

All Things New

'Without a vision, people perish.'
(Proverbs 29:18)

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I dedicate this booklet to you, Jesus. Thank you for the sun of righteousness that rises, with healing in its rays... (Malachi 4:2)

Introduction

As I reflect on life, and my mind just moves up and down the corridors of my years, I see so much 'gloom'. I'm not talking about an attitude I bring to a situation, but an atmosphere of a situation that presses in on my attitude, my soul.

Lights just cannot stay on! I see derelict buildings. I can picture what it once was, but I look on at what is no more. Everything decays. Everything crumbles. This is true of buildings, and this is true of our spirits. We start as children, starry-eyed, and as the years wear on us, and people discourage us, our eyes lose those 'stars' and cloud over.

My friend, it is in this context that the words of this God, the God of the Bible, are so piercing:

'Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who are in distress.' (Isaiah 9:1)

What other God has seen our gloom, and moved – eternally – to dispel gloom? What other God speaks – and prophesies, and acts, and reveals – to bring the light of the sun back into the core of our being?

I thank God for this move of his Spirit. I thank Jesus for his mission of love. I gaze on this move of the Spirit of God, and my soul hopes. I feel the breeze of this glory of the Lord *'covering the earth as the waters cover the sea,'* and I rest. (Habakkuk 2:14)

This booklet is a contemplation of this redemption work of God, this living move of his Spirit in my soul, in yours, through Jesus Christ.

Whom I Have Believed

Paul was not focused on his own identity or even his own faith. He was confident in this: That the Lord was holding *him*.

‘... I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.’ (2 Timothy 1:12)

Let’s look at this again, say it again – because Paul did. Paul was not confident in what he knew, or how strongly he even knew the Lord. He was confident in this: That the Lord knew *him*.

‘God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: ‘The Lord knows those who are his.’ (2 Timothy 2:19)

Paul went so far as to say that he considered his own life as dead and gone, and that the life he was living was a life of faith, a new one, not in his own hands or grasp:

‘I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live. The life I do live in the body, I live by faith...’ (Galatians 2:20)

Paul’s mode of life was not according to feelings or ‘sight’, but what he perceived in the Spirit realm by faith. This was truest to him, and he was his truest self in that space:

‘We live by faith, not by sight.’ (2 Corinthians 5:7)

‘This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the

Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. (1 Corinthians 2:13)

So if Paul had so completely let go of his 'hold' on himself, on his identity and authority, where did he get such confidence, day to day, in his 'way', his words, his actions, his own 'authority'? Multiple times Paul wrote to other believers and encouraged them to 'imitate' his life – not just accept his teaching, which he claimed was from God himself, but to also look and learn from his day-to-day example of living.

'You yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this... to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate.'
(2 Thessalonians 3:7-9)

'When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God...'
(1 Thessalonians 2:13)

So we see a type of dual reality. On the one hand, Paul is completely emptied of himself, '*crucified with Christ*', and saying he no longer lives. On the other hand, Paul is established in a powerful way, not just in words but in actions. His true and present identity is not so much in his mind, his ego, but it does come through his spirit, his words, his actions. He's dead to self in a worldly sense, but his eternal self, his person in Christ and his life mission and journey, is established in a heavenly way, here on earth.

Disappearing Act

In order to 'reach' us, Jesus set aside his glory and '*became nothing.*'

'Christ Jesus, being in very nature God... made himself nothing... being made in human likeness...' (Philippians 2:5-7)

In order to actually 'access' our hearts and minds, Jesus often hid his true identity from us. He tells Peter, after he had just made the great statement that Jesus was the Messiah, to not tell anyone. He commended Peter for this statement of faith, said he would build the church on it, but told him to '*not tell anyone.*' (Matthew 16:15-19)

As humans we tend to work the other way. We want to influence people by coming over influential, by coming over experienced, educated, important, higher. We introduce guest speakers with a list of accolades, so that the listeners will be looking 'up' at who they are, and so give what they say value. This is the world's way. Two thoughts on this:

First, this is not the way of Jesus. He humbled himself, '*became nothing*', and even hid his identity so that he could reach people. Jesus went low personally, in order to reach deep into people's hearts. How did he reach people like this, without asserting his full identity? Was his importance, authority, identity, not essential for people to 'know' in order for him to influence people? Where was the lofty introduction as he stepped up to speak?

