinary; that is, the crowds did not surround Him because He was handsome.

God's intent was not to attract people to His Son because of His bodily appearance; rather, He wanted us to be attracted to *"the way, the truth and the life"*, He wanted/wants us to value only the spiritual character, the eternal quality for of course, this is always God's way—the flesh profits nothing¹.

*"He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him."*

"Sorrows" should be understood to be 'sorrows of pain and grief' while "acquainted" should have been translated 'knowing (by experience) grief'. Have you thought that God and/or Jesus was stoic about death and the consequences of sin in this world? Think again. The reason Jesus wept at Lazarus' tomb, the reason He more than any man has carried painful grief is because He deeply loves everyone. Each person who dies without knowing Him is yet another weight of grief that He carries. Yes, He knows grief and painful sorrow more than we can imagine.

*"Surely, He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted."*

Another, and perhaps better translation would say 'He lifted up our

sicknesses’ and ‘carried our pains and sorrows of grief’. In other words, it seems that for every person He healed, He transferred the weight if you would of the malady along with its pain and sorrow to Himself. In fact, it could be that over time, this somehow weighed on Him because the above verses say that ‘we perceived Him’ as stricken, smitten, and afflicted by God. Now, I’m not suggesting that He became sick No Nothing of the sort. Scripture says He lifted and carried these afflictions.

OK, this is a pretty radical perspective, but we do know from more than one Gospel account that Jesus could tell when ‘virtue’ or healing power went out from him. I can’t be dogmatic on the particulars because this could be referring to what He did on the cross, but it also could apply more broadly.

*“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.”*

Now, this part speaks clearly and specifically of the cross of Calvary for ‘wounded, bruised, and stripes’ are clear descriptions of the beating He took. In addition, ‘peace and healed’ refer His glorious accomplishment, to our resulting eternal relationship with Almighty God. So why would He do this?? In His life and death, He was utterly selfless... because...

*“All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, everyone, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”*

Not some of us, or even most of us—ALL of us have strayed from God and are guilty of influencing others to do the same, to do ‘our own thing’, to walk according to the desires of the pernicious sin nature embedded in our DNA.

In conclusion, these first six verses of Isaiah 53, along with the rest of the chapter show us that contrary to the lies of Satan, God does love us and was/is willing to lift up and carry the weight, the debt of all our misdeeds.

1. *“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.”—(John 6:63 NKJV)*

Chapter 45

The Impossible Dream

From the moment we are born and onward through this life we are taught to think and respond to a performance-based ethic. As a child, when we are ‘bad’, we are scolded or punished. When we are ‘good’, we are praised or rewarded. In school, when we are ‘bad’, we fail or are disciplined. When we are ‘good’, we are praised or rewarded. On the job, when we are ‘bad’, we are disciplined or terminated. When we are ‘good’, we are congratulated or elevated.

Even in our religions, when we are ‘bad’, we are shunned or condemned. When we are ‘good’, we are extolled or praised or honored.

But nowhere and at no time are we ever expected to be perfect. That’s because we all know that no one of us is truly a ‘10’. You may be the most accomplished athlete or outstanding beauty but in reality, you know, and we know you’re not a true ‘10’, you’re just not perfect.

You’re human and so by what we recognize as a definition, you’re NOT perfect.

But along comes this radical teacher from a backwater town in Israel who tells us to love our enemies, to give to everyone who asks, to not resist an evil person but to actually do good to them, to never swear an oath, that to even look at a woman with an impure thought is like adultery, that to be angry at someone without due cause is akin to murder, that you must forgive in order to be forgiven by God the Father. Obviously, an incredibly high standard of performance—an impossible one.

You see, He was talking about a level of performance or righteousness that would allow entrance into heaven, to make us acceptable in God’s eyes because it’s His own standard, His own performance. And He lived it out before us.

Now, you can imagine, those who heard this were dismayed. He had told them that their performance, their righteousness had to exceed that of the most religiously disciplined. They probably shook their heads in bitter

disappointment. I mean, what could they do? This was/is a performance they/we can't perform. It's a dream, an 'impossible dream'.

So, what was Jesus' aim? What was He conveying?

First and foremost, He was simply teaching that unlike the common thinking of that day and today as well, you CAN NOT be good enough; you CAN NOT jump high enough. Your good works will never be enough; your self-discipline will never be enough.

Second, He was telling us how we should perform. He said to follow Him, to follow His example. But then He finished His teaching with the real bombshell.

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

— (Matthew 5:48)

He did not say, "You need to be perfect..." nor even "You should be perfect..." The tense of the verb "to be" is specifically in the future and the translation is accurate—"You shall be perfect..." It is used that way in 170 other instances in the scripture.

So, third, He was telling us of what we can look forward to—in heaven. Of course, this is based upon accepting Him as your Savior, believing in His sacrifice for you on the cross and His resurrection. You see, that's why He banished Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden before they could eat of the tree of Life and live forever filled with darkness and sin. The plan was always to redeem us, to make us perfect in character—like Him, so we could truly enjoy living eternally.

What He was conveying was that the 'impossible dream' is not impossible for God; He can and will one day make you perfect, a true '10' in a truly '10' setting, His presence.

Chapter 46

Living in a Dying World

When an organization founded to entertain children and families turns to endorsing and promoting deviant sexual behaviors, you know we're in a dying world. When the man with authority over the 'nuclear football' is often delusional and the people around him are continually covering for him, you know we're in a dying world. When hucksters promoting racial equality use their positions to bilk millions from their devotees and spend it on themselves, you know we're in a dying world. When many if not most young adults who claim to be Christians don't know if they actually believe that Christ is the Son of God, you KNOW we're in a dying world. Such examples abound.

And it's not just the US; every major nation in the world is 'in the toilet' or rapidly disintegrating morally, socially, and even intellectually.

So, what does the Lord want us to do living in such a state of death, chaos, and deception? Can we fix it all? Do we 'hunker down'? Do we simply deny it or embrace it? To answer that, we need to consider the two individuals that Christ referred to, as well as their situations, when asked about the last days before His coming.

First:

“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.”

— (Luke 17:26)

From other scriptures, we learn that Noah was a preacher of righteousness

and that he was faithful to do all that the Lord told him. And this was in a time wherein the whole world of men and creatures around him was filled with violence and deviant behavior.

What we see is that he did not just ‘cave in’ and go with the crowd. He kept his heart and mind in tune with the Lord. He probably had brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles, can’t say for sure but if so, they did not make the trip; only his immediate family got on the ark. His pains-taking work likely took at least decades of hard labor, perhaps as much as 100 years or more. And he had to believe in something no one had ever seen before—rain, torrential rain. So, he lived in a dying world as a man of real faith and faithfulness in spite of overwhelming circumstances.

Second:

“Likewise, as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; “but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.”

— (Luke 17:28-29)

Lot also lived in a vile, dying degenerate society. But unlike Noah, it seems like he was personally a mess. He was oppressed and tormented, but his soul was still righteous in the eyes of the Lord. Peter writes that God, “... did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)¹.”

Now, we know from other scriptures that unlike Noah, it seems like Lot had caved in at least to some extent. He chose to live among the vilest society of his day and was reluctant to leave even when God told him He was going to destroy it. His angels had to literally drag Lot and some of his family out of it. You see, Lot was a righteous man but lived as a compromised man.

He lived in a dying world as a part of it rather than as a godly example like Noah.

So how are we to live today in our own dying world. Noah was warned by God; he worked in obedience and saved the human race as well as the animals. Lot was warned by God and lingered in disobedience. Jesus alluded to both of them and their days in warning his disciples of what to expect. He also said,

“Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But

know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

And He added,

“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. (Obedient, like Noah) Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, (caves in like Lot) the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

— (Matthew 24:37-51)

So clearly, watching for the Lord, being ready for His coming, continued obedience to His commands and steadfastness are what the Lord is looking for in our hearts. The good news is that God delivered both men out of their dying worlds—He is faithful even when we fall short. If you truly trust in Jesus, He’ll deliver you as well.

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1. *“and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)”*— (2 Peter 2:5-8 NKJV)

Chapter 47

John 1

At Easter time, messages and pictures associated with the wonderful resurrection of Jesus Christ abound. Some are great, but unfortunately, many are so steeped in religious tradition and frivolous concepts that they denigrate the deity of the Son of God. You know which ones I mean. They are cute or trendy or simply cheap. People who produce such things project that they don't really know who they are promoting.

But John did know. He knew the One Who loved him, and as he opens his gospel his first focus, his first thought, is of the incomparable deity of His Savior. In the first fourteen verses of chapter one, he is conveying the immortal, eternal, truly indescribable awesomeness of the God-Word, God-Man, God-With-Us, Jesus.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

This is how John starts and immediately we're reminded of how Moses started, *“In the beginning God...”* back in Genesis chapter one. Of course, the two are linked and speak not of the beginning of mankind or the beginning of the Gospel or the beginning of the earth but the unknowable beginning of the eternal-now when *“I Am”* came forth out of God Almighty.

“He was in the beginning with God.”

This beginning is not like any beginning we can understand with our feeble limited intellect. Not like the beginning of any created being or entity whether in the realm of time or eternity, but it came forth as a spoken Word, Logos in the Greek. The Almighty spoke and what He expressed was in Him, with Him and

indeed was/is Him. Jesus was not created like everything else. Rather, He himself created all things seen and unseen.

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

This is where all pseudoscience that panders to mankind’s vanity fails, whether from Hawkings, L Ron Hubbard, Darwin or Mickey Mouse. None of them can account for first cause. You see, John nails it—Jesus is Himself the first cause of all things. The living, spoken Word of God.

“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

With this, we have two more spiritual concepts—life and light and they are directly related to each other. Life is indeed, in this context, eternal life but it is also much more than that. It is an infinite thing not only in existence but in quality. Jesus told His disciples, *“While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”* You see, this life that was/is in Him illuminated, it exposed. Those who loved Him relished it and danced in its splendor; those who did not, ran for the cover of darkness, just like rats, and wanted it extinguished.

And wonder of wonders, He was not content to have this life in Himself, but He gave it to us as well.

“And so, it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam (Jesus) became a life-giving spirit.”

— (1 Corinthians 15:45)

“And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend (or overcome) it.”

