

I KNOW

WHOM I HAVE BELIEVED

BY JONATHAN

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I KNOW WHOM I HAVE BELIEVED

by Jonathan

I. THE COMING FLOOD

WHEN THE ENEMY SHALL COME IN

“So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him. And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD. As for me, this *is* my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that *is* upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever” (Isaiah 59:19~21).

“O thou afflicted, tossed with temptest, *and* not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones. And all thy children *shall be* taught of the LORD; and great *shall be* the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee. Behold, they shall surely gather together, *but* not by me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake. Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue *that* shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt

condemn. This *is* the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness *is of me, saith the LORD*" (Isaiah 54:11-17).

There is a scriptural pattern for overcoming victory God desires for each one of us. However, this comes not without trials and afflictions, sorrow and pain. When a man or woman is determined to follow closely in the ways of God and walk in His Spirit, the forces of darkness will no doubt rise with great fury against that individual. Moreover, I believe that there is a crushing and humiliating process that accompanies that man or woman who desires to do the will of God- and oftentimes, He allows the adversary to prove and try His chosen vessels (read Philippians 1:29, 2 Timothy 3:12 and Romans 5:3). In terms of the Christian experience, it is extremely difficult to understand why a loving and faith-honoring Heavenly Father would allow His children to be overwhelmed by constant difficulties and turmoil. Actually, I suspect that if we are free from all afflictions and sufferings, then we would not seek the Lord as we ought to- "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word" (Psalm 119:67). Remember though, God's dealings with us is never meant to be destructive or faith-undermining. Rather, it is designed to bring us to a place of contrition and total dependency on Him.

II. A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

A BROKEN HEART AND A CONTRITE SPIRIT

"But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him *to be* captain over his people, because thou hast not kept *that* which the LORD commanded thee" (1 Samuel 13:14).

“The LORD *is* nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many *are* the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all” (Psalm 34:18-19).

“The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:17).

“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isaiah 57:15).

“For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isaiah 66:2).

“But he knoweth the way that I take: *when* he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

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I think I can say that there has never been a greater obsession in wanting to have the fear of the Lord in my heart and spirit than I do today. But on the other hand, as the knife of the Holy Spirit does His work of surgery, I have to honestly confess and cry out, “I am so frail, so undone, so incline to sin. How can I ever be approved as a workman of God?”

Even with the earnest desire to live for Him, there are moments when we feel the emptiness of the inner man. The touch of God appears to dissipate even though we are hungry in seeking His face. The heavens are as brass and there seems no breakthrough in prayer. In the darkest hour, we may even be tempted to cry like Job, saying in effect, “If I had called, and he had answered me; *yet* would I not believe that he had hearkened unto my voice. For he breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without cause” (Job 9:16-17).

Have we experienced, in some measure, the furnace of Job? Or do such words of despair and unbelief, mouthed by what may be considered an upright man, rudely shocking and unthinkable?

You see, I believe God allowed Satan to test Job for a season as he became convinced of his own goodness. Likewise, this Biblical account serves to remind us that on our own efforts, we have no righteousness whatsoever. It is only through the blood of His precious Son, Jesus, that the mighty gulf that separates Him and us is bridged and we enter into a covenant relationship with God. Our indebtedness to Him should show us what we really are, especially with all the frailties that are ever before us. We Christians must realize that the only way we are going to make it in times of distress is by keeping our eyes on Christ Jesus, “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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (Hebrews 12:2~4). When we choose to focus instead on our good works as the basis in pleading with God for our deliverance, we go wrong. The true test of our attitude and spirit is actually during times of “pressure”. Anyone can respond victoriously to favourable circumstances; but it is when we have an absolute trust in God during adverse situations that our testimony is strongest and most effective to the glory of God.

DEVOTION OUT OF DUTY, FEAR OR LOVE?

“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:8~9).

“Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and *let* him *be* your fear, and *let* him *be* your dread” (Isaiah 8:13).

“Hear the word of the LORD, ye that tremble at his word... ” (Isaiah 66:5).

“ ...to this *man* will I look, *even* to *him that is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isaiah 66:2).

“ ...How dreadful *is* this place! this *is* none other but the house of God, and this *is* the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:17).

“THE LORD reigneth; let the people tremble... Let them praise thy great and terrible name; *for it is* holy” (Psalm 99:1,3).

“Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear: but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Timothy 1:6-8).

If it is ever possible to understand our true position with respect to God, there is perhaps, no more pertinent question than this, “What is the underlying motivation that causes us to serve Him?” We must allow such question to arrest our attention, or else our service unto God would amount to a sheer waste of effort and time. The possibility of every one of us to serve God in a manner that is less than acceptable unto Him is real. Unless we are really in a state of obedience, serving God is an outright hypocrisy and a dreadful mockery!

In far too many religious assemblies, there is a vast amount of demonstration in the flesh. Week after week, formality and stereotyped ways of exercising religious duties take precedence over the submission of hearts to the supremacy of the Holy Spirit. And it is just isn’t enough to experience the acts and works of the Holy Spirit in the realm of miracles, we must also learn the ways of the Holy Spirit to where we

move in obedience unto God at His slightest urging! Be reminded of what God said of Israel, “Forty years long was I grieved with *this* generation, and said, It *is* a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways” (Psalm 95:10).

Surely, we would be inclined to think that after forty long years of witnessing miraculous deliverances that they would understand God’s principles of leading, but unfortunately, this was not the case with Israel. Hence, it is evident that heartless profession of worship leads to tragic spiritual consequences and may the Lord deliver us from such! All mere obligations in the Christian life, be it in the area of prayer, worship or giving, are only going to rob us of the true spirit of devotion. Do not misunderstand here. There is a rightful place for Christian commitment, duty, responsibility and stewardship. But what we are talking about in this context is the exercise of mere religious duties that is insincere. For example, if we give to support the work of God because we feel it is our duty to give, then we really lose the whole meaning and purpose of giving. Beloved, let us beware of serving God out of mere duty or impure motives, reminding ourselves that we cannot earn brownie points for any spiritual accomplishments. We forever stand indebted to God, without any natural merit of our own whatsoever. Yet as an expression of gratitude and thanksgiving, we are encouraged to serve Him out of love and joy, and not regard it as a task for which we must not omit to perform.

There is one essence of worship and service that I cannot put out of mind and it is the holiness of God. The mighty Word of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, brings conviction that God visits iniquity and judgment. The fear of the Word of God must be present if I am serious in bearing much fruit for the Master (The “fear” in this context is not the crippling and tormenting kind of fear, but it is the healthy and reverential kind of fear). Nevertheless, the fear of the Lord and His

Word involves a terrible responsibility in convicting me that if I am to worship Him, I must worship Him in the splendor of His holiness.

THE CALL OF GOD AND THE SNARE OF SATAN

In my zeal to preach to you the holiness of God, I am concerned that some of you are experiencing a subtle detachment in your walk with Him. Though you acknowledge that God is holy, you are not partaking the divine nature of your Heavenly Father in the fullest measure (read 2 Peter Chapter 1). You are not really where you should be in Christ Jesus. There are areas in your life you feel you've failed God miserably. You are overwhelmed with guilt and condemnation. Possibly, you are even reaching a point of spiritual crisis and desperation. If you are one of such, let me say that God still wants to show you kindness. Though the Holy Spirit brings solemn conviction, He does not charge you with condemnation. And even though the anger of the Lord is hot against all unrighteousness, He will extend His lovingkindness to you as you repent and call upon His name.

Just as Jesus was “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Hebrews 4:15), the Holy Spirit is beginning to move this unworthy brother to a greater capacity of compassion for those who are hurting as a result of the harassment of the enemy. Yes, the enemy has come in like a flood in full force in the church and is ever devising to accuse the brethren at the slightest opportunity. If we are not vigilant, then his schemes will bring about the undermining and even destruction of our faith in God. In this violent spiritual warfare, we need to recognize that the devil has already have the children of darkness under his captive but as for the people of God, this is where he zero in and have his concentrated efforts on. Do you understand the import of this?

One of the greatest discouragement and dilemma all of us wrestle with almost constantly (which actually, is a lie from the pits of hell) is when

the enemy comes and subtly suggests, in essence, “In spite of your commitment and sacrifices to Jesus Christ, you are not making any significant spiritual progress”. Put it in another way, he’ll remind you of some past sins and failures and say, “You’ve desired so much to follow the ways of God, yet it has transformed you so little”. He may further add, “Look! Don’t you see that you’re still too full of self and are vulnerable to sin? You are a hypocrite! You are merely paying lips service!” Can you identify with these variations of the enemy’s lie?