This brings me to the second point. True identity in God comes in power, not just words.

'The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.' (1 Corinthians 4:20)

This is not only 'signs and wonders', but often is. No, the 'power' is about Spirit. The Holy Spirit primarily. I say 'primarily' because the Holy Spirit also moves in and through *your* spirit, and some of this 'power' is, in fact, about *you*. Look what Paul says here:

'I have no command from the Lord [on this] but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.' (1 Corinthians 7:25)

Paul might have felt this was just his personal impression, judgment, as he had no clear 'revelation' on this topic. But the Lord included this in the Scriptures, and we live by it as the word of God.

You, too, as a believer in Jesus, have the Holy Spirit inside of you.¹ He is very much separate to you, but also very much impacts and permeates and changes your person, your mind, your own spirit. So over time your judgments may have more of God in them and through them, than they did before, than someone else's might.

Like Jesus 'hiding' his identity for a clean slate in dealing with people, in allowing no 'history' or introduction to influence the hearer, look at what Paul writes to the church of Corinth:

'Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool... but I refrain, so that no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say.' (2 Corinthians 12:6)

¹ Ephesians 1:14; Colossians 1:27

Paul wants what he 'does' and what he 'says' to need no introduction. He wants them to bear the power of the Holy Spirit in real time. Whether this is with an accompanying sign to verify his message – like Jesus did in Luke 5:20-24 – or whether it is simply by the authority that his words carry, because they are carried by the Holy Spirit – as was the case with Jesus in Matthew 7:28-29.

So the way of Christ is not the way of the world. He was explicit about this:

‘Jesus called the disciples together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles [secular society] lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant...’
(Matthew 20:25-26)

But it is important to note that his way is not just another system, or a different way of doing things. No, his way is the way of the Spirit. His way is not another set a rules, but a ‘wind’ that blows us, and blows through us.

‘Jesus said, ‘You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sounds, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.’ (John 3:7-8)

The way of Christ – where you will find your truest self, your truest identity – is a *Spirit space*. It is a ‘walking on water’, a revelation, a wind. You access this place of ‘being’ by coming to Christ in *‘spirit and truth.’*

‘Jesus said, ‘God is Spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.’ (John 4:24)

Christ himself is the ‘door’ to God’s Spirit, God’s reality, your true self. The door to this truth and this Spirit path is not ‘charity’ or kindness or good living. The ‘place’ is a dying and rising again. As Paul said, ***‘I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live...’*** (Galatians 2:20)

In many respects, this place of ***‘life that is truly life’²*** is found not in the tomb, but *through* the tomb. We die, and rise again. The resurrected ‘you’ is the true you.

Have you died with Christ, and risen to new life?

² 1 Timothy 6:19

Being

We're obsessed with 'knowing'. Our minds race to figure things out, get answers. I'm not just talking about 'theories' in life, or how to fix things, understand things; I'm talking about everything! *Ingredients, prices, appointments, names, places, plans, back-up plans, in case of this, in case of that...* Our whole lives are tacked together by facts and figures and screws and bolts here and there...

This, my friends, is because we ate of the tree of 'knowledge'.

'God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.' (Genesis 2:17)

We ate from it. We were not content with 'being', we wanted to 'know', to control, to 'be like God'.³ We exchanged 'being' for 'knowing'. This knowledge came at the cost of mortality, darkness, sin. So now we die. But we also live a life that is weary with questions, answers, darkened understanding, limited vision, and very little peace. Because God's peace is not about 'knowing'; it is about 'being'.