This world is indeed dark. It’s a dark planet with dark motives, dark ideals and everyone fumbles around in it feeling for a light switch. It’s over-the-top stupid that when the Light did shine here, mankind (especially the religious elite) didn’t comprehend it and tried to extinguish it. Epic failure.

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.”

Now, John the Apostle first followed John the Baptist, and surely, he appreciated the Baptist’s iconoclastic message but when this guy clothed in a camel hair suit pointed out Jesus as the Light and Light-giver, God’s Son, the

Apostle to be and his buddy Andrew became Christ's first followers—they recognized and were drawn to the Light.

And there's that giving nature of our Lord again—He gives life, and He gives light, both eternal qualities. Not to a select group, Jew or Gentile, but to all. He simply leaves it to us to believe it and accept.

“He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.”

What irony! Fumbling, diseased, rotting humanity with dying souls crying out, “Is there a doctor in the house!?” and when He shows, they don't recognize or receive Him. His life and light are offered to all, but few will accept and receive it. Mankind turned dark back in Eden and still prefers darkness and death.

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born Not of blood Nor of the will of the flesh. Nor of the will of man, but of God.”

To believe in His name is also to believe in His nature, His character. The word “name” signifies both. So, what is His nature? We see it displayed in 3-D, in real life, in the Gospels—He's gracious, kind, forgiving, loving, truthful, merciful, accepting, sacrificial, giving, helping, on and on it goes, and there's nothing wrong Nothing evil Nothing crooked, because He is PERFECT.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

This word, “dwelt” means to pitch a tent or tabernacle and thus we see that John recognized in retrospect, that His God and Savior was that same One whose Glory went with his ancestors in the wilderness. “Begotten” means One who came forth out of Not created. Therefore, “only begotten” makes clear that He is unique, the only one to come forth out of God.

And though we know He is Life and Light, He is full of both Grace and Truth. In Him they exist as a perfect coupling.

What John saw in heaven in the book of Revelation, he seems to have struggled to express but what He witnessed on earth in Jesus his Shepherd, his Savior, his Lord was clear, clearly divine and without any comparison. The divine Word, the Logos, took on flesh and tabernacled among us and He is absolutely amazing.

Chapter 48

Facing Fear in Faith

When Jesus was crucified, the disciples were fearful. They hid out in the ‘upper room’. They were disillusioned and lost—Peter went fishing along with several others almost as though they thought they could find solace in past activities. They lost faith and wouldn’t believe Mary Magdalene that she had seen Jesus alive.

Back in the Garden of Eden, the act of disobedience and sin led Adam and Eve to shame and fear. (Ya-re)

David, who had stood against Goliath lost confidence and feared for his life by the hand of Saul so he pondered escape to the land of the Philistines.

Such a powerful compelling force—fear. Yet the Bible says,

“For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love and of a sound mind.”

—(2 Timothy 1:7)

And today, the enemy of our souls is working as if time is running out to overwhelm and herd the world of men toward alienation from God and its own destruction with fear. Fear of death, fear of man, fear of suffering, fear of ... the list is large and seems to grow every time the media speaks or Hollywood vomits out more of their lies.

But if we let Satan or the world and its forces control our lives with fear, we are not pleasing to the Lord. Courage is not the absence of fear, it is the overcoming of fear.

That’s not to say that you jump off a cliff to prove the cliff doesn’t exist, you simply decide not to let the ‘cliff’ be a fearful thing to you.

In fact, “the fearful” are top of the list of those condemned to the lake of fire.¹

So how do you fight fear? First, when we face our fears head on, they no longer have power over us. Again, I refer to David facing the giant, Goliath:

“So it was, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hurried and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.”

— (1 Samuel 17:48)

Consider the three Hebrews in Babylon, standing before the mightiest king in the world who commanded them to worship his idol.

*“...if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?” They boldly affirmed,
“If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods. Nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”*

At the same time, we look to the Lord.

“I sought the LORD, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed.”

— (Psalm 34:4-5)

And we always look to Him in reverence. There are 25 different Hebrew words for fear in the OT and ten in Greek in the NT but the one in each Testament we use referring to God is the only one meaning reverence. (ya-re)

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment (penal infliction). But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”

— (1 John 4:18)

“...that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

— (Hebrews 2:15)

Bottom line—don't let any fear of anything in this world be your master or even your 'advisor'. Reverence God with all your heart and walk in faith.

1. *“But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”— (Revelation 21:8 NKJV)*

Chapter 49

Our Miracle Child

Gabriel was our miracle child from the very beginning. While I attended Officer Training School in San Antonio, Darlene and the kids stayed in a home my parents found for her in Colorado Springs. Dad would show up most every day to help out and spend time with the kids.

But then the balloon burst—I got a call at OTS in the middle of the night from Darlene and she was weeping and crying, “not again!” over and over. She relayed that Gabriel had been born at the Air Force Academy hospital with a transposition of the arteries that prevented him from circulating oxygenated blood once the placenta was gone. The surgeons had done an emergency operation to create a hole in the heart’s septum separating the isolated chambers and allowing a small amount of circulation. This saved his life but was a very temporary fix.

The additional dilemma was that if I ran back to Colorado Springs which everything in my heart was demanding, they would drop me from the OTS, the Air Force and consequently we would have no health insurance which Gabe was going to desperately need. I talked with Darlene about it and she agreed that I should stay. To say the least I couldn’t focus after that; it was killing me not to be with my wife and kids. I did the best I could though and spent a lot of time on the phone. (and a LOT of time in prayer)

Right after graduating, I was assigned to attend Auburn University to obtain an undergraduate degree in Electrical Engineering in just two years as well as to supervise the group of AF officers who were also at the school—about 25—30 or so. We found a house to rent in Opelika but shortly thereafter, Gabe’s ability to breathe started to decline and so we rushed with him to the Army hospital in Fort Benning, GA.

Sad to say, the doctor in charge of Gabe was disturbed that he had to interrupt his golf game and basically told us to accept that Gabriel was going to die. I blew up at him and we just took Gabe from the hospital and drove to

Atlanta where we went to the emergency room of the Emory University hospital. There, the doctors said he was the sickest little child they had seen and quickly gathered their top cardiologists to decide what to do.

It wasn't long until they had an answer. Although he would be the smallest child to ever receive such an operation, they told us they could help him by performing an operation called the Senning procedure. Bear in mind that his heart was the size of an acorn—a small acorn. We agreed and prayed desperately during the operation which took hours longer than they estimated.

When they finished, they warned us that he might not wake up but even as the doctor was telling us that, the nurse came out and said that he was already awake and full of energy. Of course, we praised God.

But then the other shoe dropped.

Over the course of the next week, Gabe's energy and vitality steadily declined, and he got so bad that he couldn't eat. I was in Opelika with the kids and dear Darlene was in the hospital looking out for our baby. She got more and more worried and said the doctors, though they clearly cared about Gabe, couldn't figure out why he was going downhill. Finally, she overheard the nurses saying that the doctors had given up on him.

Anyway, she then called me again and told me of the situation, weeping terribly. Something caused me to say, "Call me back in a few minutes." I went to prayer as did she and when she called back, I told her with absolute assurance, "This is Friday. I guarantee that by Monday, you're going to leave there with Gabe. Now, seek the Lord; I know He will tell you what the problem is."

Well, she did exactly that and sure enough, the Lord showed her a group of doctors taking Gabriel's blood to test and it dawned on her that different groups of doctors with their students had been doing the same thing over and over with no realization that together they were 'bleeding him dry'.

So, she went ballistic. She virtually threw the next group out the door and barred the way to Gabriel. The attendants thought she had lost her mind, but she demanded to see the head cardiologist immediately. The whole hospital was quickly aware of the "crazy lady on the third floor" and when I got there, everyone was talking about it.

But the head guy came in and sat down with her and listened to her explanation. He was utterly shocked and sobered and said, "I think you're right, Mrs. Dickey." To his credit, he immediately ordered a blood transfusion for Gabe and in a few minutes, he was eating so eagerly, he broke the nipple off the bottle! And just as the Lord had told us, Darlene and Gabe were discharged Monday afternoon. Praise God!

Chapter 50

Out on a Limb

Back in the US for about a month, we got a call from a couple we knew in Rome. They asked us to consider joining them on a short-term mission to Acapulco, Mexico. Darlene was several months pregnant, so our inclination was to say no. Nevertheless, we prayed about it and felt that the Lord was saying yes. So, we got a small trailer to tow behind our little Chevy Vega—yeah, a Vega, and headed off to meet our friends and drive down south. Imagine six of us, four adults and two (and a half) kids towing a packed-out trailer venturing naively to Acapulco on the south end of Mexico on the Pacific coast—a long trip.

Along the way, since I was the one who spoke Spanish, I kept asking how much a small cabana there would cost to rent, and everyone said, “Oh about \$150.” So, I thought, OK, we can stay a couple of months. Now, as we finally came down the hills into the city, our super-Vega brakes burned out and we coasted to a stop not too far from where we got them checked. The next day, we went all around the town asking to see places to rent and when we finally settled on a reasonable location, I asked the landlord to write up our lease agreement. As he wrote, I noticed that the cost was “\$150 diariamente.”

I immediately stopped him and asked, “What do you mean daily!?” Of course, he was put off and basically told me to take it or leave it.

Well, we left it. But after checking around, it was indeed the going rate and wow, were we bummed. We thought for sure we had not heard from the Lord but again, we went to prayer and the Lord said to simply go out and share the gospel, so we did. We witnessed all day to dozens to receptive people and then toward the end of the day, we were out on the peninsula that sticks out into the bay—a very nice area at the time—and encountered Jorge who loved hearing about the Lord and got saved.

He immediately wanted to learn more about the Gospel, and we explained that we would love to share more but we had to return to the States. We

explained the situation to him, and he smiled and turned me around. He swept his arm in a half circle and said, "Take your pick!"

"What? What are you talking about, Jorge?" we asked.

"I am in charge of all these homes. You can stay in any ones you like for as long as you like. Just teach me about Jesus Christ."

Needless to say, we were flabbergasted and so thankful. We moved in to two adjoining cabanas with a pool and rejoiced at God's goodness.