Yet beloved, we need not be caught unawares when the enemy lays his trap on us, for “the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). You see, when the enemy seeks to destroy our faith in God, his foremost approach of attack will be on our minds. Instead of taking God at His Word, he tempts us to rationalize. Just as “the serpent said unto the woman (Eve), Ye shall not surely die” (Genesis 3:4), the adversary is still in the business of taking God’s Word out of context and plant them in our minds. And any departure from the Word of God (in the proper and rightful context) is opening the door to doubt and unbelief, thus undermining our faith in God.

Because many believers have become the targets of the onslaught of the enemy and have been defeated in warfare, the lovingkindness of the Lord must be proclaimed to these precious children of God once again. I’ve sensed a need to be broken down by the Lord so that I can become a vessel of the compassionate love of the Master. You will be amazed at how much the Bible says about the lovingkindness of the Lord and it is one aspect of His character that I understand very little of. In many instances, unworthy and frail as I am, I have stood up for the holiness and righteousness of God and I know I have His approval because

through His Word, I am burdened and concerned that “wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in therewith: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). His paths are always straight and there is no flexibility or negotiation in respect to obedience and submission to the sovereign rule of God. But as we experience more intensifying spiritual confrontations the longer we live for God, we can identify with the danger of warring in the flesh. Weariness overwhelms us and the possibility of spiritual relaxation becomes such a temptation. But in these perilous times, yielding to this rationalization can only prove to be fatal. There can be no relaxing in this final hour. The admonition to “be sober, be vigilant...” (1 Peter 5:8) can never be more urgent and pertinent. I pray that you will allow the Holy Spirit to impress you to submit to God’s call of awakening. But in places where you’ve failed Him and grieved the Holy Spirit, do not allow the devil to suggest that the Lord is no longer with you. Once you have determined to forsake all unrighteousness in His strength, you are to actively resist all the memories of past sins through the blood of Jesus Christ. Trust and abide in the lovingkindness of God and then press on in the spirit of His glory and power. Begin to prevail in prayer and lay hold of the exceeding great and precious promises He has made available to you. Take God at His Word and see that He is your victory in every circumstance. Even if you are in the midst of trials, He will bring you through. The warfare will be intense at the present time but the Lord is greater than all your tribulations. He is raising an army of overcomers and there is no retreat for these mighty warriors! Hallelujah!

Consequently, I believe that in our devotion, service and worship of God, we must be deeply motivated and moved- by the fear of His utter holiness as well as His infinite love for us. Feed on the truths of Psalm 103:1-11 in the inner man and allow the Holy Spirit to speak, saying,

“BLESS the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, *bless* his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s. The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep *his anger* for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, *so* great is his mercy toward them that fear him”.

III. THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

GETHSEMANE: A PLACE OF DECISION

“Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Geth-sem’-a-ne, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zeb’-e-dee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou *wilt*. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this

cup may not pass away from me, except that I drink it, thy will be done" (Matthew 26:36-42).

If you are contend with following the Lord at a distance, then this message on Gethsemane is not meant for you. But if you have a burning desire to become a true man or woman of God, a word of caution is needed still. Because to become a bondslave of Christ, you must be prepared and be willing to be tried and tested. To get a glimpse into the reality of the existence of the spirit world, we must study what happened to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. In fact, Scripture distinctly records that Christ's agony was so intense that "he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44).

Jesus spent His entire ministry in obedience to the will of the Father. There was no question as to His life's mission in going to the cross of Calvary. Yet we can *feel* the pathos in His words as He turns to His disciples and says, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" (Matthew 26:40). This was the moment when He recognized that even His closest acquaintances on earth could not enter into the very place and position where He was to be served the cup of pain. Even at this point, Jesus could have turned His back on His life's mission. But as He wrestled in prayer, He cried, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except that I drink it, thy will be done" (Matthew 26:42). I believe that far worse than the physical pain that He was to experience was the realization that He was going to break the fellowship with the Heavenly Father as the sin-bearer of the world- "For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Do you understand the import of this?

Beloved, this painful episode of Christ's experience in the Garden of Gethsemane can be ours, spiritually speaking, as we set our hearts in

determining the will of God in our lives. For some of us, it may come in the form of misunderstanding and rejection by our friends and family members. Yet, for others, it is to feel the forces of the enemy opposing every godly move and intentions.