Consider this moment of Mary and Martha:

'Martha opened her home to Jesus and his disciples. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and

³ Genesis 3:5

asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'

'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed – or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'

(Luke 10:38-42)

Knowing *about* God, and knowing God, are two completely different things. One is outside the reality, one is inside the reality. Jesus referred to himself as a 'door' to go through. He then said that in passing through this door, we would come into a reality without any clear border, boundary, scope or limit:

'Jesus said, 'I am the door, and anyone who comes through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture.'

(John 10:9)

The door looks like a small entrance way. But in passing through the door, we come into the eternal. There's no floor, no ceiling, no limit. That is why David asks only one thing of this eternal God:

'One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.'

(Psalm 27:4)

David has experienced the eternal space of Spirit that is God. All the days of his life he knows – if his faith eyes stay open – that he will always see more (gaze) and have more to see (seek). We pass

through the door of Jesus Christ, and then see no end, come to no end.

Look at how Paul describes the love of God. He has seen it. He lives in it. He calls us to it:

'I pray... that you may have power... to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge...' (Ephesians 3:18-19)

I'm trying to *'be'* with God more. I find it hard to be still, to be quiet, to be alone. And yet, the name given to Jesus was *'Emanuel'*, which we are told by Matthew, means, ***'God with us.'*** (Matthew 1:23) Jesus came to be with us. He came so that our minds could quiet down, and our spirits could be with him again – like we were before we ate of the tree of knowledge.

We can be frenetic, insecure. Interesting how in Isaiah 30 God offers the people rest, but they choose to run, to *'flee'*.

'... In quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.' (Isaiah 30:15)

God then hands them over to their restlessness:

'You said, 'No, we will flee...' Therefore you will flee!' (vs.16)

We talk so much about rest and self-care and asking God for rest and peace. But then when he offers it, we often choose to *'flee'*, to run, to work, to stress, taking on new projects, new conversations, new tasks and commitments. We choose to flee.

We derive so much sense of meaning from the noise of people's affirmation. We strive to hear from people, their feedback, their approval. And yet, what is it worth? What if the whole world joined in chorus at how wonderful and meaningful you are? Does that actually determine your meaning, your significance, your value to God and history?

There is only one Judgment Day, and one Judge. Look at this incredible and freeing perspective of Paul, speaking to other Christians:

'I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human [secular] court. Indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.' (1 Corinthians 4:3-4)

This is freeing, but also challenging. It frees us from the judgment of others, but it also challenges us to be free from ourselves. There is a resting place, a living space, in the Spirit of God that is separate to our own broken thoughts about ourselves. A faith space, a Spirit reality.

Lord, help me let go and rest in this space of your Spirit, in Jesus' name.

Seasons

In the Bible we see men and women of God change life seasons, with the blessing and decree of God. They pass from a 'season' of life – maybe poor, barren, sick – into a new, blessed season. Everything changes. Three things strike me about these changes that God brings about.

First, the change is personal, internal. So, for example, as noted above, a poor person who worried often about money, no longer has this worry. The change to them, over them, is a personal relief. Same with sickness, or anything to do with the body. The change to our resources or body, touches us personally, changes us and our personal surroundings.

Secondly, it changes our perspective on reality itself, and with this change of perspective we influence change on reality itself. For example, a person who has been encouraged, blessed, has relief and hope. Hope soaks in, seeps out. This man now sees more hope in life, not just in his circumstances. And this man now imparts more hope to others, speaking and praying the Lord's presence and breakthrough in people's lives. His personal season change brings about a new view of reality, and new influence on reality. So his new personal season, brings about a change on life's reality, and life's history.

Thirdly, a touch of God, a change of your life season, is not the same as the four *seasons*. It does not come and go on a cycle. You don't have a good season, but it's just a matter of time... This may be the case in nature, or with 'seasons' in life that are man-made, but not season changes that God makes happen in a person's life.