That evening we decided to splurge a little and buy a plate of spaghetti at the one Italian restaurant we had seen. As we were slurping down the last noodles, our waiter, Fulvio, came over and asked if the food was good. In typical Italian fashion, we all put our index fingers in our cheeks and said, "Molto Buono!"

Fulvio jumped and exclaimed, "You're from the old country??"

He ran and grabbed the owner who came over and said, "Fulvio says you are from the old country!" He pulled up a chair, snapped his fingers, ordered a round of drinks and desserts and we spent the next hour talking all about Italy.

Finally, as we began to leave, he insisted, "You have to come back and meet my friend." When he observed our hesitation, he added happily, "On me of course. You'll be my guests."

So, we showed up the next evening and were treated like royalty. Course after course was served with great care. Meanwhile musicians played violins around us. Then as they began to serve some wonderful deserts, an older Sicilian man appeared smiling broadly and introduced himself as Pipo. The manager brought over an extra chair, and we had a delightful talk about the restaurant, the 'old country' and of course, each other.

Pipo said he was mostly retired and liked to do artwork. Now, I had a liking for art as well, so we had a long talk about painting. Soon, he was insisting that we join him for a dinner at his house and we agreed.

A few days later, we journeyed out on the peninsula that juts out into Acapulco bay. There we found a rail car positioned to carry us down to where his phenomenal mansion was literally built into the cliffs above the bay complete with its own large swimming pool. Quite impressive to say the least.

As our relationship with Pipo progressed, we ministered to him about Christ and our desire to serve Him and he responded by taking us all out for dinner at least once a week for several months. Each time he seemed to receive more of the gospel message. Finally, on our last night together, he took us to the Princess hotel which at the time was spectacular—a pyramidal structure with hanging gardens inside all the way to the top.

At meal's end, Pipo asked my friend and I to come with him outside. There, he held our shoulders and smiled. He said, "I have learned so much from you and wanted to thank you. You've helped me make an important decision—I'm going to stop what I've been doing and go back to the old country."

He hugged us both and we prayed for him to place his trust in Christ. Of course, we had no idea what he meant by "what I've been doing."

Anyway, the next morning, my friend and I drove to the open market to talk with the people who routinely helped us with vegetables. As we stopped to park,

we heard gun shots everywhere and saw all sorts of people running. We thought we'd be sitting targets in the car, so we jumped out and put our backs against a convenient wall. Suddenly, one of the people we had seen frequently at Pipo's home dashed around the wall and saw us.

"What are you guys doing here?!" he exclaimed.

"We just came to the market to get some produce. What's all the shooting about?"

"You both need to get out of here immediately before you get hurt," he replied with urgency.

"OK, but what's this all about?" we asked.

"Pipo left! He just left..."

"Oh, yeah, he told us last night he was leaving," we said with a tinge of cockiness.

"You don't get it," clearly our naivete was trying his patience. "Pipo was the second most powerful man in all the Latin American mafia. He ran the drugs from South America to the US and now that he's gone, there is a huge struggle between many groups to take control."

We were absolutely dumbstruck. We had had no idea and were thankful God had protected us and used us, unwittingly, to disrupt the drug trade by leading the kingpin to seek new life in Christ. As you might imagine we left Acapulco not long after this.

Chapter 51

He Truly Knows Me

You know, there are times when I can get pretty down on myself. The older I get, the easier it is to notice my failings, both present and lifelong. I got up at 3:00 AM this morning and knew I needed to spend some time before the Lord. Now, I don't walk around all day beating myself up or stressing out over my sin filled character. But every once in a while, I ponder it and as a result come to more and more awe and wonder concerning the grace and mercy of my Father in Heaven.

You see, He knows me completely. He knows who I am and what's in me, so no stupidity or bad behavior surprises Him. Get this, like a pick-up game of basketball, he chose me before the beginning of the world.

".. 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"

— (Ephesians 1:4)

"Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. 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 2:23-25)

*“As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
As a father pities his children,
So the LORD pities those who fear Him.
For He knows our frame;
He remembers that we are dust.”*

— (Psalm 103:12-14)

So, in spite of my wretchedness, He loves me. How awesome is that! And He has already cancelled all my sins, past, present and future because I placed my heart in His and opened it to faith in Jesus Christ. This blew me away again this morning and lifted me up out of the stink of my own self. And I recalled that it was this message that Darlene and I shared with... well, let me tell you the story.

We were living in Athens. We never had much money; the translating job paid very little. So, I made ends meet by taking my old guitar out in the evenings and playing songs like a wandering minstrel in the streets. In Athens, everyone loves to spend their evenings dining or just talking at outdoor cafes. Typically, I'd sing a song or two and then take a collection. Then I got smart and had my little girl Starshine, who was about three, do the collecting with her hat. She was irresistible.

One evening as we were headed home, we passed by a long table with some ten or so large black men and at the end an elderly black gentleman. When he saw us, he waved energetically for us to approach. When I neared, he said in English, “Come, play us a song! Something with joy.” At that, his companions who resembled in size, the front line of the Chicago Bears, also chimed in, “Yeah, play us a song!”

Not one to take on unnecessary risk, I began to strum and sang a song about coming to Jesus innocently and receiving His joy. A bit to my surprise, they loved it. And the older man at the end said, “Sit, sit.” He took Starshine on his lap and she giggled.

“Where are you from?” he continued.

Shortly, we were engaged in a lively conversation about my song, living in Athens and probably ten other topics. There seemed to be an instant click between us, and he was enchanted with Star. After a half hour or so, we excused ourselves and he insisted that we come visit him in his hotel. Not wanting to get on the bad side of the ‘Bears’ at the table, we agreed.

And wonderfully, this began a long and delightful friendship with Abdul. We visited with him probably twice or three times a week for six months or so and each time listened and then discussed both Islam and Christianity. We emphasized how gracious God is and that because of Christ we enjoy the freedom of truly forgiven sins. He told us that he was a lawyer and an author known in the Muslim world and each time we met we grew closer to each other. Star would run to him and jump onto his lap. Then she would stick out her hand into which Abdul placed a piece of candy. She loved this as much as he did.

One day, after several months we went to his hotel lobby and though his

'friends' were there, he was gone. We asked them where he was and one of them let slip, "Oh, he's in Tripoli."

"Tripoli?" I asked. "He didn't say anything about that. When will he be back?"

"Oh, in a few days, it's another Arab Summit," he replied and then acted like he'd really blown it. "I shouldn't have said anything. I'm sorry."

"That's OK. You know we are his friends. Why is he at an Arab Summit?"

"Well...", he paused, "Abdul is the Prime Minister, in exile, of the Sudan. He is still considered the legitimate leader of our country by the other Arab heads of State, so he attends for us." This last part was said with obvious pride.

Darlene and I were dumbfounded.

When Abdul returned, we met with him, and he shyly confessed that it was true. He told us that he had spent seven years in and out of jail in Khartoum because the Egyptians had taken over and put all his government in prison, then the military leaders that had overthrown his government were themselves overthrown but the new leaders didn't know who to trust. At one point, Abdul, convinced that he was about to be executed, wrote his will on the wall of his cell. The next morning, the ones who were going to execute him were themselves executed in the cell next to him.

Upon release, he fled the country with many people who were loyal to him, and he was supported by other Arab heads of state because he was so highly respected. He had been the first Sudanese leader invited to the White House and to speak to the UN. In addition, he had hosted several Arab Summits himself.

"Do you know what I did in Tripoli?" he smiled broadly almost like a child.

"No, Abdul. What did you do?" We anticipated something unusual just by his body-language.

"Well, there is this man named Ghaddafi who is the leader of Libya."

"Yes," we inserted. "We know who he is."

"OK, well he was going on and on, loudly asserting that we all had to reject the West and especially Christians because they are all infidels and unworthy of our friendship. So, I stood and rebuked him and said that he was mistaken. I said that, in fact, I had met some wonderful people from the US who were Christians and if there are more people like them, we should welcome their friendship."

"You said that!?! Abdul, you said that at the Arab Summit?? Will that get you in trouble?"

"Oh no. It is the truth and I know many of them heard my conviction."

We were flabbergasted at his boldness and prayed for God to protect him. Anyway, it wasn't too long afterwards that the Lord led us to move to Italy. Of course, our goodbyes with Abdul were tender and loving. He wrote to us many times explaining that he had experienced vivid dreams about us and about Jesus. In one letter, us joyously wrote that he had asked Christ to come into his heart and forgive his sins. He was so happy that he knew he was saved and would see us in heaven.

A few months later he returned to Sudan under a blanket pardon, and we did not hear from him again. Much later, we found out that he died about a year after returning but we don't know the circumstances.

I looked this info up later:

Muhammad Ahmad Mahgoub (Arabic: محمد أحمد المحجوب; 17 May 1908—17 May 1976) was the Foreign Minister, and then Prime Minister, of Sudan and author. He was an important writer who has published several volumes of poetry in the Arabic language. He was born in the city of Aldewen in 1908, but then moved to Khartoum at the age of 7. Mahgoub graduated from engineering school in 1929 and in 1938 he obtained BL in law from the Gordon Memorial College. He was elected to the Parliament in 1946. Mahgoub was foreign minister between 1956 and 1958, and then again between 1964 and 1965. He was elected Prime Minister in 1965, but subsequently forced to resign. He was elected Prime Minister for the second time in 1967 and served in that position until 1969.

After twice serving as Sudan's minister of foreign affairs (1956–58, 1964–65), he was elected prime minister (1965) but was forced by the constituent assembly to resign in the following year. He was again elected prime minister in 1967, and in August of that year he hosted an Arab summit conference designed to coordinate strategy against Israel. Mahgoub's government was deposed (1969) in a coup led by Muhammed Jaafar al- Nimeiri and other left-wing officers. A writer, Mahgoub has published several volumes of poetry in Arabic.

The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th ed.

So, it is the exciting, wonderful truth of this grace, the freedom from the ugly stench of sin that appeals to all people who will truly hear it. Just like me and just like Abdul, God knows all His children and loves us so dearly.

Chapter 52

The Message

Thinking back to Genesis chapter one, what was one of the very first things God did? He gave names to His creation-Day Night, Heaven, Earth, Seas, and here, Man or literally, Adam. In this chapter, we're reminded of the fact that He created Man in the image and likeness of Himself and so what's one of the first things Adam does? He starts naming things as well-cow, dog, porcupine, etc. And in this passage, he, like God, gives names to his creation or rather his procreation.