On occasions, God may require us to set aside specific periods of time, away from the demands of ministry, into the “wilderness” to be shut in with Him. Just as Jesus “was led by the Spirit into the wilderness... tempted of the devil” (Luke 4:1-2), the foundation of any spiritual ministry must be birthed of the Lord, by His Spirit. What about you? Do you want the hand of God in your life? Then you will have to experience the little “Gethsemanes” God has in store for you. You will be served cups of pain but with “the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:7).

Even as Gethsemane was probably the most spiritually-agonizing moment in the life of Christ, our spiritual Gethsemanes, if there be, will also prove to be places of decision for us. It will be a time of agony and wrestling with God, when the spirit of prayer descends on us. It will be a time “of whom I (we) travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you (us)” (Galatians 4:19).

CALVARY: A PLACE OF SACRIFICE

“I BESEECH you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which* is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1)

“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Romans 6:6).

“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

“For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you” (2 Corinthians 13:4).

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

“And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Galatians 5:24).

“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14).

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Through our faith in Christ and His accomplished work on the cross, we receive the full assurance of salvation and redemption. There is nothing we can add to lay claim on God for it is “by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Hence, our relationship with Him stands on the foundation that Christ is the sacrificial Lamb of God, and He has purchased our redemption with His precious shed blood.

Because of the supremacy of the blood and sacrifice of Christ, “who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God... ” (Hebrews 9:14), we do not have to offer any lamb for the burnt offering or to have our physical bodies crucified on the cross. Yet there are individuals who take Luke 9:23 where it reads, “ ...If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” to mean carrying literal wooden crosses behind their backs. Of course, we are not in the position to offer words of condemnation for these people (and neither should we commend or recommend their course of actions), but whenever the Word speaks of us being “crucified

with Christ”, it generally implies that we are to present our bodies “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1), and not ritualistic observances.

When we acknowledge our great need of God, He becomes our provision and our refuge. When we surrender our wills, our entire beings, there is victory. Just as the Lord told Paul, He is saying this to us, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness... ” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Our response should then follow, “...Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9~10).

You see, true discipleship involves the great responsibility of bringing every aspect of our very being, whether in living or in dying, to the glory of God. To be a living sacrifice, we need to be willing to go the second mile. Many times, it means that we have to sacrifice even the legitimate things. What do we mean? For example, there are individuals, who instead of going on a holiday trip during their annual leave, choose rather to serve on a short-term missions trip. Even though they had to sacrifice the creature comforts on such a trip, their testimonials would no doubt be memorials reaching the very throne of God. True, there is a cost of commitment and a price to pay, but there is also a certain unmistakable joy and satisfaction in sacrifice.

And while God does bless His people abundantly, let us not forget the theology and doctrine of suffering- “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Philippians 1:29).

For some of you, God has dealt with you concerning the giving of your time and talents. There were areas, in terms of ambition, career, relationships and other pursuits that were standing in your way,

preventing you from seeking “ye the kingdom of God... ” (Luke 12:31). But God was gracious and patient with you. He revealed to you that “a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15), but “treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth” (Luke 12:33). As you started in obedience and in the service of God with your whole heart, you now have an all-consuming desire to do His will. Your lips, in agreement with your heart, will now cry like the Master, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and *then* cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours” (John 4:34-38). As Christians, God has called us not as loafers, but as labourers in His harvest field. He desires for us to be active and productive participants in His work. But before He can bring us to the place of sacrifice wherein we live crucified lives, we will have to experience our Gethsemanes. Nevertheless, we cannot outdo Christ, we can and must only look to Christ, “the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

IV. THE TRUE IMPORT OF FAITH

FOUNDATION FAITH

“NOW faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report” (Hebrews 11:1~2).

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh” (Hebrews 11:4).

“By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:24~25).

“But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

“Now the just shall live by faith: but if *any man* draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him” (Hebrews 10:38).

“Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens” (Hebrews 11:33~34).