'The Spirit of God will come powerfully upon you... and you will be changed into a different person.' (1 Samuel 10:6)

God's Way

God revealed himself by his Spirit to people, to prophets. These prophets were called to make God's word known to other people.

At a certain point in history, fulfilling many prophecies, God himself came to earth as Jesus Christ. He was the 'living word', the 'word made flesh'.⁴ God himself was revealed, and can be known.

'In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.' (Colossians 2:9)

After Jesus had lived his life on earth, he died, rose again, ascended to heaven, and poured out his Holy Spirit. His Holy Spirit continues to reveal himself – Jesus Christ – to people. These people are called to share his name, his message, with other people.

This is how the word of God came to earth, how God himself came to earth, and how the message and words of God continue to spread across the earth.

This is God's way. And you and I can be part of it. We are called to be part of it. To know God, and to make him known.

His justice is something we cannot understand. We are not called to understand. But his revelation about himself – who he is, and what he wants – is clear. And it is this gospel message about faith in Jesus and repentance of our sin, that he calls us to know and make known.

⁴ John 1:1,14

‘Jesus said, ‘The Holy Spirit will testify about me, and you also must testify, because you have been with me.’ (John 15:26-27)

Becoming

The story of Moses is amazing. It is also exciting and adventurous. If you need a good 'read' and overview of the life of Moses, read the book of Exodus (40 chapters) and then skip ahead to the last 4 chapters of Deuteronomy (31-34). You won't be disappointed!

One of the things that impacts me most about Moses is not how he lived, but how he died. After leading the people (c.1 million)⁵ through the desert for forty years, and being set apart by God as a prophet who had no equal⁶, Moses died alone and without ceremony.

It was not a lonely death, because he was 'alone' with God himself. But no people were involved. His passing and burial had no tomb, no epitaph, no speeches or ceremony. No man was present, and no man could ever discover where and when Moses passed on into glory.

'The Lord buried him in Moab... but to this day no one knows where his grave is.'
(Deuteronomy 34:6)

Moses, who had become great in the eyes of people and the eyes of the Lord, became 'small' again, as it were, as he neared his time to be with the Lord. He became known, and then became 'unknown', so to speak. He was alone with God when he began his ministry; he was alone with God again, when he ended his ministry, his life.

⁵ Exodus 12:37

⁶ Numbers 12:6-8

His life was like a great squall on the ocean, and then a great calm.

I think of his passing as a picture of his integrity. Even as a leader his true self and true character was 'alone with God'. His leadership was marked by his intimacy with God, not his support from people, nor their endorsement.

Look at what God says of Moses when people contended with him:

***'God said, 'Listen to my words:
When there is a prophet among you,
I, the Lord, reveal myself to them in visions,
I speak to them in dreams.
But this is not true of my servant, Moses;
he is faithful in all my house.
With him I speak face to face,
clearly and not in riddles;
he sees the form of the Lord.
Why then were you not afraid
to speak against my servant, Moses?''***

(Numbers 12:6-8)

Now here is one other thing to note and ponder about Moses in his last days, last moments.

The whole mission of Moses was to lead these people out of slavery into a land of freedom and prosperity – the land of Canaan. The 'prize' was this land. Moses, however, was disciplined by God for something that happened at Meribah – *'failing to uphold God as holy before the people'*⁷ – which I don't really understand or can explain. But because of this, God disciplined Moses and told him he would not enter the land of Canaan.

⁷ Numbers 20:12

So in Moses' last moments of life, he climbed mount Nebo, and God 'showed' him the land. He was able to look out over the land that the people would be entering. His 'discipline' has seemed to me more and more like a blessing. Moses, rather than actually crossing the river and being part of what was five years of war to actually conquer the land, he was able to look out over it, see it in its beauty, peace, promise. He was able to see it from a heavenly perspective, not the earthly reality.