Now the whole issue of names is one that we in our culture are far removed from — we tend to name our children after movie stars or give them names that seem to sound good, but we give little weight to the meaning. By contrast, the whole original purpose of naming was one of characterization or prophecy.

I think names are important to God because they communicate truth about a person, place, or thing. On the other hand, the “father of lies”, the devil, is constantly confusing our understanding of names because truth is uncomfortable for him —consequently, he says that lust is now love, sin is now entertainment, gossip is news, and on and on it goes. He's probably ticked that his own name was changed from Lucifer which means “light-bearer” to Satan which means “adversary”. He's also called Destroyer and Dragon-truthful names but not exactly complementary.

Names are really what this chapter is all about. However, if you're like me, there are times when I'll just scratch my head and really wonder why God put a certain portion of scripture in the Bible. For many people, genealogies like this one are such passages. Why would the Lord take the time to record this detail? Remember, all scripture is given for a purpose and the theme of scripture in its entirety is Christ Jesus. He is at the center of it all.

And as we take the time to study it, we'll see that this chapter is a neat illustration of that principle. In order to get the message that the Holy Spirit is

imparting, we need to do some 'mining' in it. Let's look at the whole passage first:

You can read Genesis chapter five.

So here, we have a genealogy that runs like this-Adam, Seth, Enosh, Cainan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech Noah. We started out this chapter saying that sometimes you just have to do a little 'mining' so to speak, in the Word, in order to dig out what the Lord wants to communicate.

Names don't mean much to us today, but they mean a lot to God-always have, always will.

So, let's look at these names:

Adam means Man

Seth means appointed

Enosh means mortal, sentenced to death

Cainan means sorrowful

Mahalalel means from the presence of God

Jared means one descends

Enoch means dedicated

Methuselah means when he is dead, it will come (or he will bring it)

Lamech means to the humble, to the lowly

Noah means rest, comfort

For some of you, the 'light bulb' is already going on. Can you see it? There is a divine message from the Lord in this genealogy. It says, "Adam, Seth, Enosh, Cainan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech Noah." Let's translate.

These names say, "Man, appointed mortal, sentenced to death, sorrowful. From the presence of God, One descends, dedicated. When He is dead, it will come to the humble, the lowly — rest and comfort." Wow! The gospel has just been given and God was the first preacher of it. No wonder He's into names.

Chapter 53

John 1:26-28

Bethabara was on the Jordan river. When I read this the other day, a fresh view of the symbolism just grabbed my heart. You see, the name Jordan means “descender” and as you may know it indeed descends into the Dead Sea. It is frequently asserted by Bible teachers to be a picture of death and thus quite symbolic when it dried up all the way to the town of Adam when the children of Israel walked across behind the ark of the covenant.

Anyway, here’s the place John baptized, the place where Jesus got all wet, where the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove came upon Him. And as for Him, so for us, baptism was essentially Jesus submitting to the symbol –death. Death on the cross—God’s divine plan. And in doing so, He fulfilled all righteousness. But there’s more...

Bethabara means “ferry house”. At some point it seems this was a place you could ride on top of the water—that is you could stay dry. And thus the picture of this place portrays a choice that we as believers have in following Christ.

We can stay dry too... or we can get wet, real wet, totally wet and thus encounter the work of the Holy Spirit. However, as with Jesus, it means death—death to self, self-interest, self-will, self-obsession. And yet in this death, we find real life. It’s a choice we make every day because we come to our own Bethabara frequently.

It’s a choice to stay dry or die. Remember Paul wrote “I die daily”

Prayer, help me Lord to follow you more consistently and take the plunge. My nature is to look out for number one. In my heart I want to be more selfless and I know that’s a work of your Spirit. Please help me to choose wisely and submit to your will.

Chapter 54

Ultimate Freedom

The entire story of mankind is epitomized in the age-old saga of bondage versus freedom. When we think of bondage, we often picture prison cells, balls and chains, chain gangs, slave auctions, soldiers forcing people to work or to pay taxes, etc. Some may even think of their financial debt or monthly bills as a form of bondage. In the Library of Congress, there are way more than 10,000 titles associated with this topic.

In short, it has historically been a matter of overwhelming importance. And man's answers to resolve these various bondages take the form of political elections, civil rights marches, tax reform, limited government, and such.

But the oldest and most severe form of bondage has not been and frankly, cannot be addressed by any power, politics or philosophy of man.

In the beginning, man's disobedience to God's command concerning the Tree of Knowledge of God and Evil introduced the pernicious, chronic, trans-generational and ubiquitous bondage of sin and death.

And sad to say, mankind, on his own, simply cannot be free from these two oppressors no matter what he tries or how long or hard he struggles. Even imagining they don't exist or trying to 'redefine' them doesn't work. Every man is a slave to sin and doomed to die.

If you've read it you know the Bible makes clear that there is indeed a lifelong bondage in every person—that is, the fear of death. See Hebrews 2:14-15. And we all know this very basic foreboding nests in the background of our psyche, emerging when we feel threatened.

Becoming a sincere Christian can and should alter this for when you are at peace with our Creator and have the guarantee of eternal life, physical death no longer masters you. Of course, that's not to say that Christians lack survival instincts Not at all.

But the believer knows that physical death has lost its 'sting'. For the

Christian, it is merely a transition and in fact, the fulfillment of being born of the Spirit.

And so, Christ offers many freedoms—freedom from the slavery to sin, freedom from hatred and bitterness, freedom from condemnation and guilt, and freedom from fear. Of course, all of these are blessings of believing in Him right now. But there is also the greatest freedom of all—an eternal one that Christ described in John chapter 3. In this life, when you are truly saved, Christ sends His Spirit to live within you—it’s called a ‘down payment’ by some, of the things to come.¹ And thus there is a spiritual insemination of sorts. But, for the true believer, physical death is the culmination of being ‘born again’ or literally translated, ‘procreated from on high’. It is really the climax of being “born of the Spirit”.

And Jesus described it like this—

“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 3:7-8)

It is the eternal awesome unsurpassed freedom of the Spirit. Perfect freedom!

No more bondage to a fallen, sinful human nature. No more threat of death or tragedy or sorrow. You’ll be moving about like the wind, freely wherever you wish. You’ll find the fruit of the Spirit—love, humility, joy—all as pervasive and free as the air we currently breath; and all embedded in the new heavenly nature even more than sin is in the old.

When you finally experience the fulfillment of being born of the Spirit, when you leave this earthly life and are welcomed into the heavenly, that’s when real freedom embraces you.

Now, this freedom is not for everyone. It is available to everyone, but Jesus Himself said few would find it. That’s because it’s found only in Christ. And you cannot fake it. Those who turn Him down, spurn the amazing love, ignore the gracious gift and choose their own path—these leave this earthly life for a permanent desolation.

Don’t be one of them! Choose life, choose freedom, choose the unmerited, unconditional, everlasting love of Christ.

Be forever FREE.

1. *“who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”* — (2 Corinthians 1:22 NKJV)
“Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.”
 — (2 Corinthians 5:5 NKJV)
“who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” — (Ephesians 1:14 NKJV)

Chapter 55

You Can't Beat God

On the near horizon is an event which will humble the enemies of Israel so completely and so dramatically as to usher in the final episodes of this age. It was revealed to the prophet Ezekiel some 2600 years ago but has, in the last decade or so, appeared on our radar. It is a war.

Now, stop yawning. I know, I know, you're thinking, 'another war'? And I don't blame you for your under-impression. There have been at least 11 wars or conflicts between Israel and her enemies since she was reestablished as a nation in 1948. This, however, will be one of the three big ones that remain.

Recent, best-selling books have alerted us to its catastrophic importance, but not many people really understand what the Bible has to say about it. There is a 'high level' chronology in the last part of the book of Ezekiel. In chapter 36, we read of the mountains of Israel coming alive again and then in chapter 37 we find an eerie resurrection of sorts—a vast valley of dry bones which come together, become covered with flesh and then receive the breath of life—a huge army which pictures Israel becoming a nation again.

Then come chapters 38 and 39 which deal with our war (we'll look at those in more detail) which are followed by detailed instructions for the millennial temple, its services and divisions of the land for Israel during the 1000-year reign of Christ found in chapters 40—48.

So, we find this war, commonly known as the war of Gog/Magog nestled between the time of Israel's rebirth as a nation and the events of the millennium. Some folks get confused by the multiple wars spoken of during the last days and that's understandable.

Briefly, there are three that are blockbusters so to speak and global in impact. The first is the war of Gog/Magog—details to follow. The second is the Battle of Armageddon, which occurs at the conclusion of the Great Tribulation. This is when Christ returns from heaven with His army. When He does, the Antichrist

will rally the armies gathered with and against him there in the Valley of Meggido to fight against the ‘alien invaders’.

The last war will come at the conclusion of the millennium. At that point, Satan will be released from his prison and will proceed to deceive the nations of the world to once more fight against the Lord. This will end in their annihilation and Satan’s eternal damnation after which the Lord will completely renew both the heavens and the earth.

Among these three wars there are several distinctives; for instance:

Gog/Magog—God destroys the armies in the mountains of Israel with fire and brimstone from heaven.

Armageddon—Christ destroys the antichrist-gathered armies with the Word of His Mouth.

End of the Millennium—Christ destroys the armies Satan gathered from the four corners of the earth.

Now, as we examine chapters 38 and 39, we’ll find many strange names and you might wonder why the seeming obscurity? But, actually, the use of these names allows us to most clearly identify the places and players. As a fictitious example, my great, great, great uncle Ivan lived in Petrograd which was known as St. Petersburg but then became Leningrad which then became St. Petersburg again, but my great, great, great uncle Ivan was always Ivan.

You see, people move and the places they move to are always getting their names changed, so if you want to be most accurate about the location of a future event, you nail it to the name of someone way, way back and to his descendants. The task then becomes one of tracing his descendants to the time of the future event.

So, let’s consider now our two chapters and we’ll cover each name in some detail as we proceed.

“Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, . . .’ ”

— (Ezekiel 38:1-2)

First, we have someone called Gog. He is the leader of the horde. Now, in Amos 7:1 (KJV) we read,

“Thus hath the Lord GOD shewed unto me; and, behold, he formed grasshoppers in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; and, lo, it was the latter growth after the king’s mowings.”