Over the past few years, judging from the voluminous books that have been published by the various Christian communities, there has been much emphasis on the subject of faith. Some of these books have been tremendously helpful to the church, yet others are nothing more than little formulas that distract our perception of the true import of faith. I feel that now it’s time that we return to that which is *old-* and that which has withstood the test of time- and the foundation is on the

infallible Word of God. What do we mean? You see, if asked what faith actually is, I suspect that many Christians would focus on the *tangible* acts or “things” (such as miracles, healings and answers to prayer) God had done~ and certainly that enters into it. Others are running from one meeting after another~ to see men perform miracles~ and while some are true to God’s Word, the rest are nothing more than spiritual harlotry. What I’m about to say may shock some of you, but I believe it’s at the heart of the matter. True faith is not necessarily witnessing God performing miracles. Certainly, God does perform miracles because “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8). However, true faith is recognizing we are all sinners apart from God’s redemptive grace~ and with the world perishing and millions dying without Christ, we are to do everything possible to take the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth, as He enables.

Of course, once we live for God and walk in His righteousness, we can and should anticipate miracles and answers to prayer. I want to emphasize that I do not for one instant question the miracle-working power of our Lord Jesus Christ, nor do I doubt the ability of God to answer the prayers of His children. I’m concerned, though, that when we focus entirely on *these* aspects of faith, we become too shallow in the ocean of a greater aspect and dimension of faith. Hence, our test of faith should be, in effect, “Miracles may come or miracles may *not* come (seemingly), but I am going to serve the Lord anyway!”

In this age where we may be accustomed to numerous kinds of “instant” food that are freely available, let us not suppose that we can extend this to the spiritual realm. There is no such thing as “instant” spirituality. Actually, the spiritual molding process that the child of God undergoes is often accompanied with great struggle~ and is a pilgrimage of faith. It is only with perseverance and steadfast faith that we can say, “I’m not giving up. I’ve started out with Jesus and I will go through, regardless of the circumstances, and I will see the Lord’s

victory!” It is easy to praise the Lord when things are running smooth but when troubles beset us, it is such times that our adoration becomes a “sacrifice of praise”. I am sure we can all identify with this. Praising God in times of blessings and victory is no exercise of faith. It is praising God during trying moments that the true testimony of an individual is reflected- and a strong sign of faith at that. I want us to consider the following passage of God’s Word and observe the fruits of faith. It reads, “And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him (Abraham) for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:19-25).

As the subject of faith is so expanse and vast, we can only touch the surface of this great truth. To begin with, I want to say that if we are to truly live a life of faith, we are to “first (give ourselves) to the Lord” (2 Corinthians 8:5). Even as “by faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it being dead yet speaketh” (Hebrews 11:4), the lesson here for us is that we are to present ourselves as living sacrifices, as offerings that will *cost* us everything we have and all that we are. God is not (merely) interested in wanting partnership with us, He desires ownership with us~ “ ...know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price:

therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

As Abel's sacrifice of blood typified the coming Messiah who would give His life for a lost and dying world, godly Christians today are also entering into "the fellowship of his sufferings..." (Philippians 3:10) as a consequence of "ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost" (Romans 15:16).

Next, faith is a progressive walk with God. This implies a steady, continuous, on-going relationship with the Master. Even though the church today is blessed with the abundance of spiritual resources (through multiplied Christian books, music, seminars, radio and television programs), there are still no shortcuts to spiritual growth. All these resources are mere tools, mere vehicles in carrying out the work of God. The all-important, indispensable activity for the growing child of God is still the regular feeding of the pure, unadulterated Word of God and communion through prayer. Let us not be so overwhelmed by all the excitement of spiritual programs (as wonderful as they may be and as necessary as they are) - to the exclusion of the Master. God wants us to have a balanced diet. Even though there are tremendous victories, there are also obstacles along the way. Sometimes, real faith involves afflictions, even death, but it is for God's special elect who want the kind of *deeper* walk and who is able to cry inwardly, "For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain" (Philippians 1:21).

In this walk of faith, you can be sure that there will be many distractions. Satan will tempt us, the lust of the flesh will entice us, but our response to circumstances is the key. Because we are in the midst of a bitter conflict between good and evil, a war to the finish where the ultimate spoils are the hearts and souls of men, we are to do more than just say "no" to sin. We are to "abstain from all appearance of evil" (1

Thessalonians 5:22) and to resist “unto blood, striving against sin” (Hebrews 12:4).