And his story does not end here. After dying in the arms and 'vision' of the Lord, we see Moses one more time, alive again here on earth. Where? On a high mountain, standing with Jesus and speaking with him, about 1500 years later.

'Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, and led them up a high mountain. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.'

(Matthew 17:1-3)

So Moses in his last moments of life stood on a mountain and looked over Canaan. Then he died and was buried secretly by the Lord. Then he stood on another mountain, inside the land of Canaan, and saw the Lord face to face, Jesus Christ, and spoke with him.

There is a path in Moses' life and death that we can learn from, maybe even walk. It was a path of getting closer and closer to the Lord, up to the moment of seeing him face to face. It was a path that led away from people and mission and activity

as the time drew closer. It was a path of increasing light, not darkness.

'The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, ever-brighter until the full light of day.'
(Proverbs 4:18)

Your Prize!

You will be rewarded for your faith. It is true!

‘Jesus said, ‘... Anyone who gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones... will surely not lose their reward.’ (Matthew 10:42)

Jesus also told this parable, where one’s faithfulness was rewarded in measure:

‘Jesus said, ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities!’ (Luke 19:17)

Throughout the whole Bible, especially in the New Testament, there is constant teaching and reference to ‘reward’ in the afterlife for faithfulness in this life. And then the picture of heaven is stunning, like a child’s dream city:

‘Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God... down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit... the leaves of the tree are for healing... No longer any curse... They will see the face of God... There will be no more night...’ (Revelation 22:1-5)

I think heaven will be more like a child’s dream and picture, than an adult’s expectations. In fact, I think as we get older, we get less imaginative about heaven than when we’re young.

As adults, also, here in our earthly life, we often look back to our youth for our purest experiences of delight, hope, anticipation, life zest, romance,

ambition, beauty. If we look back even now to our youth to capture glimpses of what this mortal life has to offer, how much more might our youth – and our youthful spirit - ‘see’ what heaven has to offer? Look at this incredible word from Jesus:

‘Unless you change and become like a child, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.’

(Matthew 18:3)

Think like a child! You follow Jesus and are faithful to him? You will be rewarded! This life has gloom, despair, unkindness, violence. Heaven has streets of gold, laughter, love, trees, rivers, cities, sky... Not only is this how a child thinks, it is all biblical truth and promise!

Things here decay (from the day they are set up, are ‘new’), but the very Spirit and power of Christ in heaven is ***‘making all things new.’*** (Revelation 21:5) The energy of heaven is *towards* renewal, not demise or decay.

Now, let me focus on another aspect of our prize in Christ. Not what lay ahead, but what is here and now in the depths of our soul.

Christ – God in the flesh – has poured out his own self, by his Spirit, into our being. He is in you. He is through you. Your prize is up ahead, but your prize is buried deep in your core being. This is why we have this mysterious truth about the essence of eternal life, spoken by Jesus:

‘This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.’ (John 17:3)

Jesus is the prize. And here and now, because you have believed and you follow, Jesus is in you.

'This is the mystery of God revealed – Christ in you...' (Colossians 1:27)

Your reward is up ahead. But your 'prize' is already in you. In this regard, this aspect of truth, we don't wait for our reward, our prize, but rather we hold it, and we live it, we live out of it.

It is in this sense of truly seeing the treasure that is Christ, that Jesus, on occasion, prompted us to consider the 'privilege', the prize that it is to walk with him, serve him here and now. Consider these two passages:

'The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.' (Matthew 13:45-46)

'Jesus said, 'Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Won't he rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' (Luke 17:7-10)

In this regard, my friend, of seeing Jesus and his worth, it is our privilege to know him, to hear him, to speak his words, to stand with him. Knowing him

and following him *is* our reward, a gift to us from God.

Let me consider two more short points on this topic of Christ in you, Christ part of you:

First, you are *complete* with Christ in you. This is so important to know. When you are alone with the Lord, you are complete. You are part of his story, his history, his mission. His intimacy with you runs deeper than the sea. Allow yourself to 'sink' in this rich and expansive presence of the Lord:

'Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to you... for darkness is as light to you.'

