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The Proclamation of Peace

"To proclaim the year of Jehovah's favor." -- Isaiah 61:2 American Standard Version

"And there were shepherds in the same country abiding in the field, and keeping watch by night over their flock. And an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the *glory* of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, 'Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign unto you: Ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, '*Glory* to God in the highest, and on earth Peace to men of good will'" (Luke 2:8-14, ASV, marg. & Rotherham).

This was the most extraordinary proclamation ever directed to mankind. It was truly ecumenical - world -- wide -- in its application. "To all" people the herald said.

It was completely unselfish. There was in it nothing whatever of solicitation or return consideration or of demand or threat. It was all of kindness, of helpfulness, of bestowal, of good will. "Good tidings of great joy."

The proclamation promised a Savior -- a savior without limitation -- from whatever mankind suffered or feared: "Fear not."

It bore its own evidence of authenticity. The obvious superiority of this herald to earthly beings or methods stamped it immediately and indubitably as genuine. The herald angel offered a further sign of his prophetic authority: "Ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger." It is difficult for a gentile to realize the shock to Jews that such an announcement would bring. Messiah, the anointed Lord sent by Jehovah, to come as a babe born in a stable, cradled in a manger! Impossible! It is so incongruous that the thought has been a "stone of stumbling and a

rock of offense" (Isa. 8:14; Rom. 9:33; 1 Peter 2:8) to the majority of the babe's Jewish kinsmen for nearly two thousand years.

However, it was a sign that the Judean shepherds could understand and verify, which they promptly did. Nothing apparently was said to them about the much greater sign -- the birth of the babe to a virgin, without human father -- thus setting aside by divine fiat a previously immutable law of procreation. This sign is as incredible to a modern, scientific, and "rationalistic" world as the extraordinary outward signs which accompanied his birth were to his contemporaries.

The proclamation was concluded by a display of "the heavenly host" such as earth had never seen. The language of the record places no limit upon the imagination in picturing it. What regiments, what brigades, what armies, what cohorts of angelic cavalry were on parade! What iridescent showers of light from their bright uniforms and weapons and decorations! What exquisite music accompanied their assembly!

And this brilliant display came to hail "peace" and the Prince of peace; to offer a truce in the age long warfare against evil which had cost all men their lives; to announce an "acceptable year of Jehovah's favor" to "all men of good will" (as the three most ancient MSS record it). "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" -- but for "men of good will," God now publishes that he has "devised the means that he that is banished be not an outcast from him."

So men of good will celebrate at Christmas the annual festival of God's Amnesty -- with songs and praise to God and to his Son, and with gifts as each is able in imitation of the great Gift, particularly where no obligation lies and where no return may be expected (2 Cor. 9:15; Luke 14:12-14; Matt. 25:34-40).

What! Tears before you Minster Gate,
Ye blind, ye aged, and ye sore?
This is your festival of state!
So get ye in the open door,
And join my *cry* until it roar
By every field and mountain side:
For such as ye my Savior died!

-- H. E. Hollister

Keep Back Thy Servant From Presumptuous Sins

"Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins: let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." - Psalm 19:13

The nineteenth is indeed a wondrous psalm! Most Christians are quick to point out the power and majesty of God by it, and rightly so. However, as more time is spent in meditation on this Psalm, it takes on greater meaning for us. Indeed, the Lord should be extolled when we consider the works of his hands! Do not just stop to consider the works, though, because the point of this psalm is the greatness of the *worker*. As we ponder any part of God's creation in the universe or our world around it, do we consider ourselves the works of his hands? Do we ask whether our actions are going to honor or dishonor him?

Why should we look to God for guidance? There are two outstanding reasons. First, he saves us out of slavery to sin for his sake. "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for my own sake" Isa. 43:25. "...work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for [how often we willingly disregard this next part!] it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure" Phil. 2:12-13. How lofty our Father is! Dare we believe we can work out our salvation by our own devices? All of us try to do just that to our shame and, even more, to his disappointment. We must recognize that it is he who works in us both to carry out his will and his work. Yet, we continually look to accomplish his will by our strengths and talents, ignoring the work and dealings of the Spirit. How do we dare presume anything when it comes to accomplishing his will? Are we, as a body, praying earnestly for him to work through the ecclesia, or do we continue in what seems right in our own eyes? If prayer and supplication are forgotten, how is it possible to obey?

In verses seven through nine of Psalm 19, David's thoughts climax. Six times he points out different practicalities of God.

1. The Law of the Lord restores our souls.
2. The Testimony of the Lord makes the simple wise.
3. The Precepts of the Lord rejoices the heart.
4. The Commandment of the Lord enlightens the eyes.
5. The Fear of the Lord allows us to endure forever.
6. The Judgments of the Lord makes us righteous.

Now, when it comes to fulfilling his will, do we have each of these six things in our heart? They should be much more desirable than gold, yes, than the finest gold, sweeter even than honey. The Psalm, after relating these six things, comes to where we (that is the flesh) come short of his glory. "Who can (by his own thoughts and wisdom) discern his own errors (when compared with the testimonies of God)? Acquit me of hidden faults" (faults that we will never see nor realize without the touching of the holy Spirit). "Also keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins (sins of presuming); let them not rule over me: then I shall be blameless."

How often we presume to do his will. How often we strike out on our own to accomplish spreading the gospel or comforting the brethren. Why do we not recognize the Lord and what he specifically wants to accomplish in these things? Do we not realize that he has a specific time for a particular work? How often have we set out to free up time for "his service", all according to our own wisdom? Oh, to be simple in his presence! Oh, to be nothing, nothing, indeed! Let us pray for the understanding that we are clay to be molded to show forth his glory and not what we

perceive his glory to be. Let us consider an example from David's life, an example that echoes all of Psalm 19.

Consider what David said to the congregation of Israel in I Chronicles chapter thirteen, verses one through fourteen. The holy Ark had just been returned to Kirjathjearim by the Philistines on an ox cart. All of Israel could now rejoice for they presumed they could have the presence of God back in their midst. David consulted with the wisdom of men to bring back the glory of God to bless Israel once again. There was festivity and singing unto the Lord, much praise unto his Name. Even so, the Lord did not have his holy Name in this "glorying and work of God". Consider David's quote. "If it be of the Lord our God..." and again later. "How shall I bring back the ark of God home to me?" Here David shows forth his wisdom saying in his heart, "I will consult with the highest of the Lord's people, thereby having God's mind on the matter." Then he said, "How shall I bring back God's presence in my home?" He took no thought of the Lord's Law (which restores the soul), or the testimony of the Lord (which rejoices the heart), or the commandment of the Lord (which enlightens the eyes). These are the only things necessary to accomplish his will and have his presence amongst us. David sinned by presuming his way was equal to the way of God Almighty.