OK, here is the same verse from the Septuagint: “Thus the Lord showed me, and behold a swarm of locusts were coming, and, behold, one of the young devastating locusts was Gog, the king.” The cause of the difference is in the translation results from a little mark from the original that was overlooked.

And referring to this king, we read in Revelation 9:11,

“And [the locusts] had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.”

From this, we can see that this leader, Gog, is probably a demonic or demonized entity.

Now for Magog. Though it is the name of a land in the prophecy, it was originally the name of a grandson of Noah. His descendants are often referred to by their Greek name, the Scythians. Early historians identified Magog with southern Russia.

“Scythian designates a number of nomadic tribes from the Russian steppes. Many of the later Scyths settled in the fertile area of the Ukraine north of the Black Sea while other related tribes occupied the area to the east of the Caspian Sea. The Scythian language belonged to the Iranian family of the Indo-European languages. The Ossetian dialect of central Caucasus appears to be a survivor.” (Chuck Missler)

So, back to verses one and two. The latter part of verse two above should read more accurately, “the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal.” In more than 420 other instances in the Bible, that is the way the word Rosh is handled. So where are Meshech and Tubal?

Meshech was the sixth son of Japheth, the son of Noah. He is identified with the ancient Mushki of the Assyrians and the Muschoi of the classical Greek writers. Assyrian inscriptions describe them as inhabiting Phrygia in northern Anatolia (modern Turkey). Herodotus identified the Mushki with the mountains southeast of the Black Sea, the northeast part of modern Turkey.

Josephus also identified the descendants of Meshech as dwelling in eastern Turkey.

Some later writers identify the name of Meshech as preserved in the old tribal name of the Muscovites of Russia, after whom Moscow is named. This is not at all unlikely, especially when we consider their historically close association with the people of Tubal.

Tubal was the 5th son of Japheth and a brother of Meshech. The descendants of Tubal first come to our notice in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser I, king of Assyria in about 1100 BC. He referred to them as the Tabali whose original area of settlement was adjacent to that of Tegarama. Their land, in Josephus' day, was called by the Romans Iberia, and covered what is now the country of Georgia whose capital still bears the name of Tubal as Tbilisi.

The scriptures continue:...and say,

“Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords’ ” (v3,4).

From this passage, it is clear that it is the Lord who is behind this whole event. Gog is “turned around” and led out by hooks in his jaws. The ancient Assyrians led their captives out in a similar way.

So, the picture is that Gog and his horde, though they think they’re acting on their own, are actually the prisoners of the Lord’s will. It is a large, well-armed host.

Next, are Gog’s allies:

“Persia, Ethiopia and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops—many people are with you” (v5,6).

Persia includes the descendants of Elam, the first son of Shem and is now modern Iran. Iran was known as Persia until it changed its name in 1935. The name Iran is derived from the term airyana; Middle Iranian, ‘ry’n, “Aryan” or in New Persian, Iran. Iran is the leading ally in the Ezekiel list and the present major exporter of “Islamic Fundamentalism”. Persia covers present day Iran and Iraq.

The original language for the next name is Cush and refers to the land lying to the south of Egypt, usually translated in English Bibles as “Ethiopia”. Originally Cush referred to a piece of territory lying between the second and third cataracts of the Nile. Later it came to refer to a broader area known as Nubia. Today, this land is occupied by Sudan. Sudan is home to the National Islamic Front, is ruled by an Islamic military dictatorship, was home to Osama bin Laden from 1991-1996 and harbors countless Islamic terrorist groups. It also trades military supplies with Iran for docking rights on the Red Sea shipping routes.

The next name, in the original language, is Put. Put was the third son of Ham, the son of Noah. Josephus identified him as the founder of Libya, whose inhabitants were called Putites. Put, however, is associated with all North Africa, also populated by the Berbers and tribes distinct from Cush. Put encompassed the area from present day Libya to Mauritania and the Mahgreb, that is, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco.

The next ally mentioned is Gomer. In the Babylonian Talmud the Biblical Gomer, the father of Ashkenaz, is rendered “Germania.” Gomer is also associated with the Cimmerians who were expelled in 700 BC from the southern steppes of Russia into what is today Turkey but eventually established themselves in the Rhine and Danube valleys. So, Gomer potentially covers area from eastern Turkey to as far north as present-day Germany and Austria.

Togarmah was one of the sons of Gomer. The Assyrians called them Til-Garimmu, a name derived from the Hittite city Tegarama and carried into classical times as Gauraema, presently known as Gurun, 70 miles west of Mylayta. The city was destroyed by Sennacherib in 695 B.C. The Armenians still refer to themselves as “The House of Togarmah” even to this day. So Togarmah is the present-day area that covers part of eastern Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Nearly all of the allies of Magog have in common that they are Muslim.

“Prepare yourself and be ready, you and all your companies that are gathered about you; and be a guard for them. After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely. You will ascend, coming like a storm, covering the land like a cloud, you and all your troops and many peoples with you” (v7-9).

Here in verse eight, we have an additional clue—this massive army will march against the regathered nation of Israel whose people are dwelling safely. Thus, something has to happen to give the Israelis this sense of peace. It may be a peace covenant.

So, Gog and his hordes come against Israel, and this is God’s reaction:

“And it will come to pass at the same time, when Gog comes against the land of Israel,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘that My fury will show in My face. For in My jealousy and in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: Surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel, so that the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all creeping things that creep on the earth, and all men who are on the face of the earth shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground.’ ”
(v18-20)

First, there will be an enormous earthquake—seemingly ‘off the scale’ and extremely wide impacting.

Next...

“I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all My mountains,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘Every man’s sword will be against his brother. And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone’ ” (v21,22).

Gog's armies, a Muslim brotherhood, will turn on each other perhaps using not only conventional weapons but bacteria and/or viral agents. Meanwhile, the Lord will rain down huge hailstones, fire and brimstone. Later, in the next chapter of Ezekiel, the Lord says that He will completely disarm these assailants and adds,

“And I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in security in the coastlands. Then they shall know that I am the LORD” (v39:6).

We know where Magog is, but the “coastlands” is somewhat of a mystery. Typically, they represent areas quite distant from Israel. That they “live in security” may speak of people who simply don't expect to have any trouble perhaps because they have stayed out of the conflict. In this passage, Israel is seen as being basically on her own in the world. A few countries seem to give Gog a verbal slap on the wrist, but no one acts to defend God's people except God. Could these coastlands refer to the US or EU? Possibly.

“Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and bucklers, the bows and arrows, the javelins and spears; and they will make fires with them for seven years. They will not take wood from the field nor cut down any from the forests, because they will make fires with the weapons; and they will plunder those who plundered them, and pillage those who pillaged them,” says the Lord GOD” (v39:9-10).

These verses make me think that this cataclysm will take place before or at the beginning of the seven-year long tribulation. It won't be during because that would not give enough time to burn all the left-over weapons nor afterwards as there will certainly be no plundering or pillaging under the righteous rule of Jesus Christ.

Scriptures which follow state that the people of Israel will be burying the bodies of the dead for seven months and indicate by way of their procedure that the bodies may be radioactive. Though translations differ, verse two of chapter 39 indicates that these enemies of Israel will be annihilated leaving as little as one sixth of them alive.

Now, recent events are quite sobering for not long ago we saw the leader of the modern-day land of Magog attack the very place where the ancient Magogian language is still spoken—Southern Ossetia in the country of Georgia, the home of the descendants of Tubal. It would seem that there's a clearing of the way going on, for if Russia is to sweep south it must pass through Georgia and thus it is very much against allowing Georgia to become an active part of NATO.

In addition, Russia not long ago created a historic treaty with Iran, providing advanced nuclear and military technology and supplies. Syria has opened its ports on the Black Sea to Russian naval vessels and is also being supplied militarily from Moscow. Libya and Sudan are also now formally tied to Russia

via treaties and myriad agreements. So, as you can see Nearly all the players are in place and for the first time in history are allied with each other.

So, an amazing display of the power and authority of God Almighty foretold 2600 years ago is about to take place in the Middle East. Keep your eyes open and be in prayer!

Chapter 56

Really Crazy Days

And then will come to pass the days spoken of by Jesus and the prophets of old —the days of Jacob’s Trouble¹. After the church has been safely ensconced in heaven, after the Spirit of God ‘steps aside’ in this world, all hell will be unleashed — quite literally.

This, I believe, will be the time when our dear country tumbles into calamity. Though liberal economists and historical revisionists may differ with me, when I study carefully the history of this land, I cannot help but see the hand of God at work in making it great. Unlike Nebuchadnezzar, the ancient king of Babylon who walked its walls and felt such pride in what he thought to be his own accomplishment, we should recognize America’s national power at this critical time in history as most definitely a work of God’s grace.

Amid the hypocritical animosity of the other 187 nations of the UN No other country stands with Israel. To be sure, the US has an overflowing cup of sin to account for as well, but as long as the true church is present and our national posture is supportive of Israel, we can hope for the blessings of God.

But the time is nearly upon us when all of that will change. You see, much to the disappointment of patriotic Christianity, America is NOT mentioned even indirectly in scripture as playing a role during the Tribulation, that is, during the last seven years of this age of history also known as the 70th prophetic week of Daniel 9:24-27. The ‘players’ are named in the Bible and quite clearly identified, but our country is not.

Now, to our natural minds, that is quite startling. No land in history has possessed such economic, technological or military might, (and consider our godly heritage!), but unless the scripture is veiling its mention in some prophetic imagery, we simply do not see it involved. With our posture as supportive as it is of Israel, this doesn’t seem logical.

Some Bible scholars have suggested that a nuclear conflict will be the reason for this seeming disappearance (or lack of mention) of the US from the

prophetic ‘stage’ of the “last days”. Certainly, there are enough enemies and available weaponry in the world to make this a credible possibility but based in part upon the story of Genesis 19, upon what the apostle Peter says in 2 Peter 2:6-9 and many other scriptural indicators, I’m inclined to believe that like Lot in Sodom, we’ll be gone, physically taken out of the way, before that occurs².