(Psalm 139:7-12)

Secondly, because you are complete with Christ in you (point 1 above), you do not need the approval or even understanding of other people. This goes for all people – Christians, non-Christians, family or foe. If you are walking with the Lord, do not allow people to derail you.

We are told by the prophet Isaiah (600 years before Christ was born) that we would misunderstand Jesus. We see in the Gospels that his disciples often misunderstood him, or did not even recognize – 'see' – the miracles that he was doing in them and through them. (see Mark 6:52)

Isaiah tells us that we considered Jesus as *'punished by God'* when he was, in fact, set apart, honored by God. We held him in *'low esteem'*. (Isaiah 53) Paul says we did not even really see Christ from the correct perspective when he was on earth; it was not till he had finished with this life and ascended to heaven, that we came to understand the fullness of his person, his mission, his ways.

'From now on we no longer consider anyone from a merely human perspective, as we once did Christ, but we do so no more.'

(2 Corinthians 5:16)

So, my friend, if this is how we misunderstood Jesus, we will often misunderstand each other. We will misjudge each other. So as you walk with Christ, be prepared to be misunderstood. Just be kind, be quiet, be patient. Don't try to justify yourself, just walk on in Jesus. Remember, you are complete in him, with his Spirit in you, and you only answer to him.

'Man is appointed once to die, and then comes judgment.' (Hebrews 9:27)

Eyes on the prize – within, and up ahead!

Acknowledge

‘Jesus said, ‘Whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God.’

(Luke 12:8-9)

I have usually thought of ‘acknowledging’ Jesus before people as a discipline, a challenge, a hard thing to do. It can be. But God’s primary purpose in this is loving, releasing, powerful.

When I’m with people who do not believe in Jesus, and I find myself in conversation with them about faith, I am often talking ‘*about*’ Jesus, about the Bible, about views. But what I’ve noticed is often I’m talking about Jesus as if he’s not there. This is OK, and there’s a time for this, maybe a lot of time and opportunities for this; but there is also a time to ‘acknowledge’ him.

For example, sharing with someone, as the Spirit leads, this ‘acknowledgement’:

I not only believe in Jesus, like he’s out there... I know him! He is in me. He’s my best friend. I talk to him all day long. I listen to his Spirit all day long. He is my treasure, my prize. He’s here and now with me, in me. He loves you, too. He wants to know you, forgive you, be with you. Can I pray with you now?

This is different to a conversation *about* Jesus. This is being with him, with others, and ministering his presence. This is really ‘acknowledging’ him, that he is present with you, and you are present with him.

How is this primarily 'loving' and releasing, and not challenging?

Well, Jesus' call to acknowledge him means that we step into his reality – here and now. It is like having one foot in heaven, one foot on earth, and not apologizing for it!:) Relief! Release! Because you know deep in your heart that Jesus is not something you've just 'believed' and added to your set of 'beliefs'. He is more than that. He is *in* you, *with* you, a Spirit blowing through your thoughts, prayers, emotions, opening and closing doors in your provision, your protection, your opportunities, your relationships.

So if there is a deeper place of 'acknowledging' Jesus, actually sharing him with people – i.e. talking about him as if he *is* there – you are being your true self *completely*. And this is a gift from God!

When I minister Jesus to someone – looking in their eyes, and sharing truths about Jesus to them, through them, here and now – I live! I walk away thanking Jesus from the core of my being for being allowed, equipped, inspired, anointed, to stand with him and speak his living words to a living soul – not just written ones. At these moments my reward up ahead, my prize within, all come together here and now, and I thank Jesus that I can acknowledge him.

It is in this sense, my friends, that the call of Christ to acknowledge him is one of release. He calls us to stand with him so that we can touch, taste, hold, give, that **'life that is truly life.'** (1 Timothy 6:19)

This type of 'acknowledging' Christ is not of ourselves, not something we conjure up and force. It is from and through the Holy Spirit.