We need to understand thoroughly why the sin of presumption is the "Great transgression." As a result of man's wisdom, the ark started on its way back using the same means that the ungodly had brought it back. At least this time it was on a new cart! How great a work! Taking and improving on the ways of unbelievers, Uzza reached out his hand to steady the ark, and Uzza was dead. By man's wisdom in doing God's work, a soul once blessed by the Lord was now dead. Was not the intention of David and Uzza good? It most certainly was! It was commendable. Unfortunately, the means to carry out the work was man's. Is it not ironic (for lack of a sufficient word) that Uzza means "strength"? Whenever flesh seeks to steady the glory of God, the result is death. Who are we to even view the Glory of the Lord? Yet, we will certainly put forth our hand to make sure the work started by us will accomplish God's will. However, God will have nothing of flesh in his work. Only what comes forth as testimony from Him will he accept. Can there be any other source of glory?

After a few months, it would seem David had been made clean by God and his "judgments". Consider the following (especially verse two):

"And David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent. *Then David said, "None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him forever."* And David gathered all Israel together to Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the Lord unto his place which he had prepared for it." (1 Chron. 15:1-4).

Notice the difference in his focus. "None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister to him forever." His focus was now entirely on bringing glory unto God. No more of "me and my home," but Him and his precepts! Now, David could rejoice in his heart. His eyes were enlightened by fearing the Lord, and his soul had been restored by not acting upon his own wisdom. According to the Law, he had the ark brought to Jerusalem. He was now mindful of God and God alone. This is all our Father asks of us: to sit still and know that He is God. "Then the words of our mouth and the meditation of our hearts are acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer."

Let us always be mindful of God's glory, for our God is a consuming fire.

-- Andy Weeks

Questions to Our Readers

Periodically we will include questions such as might arise during your witness opportunities. We hope you will consider sending us your answers. Selected responses will be used in future HERALDs.

Is there a group called the "great company" or "great multitude" which receives a "secondary" reward for believing in Jesus?

If the New Testament says that Jesus gave his life a "ransom for all," is it correct to say that Jesus died for Adam?

Something To Consider:

What happens next? and to whom?

All who look forward to the Millennial kingdom of Jesus are specially subject to one failure. Wanting that kingdom so much, we may jump to conclusions about how close we are to its establishment.

Many brethren look to the regathering of the Jewish people to Israel as a substantial aid to faith. We might ask, what must yet occur in Egypt and Assyria (Iran/Iraq) to fulfill the words of Isaiah 19:23-25?

Wonderful Aids to Strengthen Faith

"Hearken to Me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father...For I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him." - Isaiah 51:1-2

Jew and Christian alike find it important to claim some relationship to Abraham. In their respective ages, patriarchal claims have been made on both sides.

Many *natural* descendants of Abraham stress that fact and have failed to distinguish between their outward state and their inward condition. These fail to recognize the point of the great Apostle Paul:

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise was not of men, but of God (Rom. 2:28,29).

Similarly, Christians must recognize the same distinction. The mark of the seed of Abraham is found in the words of both Jesus and the Apostle Paul. Jesus said to his contemporaries, "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham" (John 8:39). Their evil works and unbelief denied their claim. Had Abraham been present with them, they would have acted obediently, accepting Jesus as the One for whose day they had waited. Thus Paul writes, "...Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness ... So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham" (Gal. 3:6,9).

What Characterized True Faith?

That faith which acknowledges its dependence upon God characterizes true faith. It is a faith which promptly responds to the will of God without wavering. It is a faith which is ready to follow God -- trusting him fully even in the most trying circumstances. This seems the special intent of our theme text, addressed as it may well have been to all who desire the relationship of Abrahamic children. "Look unto Abraham your father," observe his obedient faith, note his long years of trial and triumph and see how "I called him, and blessed him, and increased him."

Abraham is the father of the faithful. Benefit can be derived, then, by observing how he was blessed and increased. Was there ever a greater trial of faith borne by any servant of God? Many severe tests of faith came to others. But God has asked of none others what he did of this man, who by faith and obedience so well deserved the name "the friend of God." Paul speaks of his testings in the fourth chapter of Romans. There he refers to three distinct features of Abraham's personality.

(1) Abraham believed in hope even against hope, so that he might become the father of many nations (Gal. 3:18).

(2) He did not consider it impossible to give birth to a son because of his advanced age (Gal. 3:19).

(3) He was convinced that God was able to accomplish that which God had promised (Gal. 3:21).

Abraham's was an assured confidence, even though the facts of human knowledge were against his realizing the promise of God. Abraham's was a faith that did not stagger at apparent impossibility. Why? Because his faith rested upon God's word -- his promise. What strong and fitting emphasis can be placed upon these words: "Abraham believed God."

Abraham Traveled an Unknown Path

What a wonderful faith was Abraham's! Perhaps we can appreciate it better if we consider some of the circumstances under which he demonstrated it. Abraham had no sacred Scriptures by which to be "...thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:17), such as those to which we have easy access. No record of God's integrity in keeping his promises to his faithful existed by which Abraham could take strength. We have the records of thousands of years of divine faithfulness. Abraham knew no "cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) to which he could refer for inspiration in times of faith's severest testing. Neither did he have a company of contemporary brethren -- kindred spirits -- who shared similar faith and hopes. We do, and we think little of our communion with them and the stimulation we receive by such contact. But Abraham would wait, alone, for a quarter century before the promised son arrived. What's more, a few years later he would be asked to slay that very son on a sacrificial altar in obedience to the command of the God who had miraculously given him that son.

All these things Abraham endured with nowhere to turn for comfort or help. He had no precedent to which he could cling. Looking at Abraham's age, at this point, we see a comparison with God. God also lived a "long time" [speaking in human terms which may not apply in the spirit realm] before there was a cross on which God would so abundantly manifest his love towards men. On the surety of the Cross, we have been provided a guarantee of the fulfillment of all of God's redemptive promises. At best, Abraham had a kernel upon which to lay his hopes. We have a great unfolding of promises. Yet, for all that we have that he lacked, his faith was singularly moving. What a lesson is left to man today! How faithful ought we to be if God has given us so much upon which to lay our hope.