Others have asserted that a devastating economic failure will leave us in such a strong isolationist mindset that we’ll fail to be involved in the events of the Middle East or of prophetic consequence. Surely, that’s possible as well.

However, there are enough sincere Christians in this land that I’m convinced our ‘disappearance’ in the rapture will devastate every functional aspect of the nation. As a consequence, I believe that for a period of time, the country will, in effect, cease to function. Unchecked sin and ubiquitous turmoil will consume her.

Then, without a meaningful alliance with the US, Israel will be seemingly defenseless. But scripture says that they will also be experiencing a sense of security—perhaps as a result of winning a regional war against her neighbors and the PA—perhaps as a result of a masterful peace negotiation. We may be here to see it or not, but something will happen to make the Jews in Israel feel relatively safe³.

“Given the current situation in the Middle East, some kind of confirmation of a seven-year agreement [like Oslo] is an absolute necessity, either to prevent all-out war or at the conclusion of any such war.

Bible prophecy says it will happen. The Bible also says it begins a time of judgment against Israel and the Gentile world. The Church was already judged at the Cross.

Here’s what it all means, boiled down into a single sentence. At some point before that treaty is signed, Jesus Christ will descend from heaven with a shout, and the voice of an archangel, and all those living who placed their faith in Christ will be snatched away, to be forever with Christ.

That treaty could happen at almost any moment. And that means the Rapture of the Church is even closer.” — *Jack Kinsella*

Then, during this period of seeming security, the Russian-led invasion mentioned in Ezekiel 38 and 39 will take place. I, along with many others, am expecting that this invasion and the Antichrist’s rise to power will occur near the beginning of the Tribulation period for several reasons:

Ezekiel 39:9 says that the victorious Jews will burn the weapons of the invading armies for seven years—the length of the Tribulation⁴.

The Antichrist will be known for a significant seven-year covenant that probably enables the Jews to build their temple and begin sacrificial worship⁵.

The Antichrist seems to become famous as a military genius, for the people will refer to him saying, “*Who can make war with the Beast?*”⁶. So, to the people, he

appears to be invincible militarily (even against overwhelming odds as are described in the Ezekiel 38 invasion?).

Although it is clearly the Lord who miraculously delivers Israel out of this terrible conflict, it is observably Satan's style to deceive—to unworthily take credit for what God has done and to blame God for what he has done. His proxy is justly called Antichrist which means “in place of Christ”.

In Revelation chapter six, right after the church is seen in heaven (chapter five), we see the immediate release of the Antichrist who, looking quite ‘regal’ and like a good guy riding the white horse, goes forth specifically to conquer. Right behind him are the personifications of War, Famine (or economic repression) and Death. So, it is clear that once the church is gone, evil events transpire quite quickly.

In any event, with America's power seriously abated and sinful behavior rampant and unchecked, it is reasonable to expect that the Jewish people will be in danger of immediate world-wide attack. What Satan wanted to do through Hitler, the Inquisition, Haman (see the book of Ester) and others, he will try to do again—eliminate the Jewish people—all in a vain attempt to thwart God's plan.

But this time, it would seem that even Satan may have learned something—that direct assaults on all the Jews have never resulted in their annihilation. (It's the same thing he attempted to do to the early church.) So instead, he's going to join them.

That is, it's quite possible that he'll pretend to be their long-awaited Messiah, fulfilling their perspectives of some of the Messianic scriptures, and for a while, they'll receive him. Jesus said to the Jews,

“I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.”

— (John 5:43)

Now, his ‘act’ will be very convincing—he'll be awesome in battle, bring a temporary peace, provide a means of constructing a new temple in Jerusalem, do signs and wonders, even overcome a deadly wound. But then, sometime near the middle of this seven-year period, he'll demand to be worshipped and will seek to kill the ‘remnant’ or minority of Jews (and Gentiles) who don't tow that line.

Yet although the scripture calls him the ‘son of perdition’, he won't act like some Lex Luthor (remember Superman?) or carry a pitchfork and no No red tights either. On the contrary, he will appear very ‘messianic’—a charismatic leader and an apparent ‘good guy’, an angel of light so to speak. He'll come on the scene quite suddenly and subdue three significant leaders. It's interesting to note that the UK has just begun to push the creation of an EU ‘super council’ kind of like the UN's security council, consisting of three countries—the UK, Germany and France. Anyway, rising rapidly to global prominence, he'll speak boastfully against all gods as well as our Lord, the one true God.

Sounds crazy, huh? It will be! Crazy days indeed! But the good news is that we who are saved by sincere faith in the death and resurrection of the true Messiah, Jesus Christ, don't need to be looking for the Antichrist. Jesus told us to watch for His own coming Not Satan's front man. In fact, He was emphatic about it. Speaking of His return for the church, He said,

“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—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping (spiritually). And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”

— (Mark 13:35-36)

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1. *“Alas! For that day is great, So that none is like it; And it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, But he shall be saved out of it.”*— (Jeremiah 30:7 NKJV)
 2. *“and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)—then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,”*— (2 Peter 2:6–9 NKJV)
 3. *“Thus says the Lord God:“On that day it shall come to pass that thoughts will arise in your mind, and you will make an evil plan: You will say, ‘I will go up against a land of unvalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates’—to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land.”*— (Ezekiel 38:10–12 NKJV)
 4. *“Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and bucklers, the bows and arrows, the javelins and spears; and they will make fires with them for seven years.”*— (Ezekiel 39:9 NKJV)
 5. *“Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate.”*— (Daniel 9:27 NKJV)
 6. *“So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?”*— (Revelation 13:4 NKJV)

Chapter 57

Happy Hour

“Jesus, therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour (noon). A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, ‘Give Me a drink.’ For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.”

— (John 4:6)

Now, as you’ve likely been taught, this was indeed radical. Ordinarily, a rabbi of that time would not even acknowledge his wife if he saw her on the street. But here, Jesus began to minister to the lowest social outcast. Outcast? Yes. You see, the women typically went for water in the morning or evening, but this lady was there at noon. Once you hear her story, you’ll understand that she probably had few female friends.

But that’s where the gospel finds ‘pay-dirt’. The ‘together elite’ don’t usually respond to its call. It is the sinner that can be saved if you know what I mean. Unfortunately, the church corporately spends far too much time and resource trying to impress the unimpressable.

Anyway, the dialog began as,

“...the woman of Samaria said to Him, ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?’ For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

Jesus answered and said to her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, “Give Me a drink,” you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.’ ”

— (John 4:9-10)

Keeping our focus on coming to faith in Christ, let's consider this woman's heart. To begin with, she's bluntly honest and this is always the starting point on the road to salvation. Those who try to play an insincere or dishonest game of verbal dodgeball with God find Him silent. But Jesus gave this woman a response that engaged her beautifully. When He said, "living water", the original language is water 'having vital power within itself, the power to enjoy real life—fresh, strong and powerful'. Now, that's no belly-wash!

"The woman said to Him, 'Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?'"

— (John 4:11-12)

Note that her first inclination was to think that Jesus would draw this 'living water' from Jacob's well. Her question was sincere and like most all of us who believe, her initial understanding of Christ's words was foggy at best. She challenged Him based upon her limited tradition and a supposed link to the patriarch. It is much like those today who suppose that their salvation is somehow enabled by a loose relationship they share with someone 'religious'. This is often because they think they must be good to go to heaven, that salvation must be earned, and they know they're not 'good enough' so riding on someone else's coattails, so to speak, is the only alternative.

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

— (John 4:13-14)

What the world offers, like Jacob's well did originally, can come easy and initially be a temporary thirst satisfier. But over time, it takes more and more effort. It gets tougher and tougher to slake that dryness in your soul. Finally, you can wonder if it is even worth all the effort for the momentary satisfaction. In contrast, Jesus spoke of a source that billows eternally with life—a fountain that springs up or literally leaps. It's the same descriptive word used when Peter and John saw the lame man healed outside the temple in Acts 3:8 who, after being healed, "...entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God."

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

— (John 4:15)

As yet, she still didn't understand but she recognized that this was what she wanted. Salvation has never been understood. If you're like me, there are fewer and fewer brain cells 'upstairs' and I'm grateful that understanding everything is not the key to eternal life. This woman only recognized that what Christ offered was WAY better than what she had.

*“Jesus said to her, ‘Go, call your husband, and come here.’
The woman answered and said, ‘I have no husband.’
Jesus said to her, ‘You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had
five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in
that you spoke truly.’” ’ ”*

— (John 4:16-17)

There is no other way; there is no real conversion without conviction. Salvation is not simply an intellectual discovery. It is the humbling confrontation with your sin before a merciful and gracious Creator. That's why Jesus presented it to her.

Now, I submit that this woman is not just an example of a sad story—someone who for whatever reason went through five or six men. Rather, she typifies us all.

But hold on. You may think, 'I'm not that bad!' But actually, you are. So am I. Even if your grandparents and parents were missionaries and you've worked with Billy Graham for decades, the truth is that we are all as deeply in need of salvation as the dear woman in this story. Even the great apostle Paul concluded,

“...that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”

— (1 Timothy 1:15)

“Notice also Jesus didn't say, 'You've had five husbands. Let's talk about Husband #1: Sam. Then, we'll talk about why you left George in Session 2. Come next week, and in the third session, we'll talk about Pete. In Session 4, we'll discuss Harry.' No, it didn't take Jesus five sessions to discuss the five husbands. He didn't delve into codependency, or into the woman's past iniquities. Yes, Jesus revealed her sin— but He didn't revel in it. Big difference. I think it is dangerous for people who mean well to start reveling in the past sin of another— talking about it, exploring it, pursuing it. Jesus does not model this for any minister of the Gospel, or for any servant of the Kingdom. He says, 'I know you're a sinner. You know you're a sinner. Now, let's go on from there.' ” (Jon Courson)

“The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.’ ”

— (John 4:19-20)

Her perception of Christ was changing. We commonly think of a prophet as one who predicts the future accurately but most literally a prophet is one who speaks the truth. Now, this truth wasn't particularly secret. There were many who undoubtedly knew it, but how surprising it is sometimes for us to learn that God already knows our whole story. He knows it all and yet He comes to us.