Also, faith is a choice. In this pilgrimage of faith, we will be confronted with many spiritual crossroads. Any and every decision we make will either contribute or hinder our spiritual development. Because one action oftentimes sets in motion the course of a whole series of subsequent actions, we are responsible for the choice we make. We may be *free* to do what we want with our lives, but be aware that we will also reap the consequences. For example, if we choose to enjoy the pleasures of sin (and that is only for a season in light of eternity), we will end up destroyed. On the other hand, if we choose to live for God and walk in the way “which leadeth unto life” (according to Matthew 7:14), eternal and abundant life will be ours. While we may have to “suffer affliction with the people of God” (as Moses did- please read Hebrews 11:24-25), we will also experience “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

MY SOUL THIRSTETH FOR GOD

“My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God... ” (Psalm 42:2).

In closing this message on faith, I want to bring you back some two thousand years ago when Jesus walked on earth. You will recall that whenever miracles were performed, there were huge throngs present. The people were excited to see the loaves and fishes multiplied. Generally speaking, we may consider these individuals followers of Christ. But the Master saw through their motivation in “following” Him and said bluntly, “ ...Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled” (John 6:26). They may have sought the Lord, but for all the wrong reasons. What is the spiritual application for us today? At the

present time, perhaps more than any time in modern history, we witness many individuals who profess the name of Christ. Only a few years ago, the term “born again” was the catchphrase in many religious circles. It is even popular to be part of the prosperity gospel. Now, even though I strongly believe that God does bless His children (and there is no doubt an *element* of truth in this teaching), the *whole* counsel of God’s Word includes more than an implied assurance of economic profit.

From amongst the crowd that followed Jesus, I believe the Holy Spirit chose the *seventy* (please read Luke 10:1) whose commitment to Jesus was of far greater substances than the mere question of what they could get from Jesus. Truly, there must have been a certain degree of consecration and dedication found in the lives of the seventy. I just do not believe that the Lord would choose them at random, but only after much prayer, as directed by the Holy Spirit. Today it is the “seventies” who are the faithful supporters of God’s work. Whenever they support missions, through prayer and financial giving, they do so out of compassionate burden for lost souls as well as out of sheer joy. To these individuals, I believe Jesus would rejoice in spirit, and would say now as He said then, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; so it seemed good in thy sight” (Luke 10:21).

Going beyond the seventy who were appointed by God, we have, of course, the twelve disciples. No doubt the seventy mentioned earlier were Godly men, it was the twelve who walked closer and demonstrated an even greater love for the Lord. And yet, of the twelve, three- Peter, James and John- pushed in even closer to Jesus. You may remember in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus took Peter, James, and John into the “inner circle” while the other disciples (except Judas) were asked to stay in a certain place (please read Matthew 26:36-37).

There is yet *one more step* though, in terms of *nearness* to Jesus, and I believe the *candidate* was the beloved John- “Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. He then lying on Jesus’ breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it?” (John 13:22-25). Because the term “whom Jesus loved” is used, a careful study will reveal that it was the beloved John that is referred to.

Even though we may not know all the reasons why John outlived all other apostles, it is indeed a privileged position for him to not only lean on Jesus’ bosom while He was on earth, but also to literally close the canon of Scriptures (as the resurrected Lord revealed to him in the isle that is called Patmos and he wrote the Book of Revelation under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost). Notice the *special* indelible cry of his heart, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

And what about us? What is the motivation that causes us to follow Christ and express our faith in Him? Are we merely the “loaves and fishes” crowd, or do we push through the crowd and touch “the hem of his garment” (Matthew 9:20) until we reach the very throne of grace? Or in the language of Jacob, are we able to say in effect, even as he said, “ ...I will not let thee go, except thou bless me?” (Genesis 32:26). (Incidentally, the place wherein Jacob saw God face to face is called Pe-ni’el, according to Genesis 32:30).

Let us dedicate our lives to Him afresh TODAY!

V. THE TRUE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST

WHAT IS THE TRUE CHURCH?

Were I to ask you what is the true church of Jesus Christ, I would probably receive as many different answers as there are people. To some of you, you would think that the particular church or denomination that you associate with is the true church of Jesus Christ. To the rest of you, you would hold other ideas concerning the true church, such as referring to a group of individuals adhering to a certain doctrine, looking up to a particular religious leader as God's representative or voice on earth, etc. There are just so many definitions of a church especially when you consider that there are over a thousand denominations in Christendom. The most confusing and perplexing issue at hand is that even though the doctrinal positions of one segment of the church may be poles apart from another, almost every denomination claim and promote themselves as to be "of Christ" and of faithfulness to God's Word. Actually, the true church of Jesus Christ has nothing to do with what is generally referred to as "denominations" or organized religion. Instead, it is a body of called-out believers, who are truly born again, washed in the blood of Jesus and whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (read Revelation 3:5 and 21:27).