The progressive plan of God provides "some better thing for us" in the privilege of the High Calling. These opportunities are much greater than those that were held out to Abraham. If it follows that "...unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required" (Luke 12:48), then it is important that we judge ourselves carefully in this question of faith. It is likely that we will be weighed by this rule. Is it possible that we shall be found wanting that true faith, the kind which Peter calls "much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire" (1 Peter 1:7)?

Consider that inspirational review of the heroes of faith found in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. The reference to Abraham is worthy of note.

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb. 11:8).

He became an exile from friends and went alone with God, leaving everything with God -- a pilgrim starting out for unknown parts with nothing but a vision of a distant inheritance (Heb. 11:13). In a distant day he visualized his seed multiplied, and a "city whose builder and maker is God," but the way to that city, the tests of faith and endurance to be experienced through many long years, Abraham did not comprehend.

God veiled his eyes from the coming trials until they were reached: each one in its order. How happy is the final record. All the tests were passed successfully. The pilgrim reached a splendid maturity, and his story is drawn to a close in these words, "Abraham gave up the Spirit, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full" (Gen. 25:8). What a record! He was already an old man when his experiences with God began. At seventy five and childless he began his journey into the unknown land. There he waited twenty five years for the promised son, until all possibility of a child to be born through the normal processes of nature must be abandoned. And Abraham believed God. Eventually Isaac was born. Other tests followed, leading in order to the supreme ordeal on Mt. Moriah.

Out of these experiences with God, there came at last the time of "ripe old age, and satisfied" consummation. The King James translation clouds the beauty of the expression by introducing two words not found in the text. The expression "a ripe old age, an old man, after a full life" is a repetition of thought. The preferred rendering separates the ideas into two thoughts. Moffatt gives this reading, "...dying in a ripe old age, an old man, after a full life." Fenton renders it this way, "a ripe old age, and satisfied. A life ending in ripeness and full of abundant blessing seems to be the thought. This is the record of the father of the faithful. And out of this message comes Isaiah's words to us, his children after faith: "Look unto Abraham your father," "...he whom I called out alone, and whom, because of his obedient faith, I blessed and increased." What a blessing to seek and fervently desire to obtain!

God Graciously Aids Faith

Much of Abraham's story will benefit believers today. By such a careful detail of his life, God must have intended that we emulate this spirit of faith and give evidence that we are indeed children of Abraham -- by faith. These lessons may not be overlooked, therefore, without great personal loss.

Ours, too, is a journey by faith. During its duration God veils our eyes from those trials awaiting and hides the events to come until they suit his purpose. Though God tests our faith by the experience, he will never forget his promise, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee..." (Isa. 43:2). This is always the way of God. His character is illustrated in the life of Abraham, and the story of his dealings with that faithful one.

Abraham did not have many aids to faith, but God gave him at least one. Had he not said to Abraham, "... Look now toward the heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, 'So shall thy seed be.'" (Gen. 15:5). These words are significant. They convey more than the thought of looking at the stars for the purpose of numbering them. The words, "... if thou be able..." suggest the impossibility of this task. It was beyond Abraham's power to count the myriad stars, but we are told by the psalmist that God "...tellethe the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names" (Ps. 147:4). The impossible to Abraham was a small task for God. The stars could therefore speak to Abraham not only of their numbers, but also of the omnipotent power in which he could trust absolutely. Abraham could know that nothing was too hard for God. The shining stars, moreover, became a constant reminder of God's immutable pledge. How often during his trials must this friend of God have looked heavenward in the night watches to reread that pledge.

Can we not wonder at the thoughts of his old age? He entered the last decade of his hundred year old life with no seed. Might he not have looked up at the tent of the heavens repeating the promise, "So shall thy seed be?" Or, as he journeyed to Moriah, the mount on which he expected to sacrifice his Isaac, did not those same stars speak to him as the very voice of God? But by his

faith he had learned to so trust God that he could count on God even to raise Isaac from the dead in order to fulfill a promise he could never forget or break!

Whether it was intended as significant or not we cannot tell, but the location of the sacrifice of Isaac seems apropos. As he neared the mount, Abraham was far from the water's edge where he could have counted the "sands of the seashore." But he was always close to the heavens and their display of glory. At such a time, Abraham could not rely upon the downward glance of his divine promise. No! Only an upward search towards the heavenly lights could sustain the faith of this man. Surely, when he "considered the heavens," he received strength from God to perform all that was required of him. The testimony in the heavens were an unquestionable anchor to hold fast his faith in the unseen God.

Will God perform less for those now called "children of Abraham"? Their walk is also by faith, progressing towards a greater inheritance -- greater even than that offered Abraham. Their's, too, is a way of corresponding tests. Because of their place in history, they enjoy advantages which the "father of the faithful" could not enjoy. The Scriptures offer precedents on which to strengthen a modern faith. A "cloud" of witnesses provide examples of how to live a life of faith, especially for those needing encouragement. How varied are the ways of God to encourage the present day believer. So fully has he spoken to us through his Word that we may well inquire, "What more can he say than to you he hath said?" What more indeed!

Favor for the Humble

Return again to the theme text.

"Hearken to Me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father ... For I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him."

The Lord here points us to an important lesson. In all of God's dealings with men one point is paramount, one well expressed by Paul in the letter to the Romans: "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy" (Rom. 9:15,16).

Everything comes from God. This is the lesson he would have taught Israel in the early days of their national history.

"The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because that ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deut. 7:7,8).

The greatest of all God's favors (excluding of course the sending of his Son to be our Ransom) are those which pertain to the calling of the church. The Apostle Paul reminds us that there is no room for boasting or self -- satisfaction on the part of any person invited to this calling.

"Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence" (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

What a profound reminder that our relationship with God is not because we are worthier than others. Our relationship with him is wholly by the grace and lovingkindness of God. This is the reason that the completed "bride" of Christ, the church, is everywhere in Scripture presented as a special manifestation of the love and perfect workmanship of God. "That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ" (Eph. 1:12).

This class is not called because of their value! Instead, by calling them, God shall confound the mighty by showing what he can do with little. To these the words of Peter apply,

"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter. 1:4).