Some say that her comment here was a theological dodge of sorts like when you are sharing with someone about Christ and they say, “Well, who did Cain marry??” or “Can God make a rock so big He can't move it?” but I don't agree. This woman's interest was sincere and she, observing that Jesus had a prophet's insight into her life posed a question that probably had really nagged her. Her experience and training led her to believe that something was amiss—she'd been taught one thing and yet the truth was somehow elusive. Both the Jews and the Samaritans couldn't be right. This woman wanted to know the truth of the matter even if it contradicted the traditions she'd grown up with.

And this is an important point. A sincere desire for the truth is fundamental to growing in faith. So many Christians never progress in their spiritual walk because they stop desiring the truth—that's because it's humbling, very humbling.

“Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain Nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers 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 4:21-23)

Jesus said, “*You don't see or perceive (and thus, know) what you worship.*” And this isn't limited to the woman or the situation. Undoubtedly, Jesus is referring to the mongrel nature of the theological ‘soup’ the Samaritans believed. But, it also speaks to the whole of fallen humanity. The truth is that everyone's life is an act of worship to someone or something whether to self, Satan or the Son of God. Nevertheless, the vast majority of non-believers don't see it. At best, they are playing a dangerous game with eternal consequences. Sin has drastically contorted their perception.

This woman wanted to see, to know the truth and He was staring her right in the face. From her sincere question came a liberating answer—God is not stoically sitting in the heavens listening to some and ignoring others. Rather, He's

actively seeking out those who will worship in His Spirit and with a true heart—nothing feigned No games No mindless religious routine.

Recall, Jesus “needed” to go through Samaria as an illustration of what God is doing in this age—seeking those, like this woman, who want the truth and who will relate to Him, worship Him, literally ‘kiss the hand’ in Spirit and truth.

“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.’ ”

— (John 4:25-26)

Ah, this was the turning point. Note, that she responded, “I know” rather than “we know”. It became personal for her. Belief in Jesus Christ is nothing if it’s not personal. It is never because your parents are believers or your spouse. In her statement, you can just sense this woman’s anticipation of the glorious truth being revealed to her heart. She wasn’t theologically ‘savvy’, but she knew she needed a Savior.

To her, Jesus was first a “Jew”, then a “Sir”, then a “prophet”. Here, she brought up the topic of a Messiah Not Jesus. At what point will you be satisfied with your relationship with Christ? Do you know you need a Savior? I submit that Jesus reveals Himself to us to the degree we desire to know Him.

“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?’ Then they went out of the city and came to Him.”

— (John 4:27-30)

Ha! You know, there’s a ‘waterpot’ left behind every time the living water leaps forth in someone’s heart. The things we once thought important, even vital to satisfying our ‘thirst’ are simply not our passion any longer. That’s truly a happy hour!

Chapter 58

The 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.

In fact, 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 spied 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 were 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, sExodus 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.

Cleaning your heart is part of a greater process 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 heart, 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 59

It's About Time

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

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

— (Matthew 10:5-6)

However, later on the mount of ascension, He would say, *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”*

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

“My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready.”
“But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast Not openly, but as it were in secret.”

— (John 7:6, 10)

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

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

— (John 16:12-13)

Now, this becomes quite poignant to each of us when it comes to our expectations of God and how He decides to answer our prayers. You see, He has said many things concerning His willingness to hear our prayers of faith and to respond but as you search the scripture, you'll note that He never commits to respond according to our timetable. And if you take your trust back (which you should never do) this can be disappointing, frustrating, and even disillusioning.

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

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

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

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

“While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”

— (Romans 5:6 RSV)

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

— (Romans 5:6 NIV)

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

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

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

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

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

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

— (Luke 2:25-32)

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

What are you waiting for? God’s timing is perfect and usually mysterious, but your time is easy to understand—it is right now. That is, you have no guarantee of tomorrow. If you don’t know that you have a right relationship with God via

Jesus Christ, your time is now. Pray for God to forgive you for all you have erred in and to redeem you by the sacrifice of His Son.

If you're already saved through faith in Christ and waiting on an answer to prayer, wait in patience and peace—if you asked in faith, God heard you and He will answer.

All our waiting will be over soon.

Chapter 60

Turning Points – Exodus

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

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

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

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

This wasn’t just the desert; it was the “far side” of the desert. And in that place, he became a shepherd, considered the lowest profession in Egypt.

Consequently, the next 40 years he learned to be a real nobody. Finally, at the age of 80 God saw that he was ready for his turning point.

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

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

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

— (Exodus 3:1-6)

So, what made this the turning point? No longer brash and impulsive No longer prideful or pompous, Moses observed this simple but amazing miracle and as a result he encountered the God of all. He had become meek, so meek that the scripture describes him as the meekest man in the world.¹

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

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

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

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

What does it say about God? We can see that He has great patience and humility. He waited for more than 300 years to bring Moses on the scene and then another 80 or so to get his attention. He did not appear as a stormy tornado or a mighty cedar tree or even as a commanding king but rather as a simple bush burning in the desert wilderness. Also, He is perfectly holy, and He told Moses to respect that holiness.

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

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

In Caanan, God made a promise to Abram –

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

— (Genesis 15:13-14)

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

“And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac. And God spoke unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I. And he said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again...”

— (Genesis 46:1-4)

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

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

— (Exodus 2:24)

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

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

I think it's fair to say that God's training is considerably more thorough than mankind's. Most if not all of the men and women God used mightily in

Scripture were tested and prepared for years; from Noah to Abraham to Joseph to Daniel all the way to Jesus, everyone was prepared through testing and training. You will be too.

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

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

1. *“(Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.)”*— (Numbers 12:3, NKJV)

Chapter 61

Turning Points - The Fall of Mankind

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

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

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

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

Now we've got to consider:

That she and Adam had no understanding of death.
 That she was apparently one person removed from direct communication with God at least on this matter.
 She was fairly easily ensnared by Satan's lie but we should recall that she had never been lied to.
 It seems possible that in her own mind, her disobedience was to Adam.
 With the whole garden to roam in and tend to, she (and Adam) chose to be near to the forbidden tree.
 She was not surprised by the talking serpent which we could say shows her innocence and naivete.
 At the time, she was sinless, just as Adam.

All this made her the serpent's target. So, as he slithered in her direction, she was sunk the moment she engaged in the conversation. Her only defense was Adam. He was the one who could say, "That's not true or that's not what God told me." But, it would seem that although he was nearby, he was not in on the dialog or wasn't in the immediate vicinity.

So, what was this conversation?

"Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, "You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"' "

He started with a question. One that Eve could not answer with the same assurance as Adam.

"And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, "You shall not eat it. Nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' "

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

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

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

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

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

And at this point, we might ponder why. Why disobey?
 When he saw that Eve was ‘still vertical’, did he doubt God’s warning?
 Did he love Eve more than God and decide to commit ‘suicide’ with her?
 Bottom line, we just don’t know. It’s not recorded.

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

And we are surrounded by that same seduction every day. Almost all modern marketing is based upon subtle plays of seduction. 1 John 2:16 says,

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

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

So, this turning point turned mankind away from God and made us slaves to sin, doomed to death. But this did not surprise God, deter His grace or foil His plan. In fact, I suggest that it was simply a part of it for out of this incident came the first allusion to His redemption plan through Christ. Ephesians 1:4 says,

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

If mankind had not fallen in Eden, we could have enjoyed gardening here on earth for a long time. But with the fall came the divine response of eternal redemption so that all who believe can enjoy much, much, more than gardening in God’s presence in heaven for eternity. 1 Corinthians 2:9 says,

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

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

Chapter 62

Attributes of God – Restoration

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

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

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

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

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

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

— (2 Corinthians 5:17)

“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

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

— (1 Corinthians 15:51-54)

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

— (2 Peter 3:13)

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

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

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

— (Acts 3:18—21)

In heaven, John the Apostle witnessed and recorded:

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

— (Revelation 21:5)

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

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

— (Psalm 51:12)

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

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

— (Psalm 16:11)

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

— (Isaiah 12:3)

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

— (Isaiah 35:10)

Jesus Himself concluded His parable with:

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

— (Matthew 25:21, 23)

And He said to his disciples:

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

— (John 15:11)

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

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

— (Acts 2:28)

What great news! This is, what you as a believer can look forward to is—a fully restored life, a fully restored character, everlasting and ever-increasing joy in

the presence of God, boundless restored relationships and an eternally expanding quality of life. And actually, as good as that sounds, it's still just the beginning for:

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

— (1 Corinthians 2:9)

Chapter 63

The Attributes of God – Love

As we begin to consider God's attributes, we have to acknowledge our limitations. His attributes are themselves infinite, thus we who are finite cannot fully appreciate them nor can we sufficiently describe them.

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

— (Isaiah 55:9)

Jesus, Himself quoted what the Jews called the Shema when asked for the most important command in scripture. It says,

*“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul,
and with all your strength.”*

— (Deuteronomy 6:5)

This was and is considered by the Jews as the most important scripture. However, it should be noted that as important as it is we cannot initiate this commanded love. That's because we are not the source of this love, God Himself is.

John wrote,

“We love Him because He first loved us.”

— (1 John 4:19)

and,

“In this is love. Not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

— (1 John 4:10)

In other words, we can never obey this critical command to love God unless we first receive and acknowledge God’s love for us. In Eden, we learned from the serpent to doubt God’s love for us; believing his lies sent us spiraling away from God and into self-destruction. However, the good news is that believing in Jesus is believing again that God does love us.

Interestingly, the Old Testament is filled with at least a couple dozen commands like the Shema for us to love God but only a few that speak of God loving us¹. Conversely, the New Testament is filled with verses that express God’s love toward us such as:

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

— (Romans 5:8)

and,

“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.”

— (Romans 8:38-39)

and,

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,...”

— (Ephesians 2:4)

Another example is when Paul prayed for the Ephesians

“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.”

— (Ephesians 3:17-19)

Of course, God has always loved His children and He demonstrated that countless times throughout the OT, but the epitome of that endless infinite love was and is expressed in the gift to us of His own Son’s life to take our places and pay for our transgressions. But it doesn’t stop there. His love keeps on giving throughout eternity for...:

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

— (1 Corinthians 2:9 and Isaiah 64:4)

Now the one thing that we all long for but rarely if ever experience is sincere, trustworthy and enduring love. People fail us-mates, friends, children. But knowing God, by definition, means knowing His love.