To illustrate this, let us imagine that a certain number of people attend a particular *local* church (take for example, the church where YOU attend regularly). In this scenario, I believe that there are probably individuals in this congregation who are members of the true church while there are others who are not born again and consequently, not members of the true church.

The greatest witness of the church is not on the outward appearances—the miracles, the music, the speech eloquence of the preacher or the size

of the congregation. Rather, it is concerned with the root of the heart through the life transformation power and...

WITNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:14-16).

“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Timothy 2:19).

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is taking the Body of Christ into a spiritual condition that will eventually “present *you* (*us*) *as* a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2). The separation between the true church and the apostate church is already beginning to take place and it will become even more pronounced in the days ahead. The fear of the Lord will enable the true church to enter into a place and position in Christ that will accomplish the reaping of the great harvest of souls in the spirit of His glory and power. And while there are certain churches and ministries that adhere far more closer to the whole counsel of God’s Word than others, all of us who are true ministers of God will have to guard our hearts against setting ourselves up on a pedestal. As there is going to come in the last days perilous times, accompanied by a great falling away from sound doctrine and faith (read 1 Timothy 4:1, 2 Timothy 3:1-5 and 2 Timothy 4:3-4), the people of God must get their eyes off all ministers and onto Jesus Christ. Allow me to say this: There are teachers, though appearing good, godly and sincere, are actually not immune from the insidious and subtle designs of seducing spirits and hence, promote doctrines of devil that have already infiltrated the

church in alarming proportions. The forces of darkness will often seek to pull these individuals into different directions, away from fulfilling the high calling of God originally intended for them. There are just too many voices out there and unless one is walking in the Spirit, it is easy to fall prey to deception and errors. And then there is another class of ministers whom God used mightily, and yet you'll find the deceptive character of Jacob in them. In spite of glaring defeats, God nevertheless chooses to use failures in producing godliness in these lives. And of course, there are the once-faithful and godly who are now turning their backs on God. Which is why it is so important not to tie your faith to personalities in the church world. The source of your faith must be on that which is infallible and that is the Word of God- the written and the Living Word. You simply cannot fix your faith on circumstances, churches, denominations or other believers, for they will be shaken as never before in these last days. As far as the natural mind can perceive, we have to admit that the organized church is a pretty defeated institution; yet Jesus said, "...upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:18-19). Here, Jesus is speaking about the true church, not that which is nominal, weak and emaciated. The times are here that the church is divided into two main groups: those who really want the moving of the Holy Spirit and those who have organized "a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof..." (2 Timothy 3:5). Through all the shaking that is already taking place (and will continue to take place) in every organized religion, denomination and church structure, God is preparing a people, the true believers, into a place and position in Christ that will usher in the greatest move of the Holy Spirit that will bear forth the fruits of world evangelization. If bearing fruit is synonymous with true discipleship, then the implication

also holds when Jesus says, “If any man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:6). What a sobering statement that should cause us to examine ourselves in the mirror of God’s Word! One of the evidences of abiding in Christ (the true vine) is that, in the words of Jesus, “ ...the world hate you, ye know that it hate me before *it hated* you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:18-19). If we are living in obedience to the will of God, then we should not be surprised when opposition comes upon us. You remember that the early church experienced much persecution and yet at the same time, it demonstrated such great apostolic power. Likewise, I believe the true church of Jesus Christ today will emerge in victory and in the “demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:4), in spite of the intensity of opposition and persecution. We are not to be troubled but rather to take heart because without the trials and persecution, how then are we to witness the validity of the demonstration of God’s Spirit and power? Furthermore, Jesus has not left us comfortless but “when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me” (John 15:26). The ministry of the Holy Spirit in this dimension is that “when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). I believe this truth is a missing element in the church because we have subtly allowed the spirit of the world to invade us who professed to be Christians. That is why we see so many believers who are cold and careless, indifferent to the things of God. They may keep a semblance of religion, but their hearts’ devotion for God is half-hearted. Could this be what the Lord will say concerning them on that day and place of judgment, “*Thou* wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed

not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and *then* at my coming I should have received mine own with usury... cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth?" (Matthew 25:26-27 and 30). One thing is certain though, and that "...we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10), "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). If we are willing, there is a test that you and I must take- and that is to judge ourselves (according to 1 Corinthians 11:31) if we have in any manner neglected "so great (our) salvation..." (Hebrews 2:3). This one decision is enough to stand as a witness before the Judge of the world on that day- and it is either for us or against us! The question is, "What will your answer and mine be?" and "Will we pass the test?"