God deals much the same with the Gospel Age believer as he did with Abraham: The life of today's believer is centered in the promises of God. What perfect consistency! Faith in God's operations and in his power to accomplish what he has promised is paramount. This principle is also seen in Jesus' life. Was it not written concerning him, "...who *for the joy that was set before him,*" endured to the end of his earthly life and work. He stood on the promises of God. All of the victorious saints, of all ages, have had to stand steadfastly upon the Rock of their Salvation in order to gain their triumph.

Remember, therefore, the rock and the pit from which divine love lifts all who believe in Christ Jesus. Recall the power by which God's purpose for his called out ones may be attained. How much the faith of Abraham will determine a person's success in trusting the promises of God! Cultivate that faith! Stagger not at seeming impossibility. Do not be discouraged by the lowliness of the "raw material" from which God has made you! Because God is

"...willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel 'so that they might '...have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Heb. 6:7).

Similarly, we hear more encouragement,

"Cast not away therefore, your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward" -- 'a full reward" -- 'If we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end'" (Heb. 6:17,18; Heb. 10:35; Heb. 3:6).

These are assurances which speak of an exceeding and eternal weight of glory which eyes have not seen, nor ears heard, but which God has brought within the range of faith's vision as realities yet to be fully achieved. We may, therefore, rejoice "with joy unspeakable and full of glory." All of these promises and encouragements to faithfulness are associated by the Word in our present life with "the good fight of faith" and with "enduring hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ." This is a conflict which is real and strenuous. But for the child of God it leads home and for the struggle

"The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace, and, When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?" (Psa. 29:11; Job 34:29).

We should become like Abraham "...strong in faith, giving glory to God."

Looking Toward the Stars of Promise

Is there a correspondence between Abraham and the believer in Christ? We think so. The Gospel call results in a separated life just like Abraham's. The believer shares in that pilgrim standing, with its tests and its magnetic visions of an "inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Like Abraham, the believer today is sustained and constrained by the immutable promises of God. Abraham could "strengthen himself in the Lord" by calling to mind his promises and looking at the stars so directly associated with his hopes. The Gospel Age believer, too, can scan heaven wherein we are "seated" and see it studded with stars of promise and assured hope, all of which are meant for our encouragement. Does not God say to today's believers "Look, and tell their number, for so shall I do for you"? It is impossible to count all the words of comfort, of love, of encouragement, of protection, or of final victory which he has spread before those who are sitting "together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." To number them would be impossible. But God does number them and knows every promise he has made. There cannot fail "ought of any word that he has spoken." All who live as did Abraham shall find the fulfillment of his promises. They are enabled to walk obediently in faith without staggering at the difficulties of the way because they count him as competent and faithful who promised.

What are the shining stars of promise to be found in the Word of God? Note just a few. "The Lord's portion is his people" (Deut. 32:9). "For the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation" (Ps. 132:13). And of that "habitation of God through the spirit," in condescending grace he says, "This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it" (vs. 14). Those are precious words to a waiting bride, who can respond: "I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me." He repeats his assurance afresh, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 31:3). "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16), and "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands" (Isa. 49:16). "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of my eye" (Zech. 2:8). "Thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth" (Deut. 14:2), "a chosen generation, a royal *priesthood*, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (I Peter 2:9), a special treasure, who "shall be mine, saith the Lord f hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels" (Mal. 3:17), jewels he will prize as "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (Eph. 1:18). What a constellation of precious expressions of his love are these illustrative passages from his Word! Who could fail to be strengthened by considering them!

Abraham completely exemplified the life of godliness. And how much like us does he ask, "Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" "And, lo, and horror of darkness fell upon him" (Gen. 15:8,12) in the midst of which, like a loving Father, God renewed again the certainty of the promise. Does it not happen similarly to us? When his face seems veiled by darkness and we cry out "all thy waves and billows are gone over me," God's silent witnesses remind us that "the stars of heaven are shining on, though these frail eyes are dimmed with tears." So we, "to his gracious promise flee."

Dark hours are intentional. Dark hours have their compensations! How true the words, "darkness shows us worlds of light we never saw by day." In the Christian experience, it occurs that some of the gems of the inspired record achieve the brilliance only when "clouds surround our lonely way." Does not a halo of glory shine into a man's experience when in the midst of some deep trial one understands the admonition,

My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he received (Heb. 12:5,6)

[We] rejoice in hope of the glory of God ... we glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation works out endurance; and endurance approval, and approval hope; and this hope is not put to shame (Rom. 5:3-5).

Therefore, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:12).

Look at yet another of the stars of promise found in our heavens. "Unto you it was graciously given on behalf of Christ, not only to believe into him, but also to suffer on his account" (Phil. 1:29), and then, "If we suffer with him we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim. 2:12). Gazing at the orbs which these promises encircle, can we do other than say, "If God but still my portion is, be such experience mine" (Lam. 3:24, author's translation) for "Thy judgments, Lord, are true and right, and brighter every day" (Ps. 19:9)? Then come what may, the language inspired in our grateful hearts will be, "Gladly will I toil and suffer, only let me walk with thee."

In this manner, we might go on exploring our heavenly estate. Endless groups of uplifting messages from our gracious Father could be found around which to gather. Like heavenly suns, they shine out to us with their encouragement. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son" to reveal that love to men. What a central sun that "little" Gospel is around which revolves so many of the promises of God. How many faith strengthening "stars" might we find? Like the literal astronomer who scans the heavens by night, but who must confess that his instrument is insufficient to the job, so we realize that with our present equipment (our body, mind, intellect), we are inadequately prepared to survey the entirety.

Paul saw the breadth, depth, and height of the "love of Christ" which surpassed knowledge. He understood that until that which is perfect is revealed and the revelation of God to man is complete that the fulfillment of our hopes would be realized only in his promise: "I will love him, and manifest myself to him." Why? Because the hymn said it first and best, "Search we may for many years, still some new, rich gem appears." The truth of these words applies equally to our search for the "excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord."

What more can he say than already he has said? He asks that we walk in the way of faith. He warns that we shall need faith, keeping our vision clear of that which is seen. and unveiling to our eyes that which is not seen. Surrounding these requirements he spreads out promises in his holy Word.

Rejoice in his purpose. Consider his great love which planned it all. Use God's gifts for strength and encouragement. Set your determination not to be counted among those who "draw back." Prove that gratitude and love surpass all objectives. Demonstrate through your life the blessings of faith now and the eternal inheritance soon to be received, reserved by God for Abraham's children of this age of faith. Thus may be yours the happy journey's end to which Abraham attained, "ripeness," "fullness," and "satisfaction" forever in the joys of divine approval.