Do you want more of Christ through you to people? Do you need a fresh measure of 'acknowledging' Jesus, of standing with him? Do you hunger for this? Simply, quietly, like a child, just ask him for more of himself.

'If you, then, know how to give good gifts... how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!' (Luke 11:13)

Grace

I think sometimes we panic about getting relationships 'right' before we die. And I think our sense of 'right' in this panic, is not 'right'.

Jesus did encourage efforts of reconciliation where righteousness had been compromised:

'If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.'

(Matthew 5:23)

My friend, Jesus is not here being petty. He is not talking about that immature person or jealous person who has 'something against you.' No, Jesus, more than any of us, was surrounded by these type of people with things against him, and he never gave into them!

Jesus is here talking about a sting of conscience where you need to right something with a person, before you are right with God.

'Anyone who loves God, must also love their brother or sister.' (1 John 4:21)

This 'reconciliation' that Jesus is talking about is real, deep, and it is about 'pleasing' God, not people.

In fact, Jesus was quite challenging when it came to being 'right' with people, and letting this occupy our concern. Look at this exchange:

'Another disciple said to him, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.'

But Jesus told him, 'Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.' (Matthew 8:21-22)

Getting things all 'good' with people is not always the Spirit's leading. He may be 'releasing' you from some people's expectations and demands.

Here is another hard-hitting moment, when Jesus' own mother and siblings were looking for him:

'While Jesus was talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him... but Jesus replied, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' Pointing to his disciples he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'

(Matthew 12:48-50)

(And it is important to remember that Jesus' own brothers were not always supportive of him – Mark 6:1-5; John 7:1-5)

The most striking words of Christ regarding the division between God's place in our lives, and that of people and family, are these:

'If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even their own life - such a person cannot be my disciple.' (Luke 14:26)

This is not about 'hating' anyone. This is about allowing people and even one's own 'self' coming before our love of God. Such is the importance of holding God as God in our lives and hearts, that

people (and people-pleasing) must be as far away from this throne room as even 'hate' would drive them, so to speak. The separation is complete.

'Teacher, what is the greatest commandment?' Jesus answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart... This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: 'Love your neighbor...' (Matthew 22:34-40)

Now, obviously we are called to love people, be kind, giving, sacrificial towards people. (Look above at the second-most important commandment to God!) But people are broken, devious, envious, difficult, dishonest, and there are times where people's 'leading' is not the Spirit's leading, and we must hold to the Spirit if we are going to know God's freedom and peace. This is true for even family members.

The amazing thing about the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the astounding promise and power of eternal life, is that there will be time in the afterlife to patch up some differences, to laugh and restore things... We don't have to get every single difference and misunderstanding 'tied up' before we go to glory. There is a time to *'let the dead bury their own dead.'*

My friend, the gospel of Jesus is ***'God's power for salvation.'*** (Romans 1:16) And in the same way we sometimes have to wait hours, days or months or years to 'patch up' some things with people, we may need to wait till the afterlife to patch some things up. And that's OK.

Now if there is something that you need to *repent* of, or ask forgiveness for, well, that is different. Ask God for the grace to pick up the phone or write a

letter or email, to say sorry, to ask forgiveness. Leave your offering at the altar, and go be reconciled.

But if there are just differences, some regrets here and there about communication, or misunderstandings, you feel, on the other person's part, or maybe someone has not quite 'approved' of you, and is making you feel that you have somehow let them down... Well, maybe the Lord is calling you to leave that with him, and you can patch that up in eternity. Grace. Peace. Walk on.

The Gospel

'I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation, to everyone who believes.' (Romans 1:16)

In Jesus we build a whole new life. And much like any relationship, we don't often focus on the 'where', 'when' and 'how' we met. We are just busy building and growing and going...