John, the Apostle wrote:

“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

— (1 John 4:8)

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)

Now it has come to be in vogue to assert “Love is god.” But clearly this is not at all the same thing and is yet another serpent-lie. When you believe that, you by default allow for any trending or politically correct definition of love and thus your god. That of course subjugates your puny fantasy god to your own ideas and ‘agenda’.

Of course, love is a relationship and since God is eternal, it's a really long relationship (lol) but truly, it's something that will grow and grow and grow forever. First, believe; then receive and keep on receiving and returning divine love.

Of note, this is a 'Who'-attribute of God as opposed to a 'What'-attribute. His amazing Love speaks to Who He is; so how do we recognize this love? We could go into defining the three different words in Greek for love but instead, let's consider Jesus. How did he show us God's love?

The first thing that comes to mind is that He gave His life for us on the cross. That is the ultimate selfless sacrifice.

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

— (John 15:13)

In this selfless act, He not only suffered a terribly painful death, but He carried upon Himself all the sins of humanity—a truly incomprehensible weight. We are naturally so self-occupied that we cannot grasp the selfless love of our Creator. It is the polar opposite of our naturally evil hearts.

But when we are truly saved, His love overflows in our heart empowering wonderful acts of worship as the Holy Spirit embraces us, children of the Most High, filling us with love-light and love-life—and in so doing, grants us the power to recognize and return God's love.

What this means is that you can talk about, contemplate, ponder and discuss this Who-attribute of God forever but you won't know it, that is know God's attribute of Love until you know Him. You must establish an intimate relationship through His Son, Jesus.

You see, grasping at least some of the 'What-attributes' of God like His sovereignty or His triune nature can be approached intellectually but getting a handle on the 'Who-attributes' like love or grace require actual relationship. It is this relationship, which by the way is also initiated by God, that allows us to know and be known by our Lord.

When Jesus said,

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' "

(Matthew 7:21-23)

These who will be barred from entering the kingdom of heaven will evidently know about God, but they never actually know God and thus they cannot fulfill Deuteronomy 6:5 to love God. You see, this attribute of God, Love, this is the big one. Don't debate it, don't just approach it intellectually. The Pharisees never got it; sometimes contemporary seminarians don't either.

Come to God on His terms—simple, humble faith. Ask Him sincerely for forgiveness for all the misdeeds of your life; ask for faith to believe in the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus. Ask Him to fill you with His Love.

*“The grace of the Lord **Jesus** Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen”*

— (2 Corinthians 13:14)

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1. *“The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”— (Zephaniah 3:17 NKJV)*

Chapter 64

Shed Your Shoes

The time of sojourning was over—the times of desert wandering and trudging through the wasteland of the Sinai wilderness. It had been a lifetime, literally, but now in a very short time, all that was changing radically.

First there was the crossing of the Jordan on dry ground Next there was the circumcising of all the men of war Next the manna, the bread from heaven stopped. You see, when God says it's time, things can happen quickly. For Joshua, this was more change than he'd seen in, well, a long time.

But it didn't stop there. Joshua was a one step at a time guy; you try leading millions of anxious people into a whole new existence, and you soon realize that you need to be focused on what's next, but he wasn't sure what was next. Moses had always called those shots.

So, there in front of him were the massive impregnable walls of Jericho, a city filled with hostile adversaries.

“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, ‘Are You for us or for our adversaries?’”

So, He said, ‘No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.’ And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, ‘What does my Lord say to His servant?’”

Then the Commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua, ‘Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.’ And Joshua did so.”

— (Joshuah 5:13-15)

Now clearly Joshua was a gutsy guy. Here he was in proximity of a

formidable enemy stronghold and suddenly a ‘man’ with sword drawn appeared. Courageously, he approached the ‘man’ and posed what he thought was a reasonable question.

“No,” he gets in reply. Kind of like saying, “You need to open your eyes. You don’t even have the right question.”

Then the ‘man’ explains to the new leader that he was not just ‘the man’ but THE MAN, the Commander or Prince of Jehovah’s army. This is in fact Jesus pre-incarnate.

How do we know that? Because he accepts Joshua’s worship (it is forbidden to worship anyone but God) and the Commander tells him that the ground on which he/He is standing is holy—only one thing makes anything holy—that’s the presence of He who is Holy, Holy, Holy.

Now Joshua had already done a face-plant, he was prostrate in worship, but Jesus told him to remove his sandals. And it is this command we are going to consider further.

His feet were undoubtedly already dirty from walking and removing his sandals would place his feet in direct contact with the ground. The dirt wasn’t the point; I think the point was that, like Jesus said, the ground on which he was worshipping was holy and his sandals had been in contact with the unholy—that is the ‘world’ so to speak.

Important to note: Our Holy God cannot and will not be ‘polluted’ or tainted with the unholy. The unholy cannot abide in His presence.

You see, we tend to pollute—oh Not intentionally—but we just can’t help it. Wherever we go, whatever we do, our sin-nature is there. Paul wrote, *“Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death.”*

Even when we worship it’s there—recall that after His resurrection, Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, *“Don’t cling to me,”* as she worshipped at His feet. He had yet to present Himself spotless to the Father.

And so, we also, like Joshua need to ‘shed our shoes’ before Jesus. (Of course, I don’t mean our physical shoes.) That’s because they are symbolic of how we have made contact with the sin filled world. The spiritual muck we have trod through and that clings to us must be shed in the presence of the Holy.

Recall, at the last supper, Christ principally displayed servanthood to the disciples while washing their feet, but he also spoke of the same symbolic cleanliness with Peter:

“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;...’ ”

— (John 13:6—10a)

The same thing happened to Moses as well:

“And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So, he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, ‘I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.’

So, when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, ‘Moses, Moses!’

And he said, ‘Here I am.’

Then He said, ‘Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’ ”

— (Exodus 3:2—5)

So, the lesson for us is that there’s a time to ‘shed your shoes’ so to speak, to wash feet. Now, we who are saved are spiritually cleansed by the atoning blood of Jesus. So, we’re not speaking herein of salvation, rather we’re addressing getting instruction—hearing from the Lord. Like Joshua before conquering Jerico, like Moses before leading Israel out of Egypt, and like Peter before the crucifixion, the resurrection and his part in leading the Church, when we shed the ‘footwear’ we are preparing to learn “What’s next Lord? What’s my part in your plan?”

So how do we ‘shed our shoes’? It all points to the feet, to our walk.

“If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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 1:6-7)

It’s not the physical dirt that hinders our walk; it’s the darkness of this sin-filled world—what contact with it does to us. Shed those points of contact and

walk in the light; and you'll enjoy fellowship with Jesus and your brethren. Now, you know how you've 'touched' the world—you know where you got compromised and thus soiled by sin. Confess that to the Lord. That's shedding your sandals. He'll do the rest. As with Peter in the upper room, He'll wash you:

*“ ‘Come now, and let us reason together,’
Says the LORD,
‘Though your sins are like scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They shall be as wool.’ ”*

— (Isaiah 1:18)

Do you want to hear from God? That's always on Holy ground. It's His presence that makes it that way.

Presently, and even more so in the coming days the world will fall rapidly into greater and greater chaos; and many are going to need to hear from God and learn “What's next?” “What do I do?” To face the chaos on your own is a guarantee that you'll get swept down by it into the pit of hell.

Right now, God is calling out to all who will listen. If you will hear, shed your shoes, confess your sin, listen to the good news of His forgiveness through Christ and obey what he tells you.

Chapter 65

To the Faithful

“Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.”

— (Revelation 3:11b)

Here we are in the last days. The faithful Philadelphian church will be on earth until the rapture and then we will depart in an instant. But until that moment, what is our call? The whole of society worldwide is degenerating rapidly, and evil is becoming more open, more embraced by humanity. What is good is being marginalized and labelled as bad while what is evil is being paraded and presented as in vogue. The wolves are taking off their ‘sheep’s clothing’ and ravaging the true lambs of Christ. And it’s worldwide.

So, what do we who love God and believe in the risen Lord do? Do we hide? NO. Do we shrink away? NO. So do we surrender? Definitely NO.

Do we pretend that the growing evil doesn’t exist, that it will subside or go away? NO. Do we take up arms and fight? No. Do we campaign? No.

So then, what do we do??

Hold fast to your crown. Hold fast to what you have. Let no one take it from you.

What exactly is that crown and how do you hold it? Well, your crown is so amazingly important. It’s representative of something wonderful—

*“In that day the LORD of hosts will be for a **crown** of glory and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of His people,”*

— (Isaiah 28:5)

Specifically, it represents the Lord’s righteousness.

*“Finally, there is laid up for me the **crown** of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”*

— (2 Timothy 4:8)

And because of that righteousness, you have life, eternal life.

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

— (James 1:12)

It’s a glorious, brilliant eternal gift.

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

— (1 Peter 5:4)

So, when you have true, sincere faith in Jesus Christ, there is a crown waiting for you in Heaven. It’s reserved for you as well as each of us who believe. That’s why Satan’s end game is to try to take it from you; he’s a thief, and he desires to rob you of life, of joy, of eternal rewards. You see, if he’s lost you because placed your faith in your risen Lord, then he’ll still try to cheat you out of your blessedness.

He mocked Jesus on the cross with a crown of thorns which long ago turned to dust. Oh, he lost that battle, in fact, on the third day afterwards, he lost the whole war. But that’s how he operates in running this planet—mockery, fear, hatred. He uses these very things he knows are in the heart of sin-filled man.

They didn’t work on a sinless Christ.

Remember, crowns are representative. Why does a king wear a crown? Is a king still a king if his crown is stolen? Fundamentally, yes, but he’s missing the symbol of his authority.

So how do you and I hold on to our crowns? That word, “hold on” is not like someone who’s drowning holding on to a lifeline. It literally means to “be chief, be master of, to rule”. It’s more like the one who’s throwing out the life-line, holding on to the other end saving you. It describes your position in Christ over sin, over fear.

To put it simply, you are the victor Not the victim. That’s true in life and death. And it’s true because of Christ has a permanent hold on you.

*“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.”
(John 10:27-29)*

You hold on by **knowing, truly knowing**, that while this world is drowning in a flood of lies, fears and bitterness, Jesus has an unbreakable hold on you and because of that, you can reach out and hold on to others.