-- J. J. Blackburn

As Unknown and Yet Well Known

Strangers here --
Not a link with earth unbroken,
Not a farewell to be spoken;
Waiting for the Lord to take them
To Himself, and like him make them.

Strangers here --
With their hearts upon a treasure
That has dimmed for them earth's pleasure,
Lamps well trimmed, and brightly burning,
Eyes forever upward turning.

Strangers here --
Earthly rank and riches losing,
Worldly ties and claims refusing.
On to Christ in glory passing,
All things there in him possessing.

Strangers here --
But in him their hearts are resting,
Faith looks up in days of testing,
Follows him with true allegiance,
Loves to walk in his obedience.

Well known there --
Oh, what joy for Christ to take them
To the Father, who will make them
Welcome in his mansions yonder,
Strangers here -- to be no longer.

-- Selected

Joined to Another

"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the Law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." - Romans 7:4

Scripture variously illustrates the relationship between the faithful church and her Lord. These illustrations are drawn from daily, earthly life and portray degrees of intimacy and confidence. Among the list are these:

- the shepherd and his sheep (John 10:1-16);
- the vine and its branches (John 15:1-8);
- the teacher and his pupils (Matt. 11:29, 30);
- the captain and his soldiers (Heb. 2:10);
- a man, with all his various parts;
- a high priest and associated underpriests.

Each illustrates specific lessons. None is able -- by the very limitations of illustrations -- to exactly represent the relationship in its fullness.

Our theme text presents us with another of these pictures: the relationship between a husband and a wife. Is there a closer, more intimate bond in all of human experience? The preceding verses may seem obscure, but when the Apostle says that you should be joined to another, even to him who has been raised from the dead, the thought is clear and precise.

What does "joined to" mean? The context provides the precise meaning. The Apostle can be referring only to the marriage bond:

"So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man" (Rom. 7:3).

The Husband's Law -- The Precedent

Paul uses a special argument in this context. He -- calls it the "law of the husband" (Rom. 7:2). By the terms of that law, a married woman is bound to her husband as long as that husband lives. The basis of this bond is the agreement made between the man and the woman and witnessed by the representatives of the law. Thus, there existed a lawful basis for their joint life. If the husband dies, then the woman is automatically released from her contract: both from the contract and from that part of the Law Covenant which validated their agreement in the first place. She was still subject to other statutes of the Law -- because of other responsibilities -- but the death of her husband releases her from the duties and obligations to him which the Law imposed upon her.

If the woman deserted her husband in favor of another man, she was liable under the Law. Paul said that she should be called an adulteress -- to which the Law agreed. The husband could pursue the matter with the courts of law and receive a just verdict. But once the husband died, all such obligations came to an end.

If she were now to be approached by a man to become his wife, she would not be considered an adulteress. Even though she was being "joined to" another man. Again the law of the husband becomes active to this woman. The same claims which she once owed to her first husband are now imposed upon her to her new husband.

Paul allows no promiscuity in the relations between men and women. In order for the woman to escape the penalty for immorality she must be "joined to" the man. The matrimonial vows were the key to this issue. There must be an agreement, under the terms of the Law.

Saintly Privilege

With this view of the words "joined to" the meaning of our theme text becomes clearer. We will paraphrase it, "Wherefore my brethren, ye were made dead to the law [exactly like the woman whose husband had died] through the body of Christ that you should be married to another -- to him who was raised from the dead." Weymouth, in his translation of this text, agrees with this thought, saying, "...that ye should be wedded to another..."

When are we to be married to him who was raised from the dead? Some suggest that these words apply to some time after the believer is resurrected from the dead. Then, we have New Testament assurance that we shall be like him and see him as he is. But we ask, does the context permit us to postdate our union with our Lord? Do not the words tell us that we should be joined to him here and now?

Paul clarifies this himself. He resorts to the human picture, saying that fruitage should result from this union. That is, there should be an "issue" which is to be regarded as the fruit of the marriage. There should be, as it were, children of the marriage brought forth as fruit unto God. Seeing that the "fruit" which Paul mentions pertains to our present life (as we shall show in later paragraphs) we can only understand this verse to mean that the spiritually minded saint of God is married to the Lord now.

Many will object, pointing to the discussion of symbolic marriage of the Lamb in the book of Revelation. All Bible students that we know agree that the events there described are future. But that is a picture, just like this found in the seventh chapter of Romans, which has its own lessons, setting, and environment. A picture can only illustrate certain aspects of the reality. Paul's argument here must be viewed for the lessons which it teaches: in its own place and in its proper time.

Others say that Paul spoke of the earthly church as a chaste virgin (2 Cor. 11:2), over whose virginity he exercised a godly jealousy. Is it not true that the virgin church is, at the present time, merely betrothed to Christ? And is this not a part of its earnest expectation; the waiting for the hour when she will be raised from the dead to be his bride?

Again it must be said that, like other pictures, this too is an illustration peculiar to itself. There are similarities between pictures, but they are not all identical. The church, the whole body, *will* constitute the Bride of Christ. But our verse is speaking of individuals. It is these that Paul describes as being married to Christ. The interpretation of Scripture must allow for the teaching

of various lessons which are harmonious. Thus we find that these pictures teach various lessons -- all of which are harmonious when viewed from the perspective of the being who gave them: God.

Bearing Fruit Unto God Marriage is a multifaceted relationship. One could consider the love between husband and wife. Or, one could look at the fruit of a marriage as though it were the result of the couple's union. But there is another relationship as well. The fruit of the marriage is a fruit, not only of husband and wife, but a fruit of the larger family: the tribe or clan.

A point of Paul's illustration in our theme text is this clan or tribal relationship. Every child added to the family is an addition to the clan. In those days when the well being of the family was dependent upon there being sufficient hands to tend to the feeding, clothing, and protection of the community, the addition of a child to a family was regarded as an addition to the community: the tribe. Similarly, Paul speaks of bearing fruit not only for ourselves, but for God. It is as though God was the patriarchal chief -- the Grand Sheik -- of the holy family. And therefore, every fruit brought forth for Christ and ourselves is fruit brought forth for God.

What fruit do we bear to God through our union with Christ? We consider the context again. "...Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound" (Rom. 6:1)? And to emphasize his own answer Paul says, "God forbid..." (Rom. 6:2). He then turns to three homely illustrations, all of which are easy to understand.