Friends, believe me, your seriousness and mine in having the reverential fear of the Lord and our seeking to walk in His statutes RIGHT NOW will make all the difference!

VI. I KNOW WHOM I HAVE BELIEVED

KNOWING WHAT AND WHY YOU BELIEVE

“For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:12).

“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Hebrews 12:28).

In this age of doubt and unbelief, knowing what and why you believe has never been more pertinent. More and more, you are going to hear or even know of someone who once walked with Christ but has now turned his back on him. And yet others may not forsake God outrightly, but neglect and complacency has caused their hearts to be cold and callous, no longer on fire for Him!

Beloved, I believe the experience of Peter is going to be the experience of each and every one of us who decide and determine that we are going to follow God all the way, to the end. I refer to the time and place when Jesus said, “Simon (Peter), Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:31-32). In the hour of trial and testing that we will face, our response will determine the outcome. We have been given examples of men of God under trial (read Hebrews 11) and God always has a purpose even though the process is often severe and unexpected. One of the fruits of faith is the purification of our hearts. Another is to demonstrate that what Satan has meant for our destruction (according

to John 10:10), God allows it to be an opportunity for us to trust Him to deliver.

True, we do not understand all the sufferings and trials that we encounter, but we can come to the place whereby we demonstrate such (child-like) faith in God's mighty keeping power- "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). We certainly do not have all the answers and reasons to our questions, but this one thing we can know and be sure of, "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I KNOW WHOM I HAVE BELIEVED, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Timothy 1:12).

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ATTENTION, FRIEND: THIS IS GOOD NEWS!

Dear Friend,

We want to take this opportunity to show you God's plan of salvation, according to the Bible. We believe the Bible is the inspired and only infallible and authoritative written Word of God.

If you are not a Christian and you read this, here's an appeal for you to accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. To be included in this invitation, you must have a relationship with Jesus Christ, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The choice is yours. If you say "yes" to Jesus, here's what you must do,

Admit the fact that you are a sinner, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23);

Be willing to repent from disobedience and rebellion against God, "...except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3);

Believe that Jesus is your only Saviour, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16);

Confess, trust and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

Please pray this prayer and do mean it with all of your heart:

"Dear Lord Jesus, I now recognize that I am a sinner and I am in need of salvation. I accept the sacrifice You paid for me on the cross of Calvary and I allow Your precious shed blood to cleanse me. I now surrender myself to You and invite You to be my Lord and Saviour. Please come into my heart. Take full control of my life and help me to live and serve You from this moment forward. I ask in the name of Jesus. Amen."

If you prayed this prayer in all sincerity, you are now a child of God. We encourage you to find fellowship in a Bible-believing, Spirit-filled church and obtain a copy of the Bible and that you read it diligently so that you will be the kind of Christian God wants you to be.

I KNOW WHOM I HAVE BELIEVED

In this age of doubt and unbelief, knowing what and why you believe has never been more pertinent.

The issues addressed in this book include:

- * WHEN THE ENEMY SHALL COME IN
- * A BROKEN HEART AND A CONTRITE SPIRIT
- * DEVOTION OUT OF DUTY, FEAR OR LOVE?
- * THE CALL OF GOD AND THE SNARE OF SATAN
- * GETHSEMANE: A PLACE OF DECISION
- * CALVARY: A PLACE OF SACRIFICE
- * FOUNDATION FAITH
- * MY SOUL THIRSTETH FOR GOD
- * WHAT IS THE TRUE CHURCH?
- * WITNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
- * KNOWING WHAT AND WHY YOU BELIEVE

We can come to a place whereby we demonstrate such (child-like) faith in God's mighty keeping power~ "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). We certainly do not have all the answers and reasons to our questions, but this one thing we can know and be sure of, "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I KNOW WHOM I HAVE BELIEVED, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Timothy 1:12).

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