The Dead Man

A dead man cannot be enticed by sin. No allurement can entice a corpse to sin. There is no life, no animation, by which to respond to the temptation -- if it could be felt. The follower of Christ is united with Christ in the same way. We are united in death. Being dead -- dead to sin -- there is (or should be) nothing left in us which can respond to sin.

Even though the Christian may regard himself as being dead to sin he should regard himself as being alive to God -- as having shared in the resurrection of Christ to a new life. This is, of course, a pictorial illustration. We are counting things that are not as though they had happened. Jesus Christ has actually passed from death unto life. We have not. We are dwelling in the realm of sin. But because we are so much in harmony with him we accept his victory as though it were our own -- as a token of our own victory. Therefore, even though we dwell in a kingdom ruled by sin and death we agree not to allow sin to reign in our lives (our bodies) causing us to obey its commands. Sin must not be allowed to rule over us. Every temptation to sin must be ignored because of the covenant relationship which we have with him. We are to be dead to the things of this world -- the terrestrial -- and to be alive to the things of the spirit.

The Slave

Paul then turns to one of the forms of slavery in Israel for another illustration of our relationship. This is the master and the man who had fallen upon hard times and had sold himself into slavery. Such slaves were slaves only until the time of Jubilee. The price for their service could be used to redeem themselves from debt, and they worked off that price through service similar to the way in which people now lend and borrow money at interest.

Paul's illustration turns upon the point of the slave presenting himself either to sin or to God.

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or obedience unto righteousness (Rom. 7:16, cf. RSV or ASV).

Once having presented oneself to God as a bond servant, it is God that servant should obey because by presenting oneself in servitude he surrendered his own right to choose. As a result, he could not serve sin. To do so would be to disregard the master's command so that he could serve another master who had no rightful claim upon him.

The Marriage

The third point is that of our theme text: marriage. Here the same point is made. Shall we continue in sin? The two opposing masters are still the same: God and sin. Both of these "chiefs" require that their servant obey them.

For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now, we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter (Rom. 7:5-6).

There was a time when we were married to sin. Then we brought forth children unto death -- fruitage unto death -- because death was the "chief" of the clan. Our "fruits" were the works of unrighteousness, uncleanness, and iniquity (Rom. 6:19). These wicked works were like children born to an unhappy marriage.

Now, wedded to Christ, the fruits which we bring forth to God are righteous works which tend to sanctification and purity (Rom. 6:19-21). These works are like children born from our present relationship to Christ Jesus our Lord: as fruit unto God.

Note that Paul does not set Satan in opposition to God as the tribal Chief? Why? Was not Satan permitted to be the prince of this present evil world? Yes, he was (2 Cor. 4:4). But it was not Satan who made man subject to the reign of (and the law of) sin and death. No. Paul addresses this later in the Epistle to the Romans (Rom. 8:20,21). We are told that [the human] creation was not subjected to vanity by its own choice, but by the will of God. He subjected it and has left it in this subjection for these thousands of years. But he has not done so without cause. There was a hope attached with the subjection. By the same power God exercised in subjecting the creation, he will deliver it. His creatures will be given liberty. Yes, even in this groaning condition there is a law which is operating in men: the law of sin and death. That is a law which was imposed by God, not by Satan. The Almighty is still working all things after his own counsel. He has not altered his plans because of the present, temporary antagonism of the arch -- rebel against his authority.

The Result Of Our Contact

What happens if we too have been raised from the dead into this figurative "matrimonial" relationship with our Lord? Obviously, we cannot bear fruit without him. Nor can we perform righteous works without him. And only the works of righteousness will result in holiness and sanctification, because they are the influence of his personality in our lives.

No woman can bear a child without the contribution of a man. No Christian can bring forth fruit to God by their own desire or concentration. Christ Jesus is the first essential for fruitage. When we spend time in close, intimate, holy communion fruit can result. But this fruit is not limited to the time we spend in fellowship with other Christians. It is more to be found originating from the

private prayer life. We need time to leave the throbbing pace of the day and to be alone with him; to learn how the relationship between the two of us works and to learn to appreciate it.

But what does this obvious array of physical and spiritual facts mean? Have we considered what our secret moments with the Beloved mean to our peace and contentment? Consider the natural woman again. She knows that she has the love, care, and trust of her wedded mate and can be happy anywhere. Moreover, she can be happy at all times: the good and the bad. She can carry her cares to her husband and share them; receiving his strength and encouragement in exchange. He supplies her needs just as the Christian's needs are to be supplied by Christ. In Christ, the fullness of this personal intimacy is carried to the infinite degree.

So much for our side of the situation. But what of Christ? What does our communion mean to him? Have we considered that he wants something of us? Have we considered the long nights which he spent in prayer? Do we dare think that Jesus' words only pleased himself? What of God? Was he not pleased by the communion with his true son? And if there were pleasures for the Father in listening to the sinless lips of his son, is it impossible to imagine that the risen One could find delight in our approach to him? Does he not care about our love for him? Could his exalted condition have so filled him that he forgets about us for whom he died? Surely not!

Even in the animal world this is not true. Many animals instinctively demonstrate their affection. We have heard of sheep that lay their heads against their shepherd's knee to show their affection. Can there be no kindred affection drawn from the heart of the shepherd by this act of open love? If it be so in the lowliest of human conditions, how much greater ought it to be between the great Shepherd and his true sheep?

Have we considered the pain which we might cause our Beloved? If we know his expectations and of the respect which he rightly deserves, do we not hurt him by remaining cold and indifferent to him? We may be so busy that we have no time for him. Either in action or in public or in the intimacy of our private moments. Let us not disappoint him whom we love by our being so busy as not to tell him we love him, by sharing our time and our thoughts and our confidence with him.

Service Or Devotion -- Which?

How do we keep ourselves in the proper relationship with Jesus? This is a very personal question. What is the nature of the response which the Heavenly Bridegroom has a right to expect from us? What are we trying to achieve, or become?

Can we, by looking at the human family, say that he desires us to work for him and that this attitude is the prime objective of our Christian life? We stress the point that the work that we speak of is work done for him. Work done for ourselves does not count. And we ask again, Is it our "work" which he desires or is there something else, of which our work is merely an indicator? What does a man long for in his relationship with a wife? Does a man merely want a wife as a servant: to care for the household chores, to rear children as mere slaves to his will, or does he look for something more? There is a sweet fellowship to be found between man and woman; the wedded life offers joy and a sanctity found in no other. But what joy or fellowship would man find if woman was always engaged with chores? Such an illustration is not too common nor too human to be applied to our heavenly Bridegroom. There is nothing which can equal the pure relationship of two hearts linked together by wedded love.

We are looking, then, for something beyond the service of Christian hands. Yes, the master could command the ravens of the sky or the wind or even the rocks of the earth to do his bidding. Servants he does not need. But from none of these could come the satisfaction which his heart of love could expect. Only another heart, linked with his own in harmony and that intimate matrimonial relationship, could provide that flow of spiritual affection which is so aptly illustrated in human marriage.

Having established this point, we ask another question. Does the affectionate wife ever lose sight of the service side of her relationship? Does she ever think of all the work that must be done to keep the household running smoothly? Indeed she does, and much time at that, and energy and strength, too. There is more than a slave's response involved here. She finds sweetness and satisfaction in seeing to the things needful for her family and her husband. The Christian is like such a woman. A heart which is warm toward the Lord will bring hands and feet that are swift to serve at any moment and in any way.

If our witnessing to the mercy of God or our testimony to kingdom promises become the primary objective of our life, we need to reevaluate our motives. Our goal must be to bear fruit unto God. We cannot bear fruit to him if we are working for ourselves. Intimacy with the Lord is imperative.

Natural fruit has two components: it has size and shape; it has flavor and mellowness. Service also has two components. There is size and shape as demonstrated by how we serve: What is it that we do. There is also flavor and mellowness: this arises only from the heart that dwells with God, which seeks to please and honor him. When both components are combined they result in holiness and sanctification, and anything which is done becomes an act of testifying to the grace of God even if it be nothing more than patient endurance upon a secluded bed of sickness.

Our Attitude

What should our attitude be? Should we labor with our hands over some work while our mind is grumbling, "It is for him?" or should it be the fingers which eagerly search the wallet for the very last cent we possess, saying "It is for her." Here is the basis of the matter -- the inner tie to the outward act -- faith working by love. That is the right relationship between hand and heart. This relationship makes Mary and Martha one!

What we give and what we receive from this marriage picture are the same. Eager thoughtfulness and an intense longing to please, guided into action by the influence of God's spirit upon our heart brings forth fruit to God. Such motivation and such compassion will bring forth fruit because we will never hesitate to labor for the One whom we love. Neither shall we make the mistake of thinking too much of our work instead of him whom we love. It is not, after all, what we do for him, but what he has already done for us. And it is only he, too, who can induce in us, provoke us (just as the human husband provides a human seed) in those quiet moments spent aside with him with those spiritual seeds of thought which will result in fruit unto God.

-- T. Holmes

Meditating Upon Jesus

Should one spend time rereading the Gospels when there is much to be gained by intensive study of prophecies, doctrines, or chronology? This seldom asked question should perhaps be asked more openly, more often. As long as it is unasked we are free to indulge our natural opinions.

Who would say that it is unprofitable to study any part of the Bible? Such study is beneficial.

Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work (2 Tim. 3: 16, 17, ASV).

Yet, in the battle for priority over our time, there are many decisions to be made. Every time we open the Word of God we ask again: What will I study?

"Looking Unto Jesus"

To meditate on the recorded interactions of our Lord Jesus Christ with those who were his contemporaries is to gaze upon the object of God's transforming work in us.

"...that we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error; but speaking truth in love, may grow up in all things into him, who is the head, even Christ; whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love: (Eph. 4:14-16, ASV).

By meditating upon Christ Jesus and the recorded incidents of his life, we learn several lessons. We intentionally use the word "meditate." Much of the benefit is to be gained by pondering the "what, when, how, and why" of Jesus' life and teachings.

What can we learn through the study of his life?

Our Beloved

First, there must be some reason that we should want to know more about him! (c.f., John 17:3)

"The spirit itself beareth with our spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint -- heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him" (Rom. 8:16,17).

Our future life shall be shared with the Lord Jesus Christ. This alone should be sufficient reason for his life to spark curiosity in our minds. Our inheritance depends upon suffering with him. We must know how he suffered if we are to suffer with him. We might ignorantly suffer like him, because of the same causes, or from the same kinds of people. But we cannot suffer with him without knowing it: "...*he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it*" (Matt. 10:39, ASV).

Secondly, we should want to know more about him because we have been spiritually betrothed to Christ. Paul felt that he was the spiritual father of the Corinthian church. In that position he writes

to those believers, and thence to all who appreciate the upward calling: "For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2, ASV).

How does a betrothed young woman behave? There is reason for the stereotypical "giddy young woman" so often pictured by men in stories about engaged young women. I do not say that we are to behave foolishly, but perhaps there is a spiritual counterpart to such natural giddiness. Why is it that the young fiancée appears to others to be giddy? Is it not because she is completely caught up by the arrangements for the wedding and by the handsomeness of her beau? Indeed, a woman in love seems to find nothing more worthy of words than her beloved -- until others have heard so much about him that they would rather not hear anything more about him at all. His loveliness so captures her heart that her chiefest joy is to consider him. Is not this like the relationship between Christ and his Church -- and one worthy of emulation?

Does the fiancée need to be told to tell others about her beloved?

Should believers need to be told to tell others about Christ? Again, the answer should be no. If it is not, in your own life, could it be because you do not yet know enough about him? Could it be that your lack of interest in sharing his beauty with others is that you have not yet glimpsed him in all his surpassing loveliness? If this is so, how else can you get to know him who died for you than by meditating upon him, personally?

Turning to what we learn by meditating upon Jesus we find these several factors.

We learn About Jesus' Active Care

He was moved by the needs and weaknesses of those surrounding him. In the Lord Jesus Christ we see a love that acts, rather than waiting to be acted upon. Here is a characteristic worthy of imitation.

The love of Lord Jesus Christ produced activity. He went about habitually doing good. He was not partial in doing good; he blessed Jew, Samaritan and Roman alike; he blessed men and women; the sick, the lame, the blind, as well as those whose infirmities were the result of their own actions alike were blessed. What a blessing and example that should be for us! Have you learned to habitually do good to all you meet? Whether speaking a word in season, opening a door, or contributing to a food kitchen: there is no good work which should be beyond our care.

The Lord Jesus Christ cared about those to whom he ministered. His message was always fitted to the ears of those who listened. To the people at large, he spoke most often of encouragement -- they were a people heavily laden with burdens, and they needed to know his Good News. With the disciples, he pursued deeper lessons, lessons that required more stringent obedience from them than from the people -- he was their mentor as well as their savior. He taught them how to teach others. With those who presumed to teach others, the Pharisees, he spoke directly, with righteous judgment upon the errors with which they duped and cheated the people. He did not criticize the people with a message that should have been delivered to the Pharisees. Nor does he suffice with the milk of the word when he speaks to those who afterwards would be expected to establish groups of believers in his name. He always taught a message fitted to the hearer.

Brethren, dear brethren, search the Gospels carefully. You will nowhere find a place where he begins at Genesis and proceeding on through the Bible to Revelation tells some woe -- begotten listener everything that God is doing from beginning to the end. No, instead he considers the

hearers. He tells them what they most need to hear: in one case he speaks about the kingdom; in another he speaks about who had sinned in a certain instance; once he makes wine from water and in another *instance* it is water that he walks upon to bring comfort to his own.

Never do we find Jesus teaching just to show off. Never mind that, this has often been the case among preachers and elders. Look to him, and not to human examples. Never once does pride show through his message as if to put false teachers to shame by his superior knowledge. His words were always seasoned with salt, well -- chosen to encourage and to develop those who heard him. He did not merely display what he knew of God. He taught people about God. And in learning, they entered into life everlasting!

We Learn The Methodology of Salvation

How was it that Jesus brought men first to faith in him and, secondly, to dedication to the upward calling? What means did he use? How did he react when listeners asked foolish questions? What did he say when his message exceeded their ability to understand?

By meditating upon his style and his mannerisms we learn the tools that we too are entrusted with for the pursuit of the Gospel commission. Like apprentices, we are committed by our Lord to a period of "learning while doing." He oversees us, but do not assume that all we need do is show up for work -- in a spiritual sense. Just as apprentices are often required to take classes to teach them about the legal requirements of their trade or about the newest techniques, so believers find that they have coursework as well as practical lessons. The spiritual "coursework" is largely contained in the Gospels. There our chief trainer and exemplar teaches us how to engage in our life's new vocation: to be fishers of men.

What must we learn? First of all, our warfare is not carnal. Whatever the temptation, we must at all costs avoid resorting to tools the Adversary would approve. This is one thing we find in Jesus' life. If the building of our Temple is to be pleasing to our heavenly "inspector," our entire construction must be according to his codes of conduct.

Jesus shows us how to use the Father's tools and when. We have many tools to use in bringing others to him and in encouraging them on to sanctification and the upward calling. We must gain skill in their use so that we choose the proper tool for the proper circumstance. Physical tools can be used for differing purposes. It is the same in our spiritual life. There is the spiritual equivalent of rough framing to be done as well as finish work. There are also tasks which must be done by other workmen: the plumber doesn't run electrical wires and we find the same to be true spiritually. One sows and another reaps. Sometimes Jesus sends us to reap what other men have sowed; other times the order is reversed. It is important that we learn from him what, when, and how to do.

We Learn The Weaknesses and Characteristics of Archetypal Man

That sounds like a mouthful but it is a very simple thing. By thinking about what Jesus said to whom, we learn both about ourselves and about mankind in general. Sometimes we find in the Gospel stories glimpses into our own specific character and weaknesses. Other times, we learn about tendencies of mankind.

If we have seen something of ourself in Jesus' stories, we learn about our own impediments to spiritual understanding and what Jesus can do to help overcome for us. *I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me*" (Phil. 4:13, ASV). We all have impediments. God brings them to our

attention so that, knowing how we fail, we may submit to his will. He does not show us our failures to embarrass us, but that we might grow up into our likeness to his son.

We also observe our own excuses for failure or neglect -- in the lives of those with whom Jesus dealt. From Eden, when Adam's first words on being accused of sinning were "...the woman thou gavest me," men have avoided the weight of God's judgment. Jesus shows us that God's spirit is come into this world (and into us) to reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (John 16:8). If all of those works are works of reproof, we need to understand that there is a process involved in what God is doing. He is transforming us, and those we contact, from one state to a better state: from sin to righteousness -- through Jesus' blood.

We learn about his intervening care which will not suffer us to avoid his instruction. Do you always listen to God's instructions? Have you never known a commandment of his that you insisted upon ignoring? One lesson serious meditation upon Jesus' relationships produces is that he will insist that we learn his lessons. He does not allow us to avoid them. We may be like the rich young ruler who left his conversation with the Master "exceeding sorrowful," or like the Samaritan woman, who having been told about her sins, ran into town so as to bring her neighbors to hear Messiah. If God is dealing with us through his son Jesus Christ, we too must deal with that sin which we choose to ignore.

We Learn the Morality Required Of All Who Enter Into the Kingdom of God

Those who heard the Master teach were struck by the authority of his words. He did not quibble. He did not teach in double -- talk so that lawyers needed to analyze what he said. No. He spoke plainly to the point, about absolute moral values which God demands of his children. We too must enter into such a state of absolute morality; even though we find that we will not be the ones to attain it. Christ Jesus does all that needs doing in us. And we can never accomplish what needs to be done. Only in him can we please God. *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me..."* (Gal. 2:20, ASV).

We learn that the kingdom of heaven is within us; God expects us to live under his sovereignty now -- not just in the kingdom. We learn that we are to enlighten those we contact, as he did.

Brethren, spend time with Jesus alone so that his glory might fill your heart and so that you might grow up *"...unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"* (Eph. 4:13, ASV).

-- Peter J Pazucha

The divine power or holy Spirit of God is not only exerted in creating, but also in upholding, directing and controlling all things which he has created, whether animate or inanimate.

Truth gains more even by the errors of one who, with due study and preparation, thinks for himself, than by the true opinions of those who only hold them because they do not suffer themselves to think. -- J. S. Mills

It is not necessary to be always audibly speaking to God in prayer, or always to be hearing from God by the ministry of his Word to have communion with him. There is an inarticulate fellowship more sweet than words. The little child can sit all day long beside its busy mother, and although few words are spoken on either side, both being busy, the one in his absorbing play, the other in her engrossing work, yet both are in perfect fellowship. The child knows that mother is there, mother knows that the child is all right.

-- Bible Study Monthly

The overshadowing and oversight of a surrendered human life by the Almighty God is one of the most amazing things in all creation. It is the latest phase of creation -- for therein the

Omnipotent Architect of the Universe is engaged upon the absolute masterpiece of all his varied work.

-- Bible Study Monthly

Entered Into Rest

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