This is OK on one level. Jesus himself focused on 'life' and not death. However, the very '*power of God for salvation*' is found in the gospel message, and we do need to hold this dear, in our vision, and in our hands for others.

The gospel message is simple, deep, stirring. It is this:

God created the world, all people. We have chosen to turn our backs on God, which is sinful and selfish. This sin is the very death of our souls and our bodies. God himself stepped down from heaven and became one of us in the person of Jesus Christ. He paid for this sin, this separation, by sacrificing himself in death and suffering. On the cross he took our sin, and died with it.

He then rose again from the dead. In dying with sin as a perfect sacrifice, he defeated death itself. He broke the chain of mortality, guilt, sorrow, scars.

And he calls us to come to him. He calls us to look to him. He calls us to turn away from our sin (repentance), and believe sincerely, put our faith in him. He calls us to follow.

Jesus has promised that all who come to him in repentance and faith will be forgiven, made new, and live forever.

This is the gospel message. This is where God has put his power. The blood of Jesus destroyed death. Here are 2 verses I love about the gospel:

'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. Whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.' (John 3:16)

'Jesus Christ destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light.' (2 Timothy 2:10)

Calling

David was called by God through the prophet Samuel. He was anointed secretly to be king one day. Secretly, because there was already a king – Saul – and this news would not go down well.

You can read this most amazing story and adventure in the two books of the Bible, 1 & 2 Samuel.

There was no timeline given by Samuel, so I imagine David felt things would develop pretty quickly. It's just natural to feel like this when we have not only a vision of what's ahead, but a promise, a confirmation, words and confidence from others.

Things got off to a promising start. You know the story of Goliath, and how David as a young man took on this giant on behalf of the king and of the people. Surely this would not only favor him with the king, but ring in a new era, and open the door for the anointing over his life by God to be the king.

My friend, this did not happen! David went from being favored by the king and the people, to having his life threatened by this same king and having to flee into the mountain caves for safety. He lived here, hid his parents in another kingdom, led a band of followers for about ten years through thick and thin, and then finally became king. It happened when all hope was lost, and even the vision seemed impossible. His own men were turning on him. But then God came through, and David was made king.

We tell this story in church. We preach on many aspects of this history of God and David. We note

how David's calling – and the path, thereafter, to see this calling come to fruition – was anything but linear, clear, understandable, easy or confirmed along the way. It was brutal, confusing, impossible to map or predict, had many sub-plots along the way...

And yet, we often fail to see this going on in each other's stories and callings. When we see some hardship cut across someone's life, we immediately feel that the path we thought they were on spiritually, their call, their giftings... well, maybe not. We celebrate David, Abraham, Moses, and so many others that seemed to be out of favor with God (even Christ himself, Isaiah 53:4), but not so much because we are 'discerning', but because we read the story with the ending already told. I wonder how supportive we might have been – or not been – if we had been walking alongside them in the middle of their journey.

Discernment is the key word, actually. There have been times in my own life when failures in my ventures have been the discipline of the Lord. I knew at the time. I was not walking with the Lord, and had put my hand to this and that project, and when I started hitting walls and limitations and ultimate demise, I knew it was the Lord blocking my path.

'Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it...' (Psalm 127:1)

'... what the Lord shuts, no man can open.'
(Revelation 3:8)

I was like Jonah watching men on the boat throw precious cargo off it. Jonah knew in his gut that they were wasting cargo, because *he* needed to be

thrown off the boat, or nothing would be accomplished. It was him on the run from God, not anything to do with the logistics or cargo of the moment.

Now some believers around me did not know, but I did.

However, there are other times in my life when I have hit some challenges, testing, when my faith was strong, and my following *'in step with the Spirit.'* (Galatians 5:25) There were 'walls' and costs that cut across my path, as I shared my faith with colleagues and others. I lost jobs, money, face. There were believers in my life that did not see the truth of this situation, either. They felt my rocky road was about myself, primarily, and not to do with the Lord's call and lead in my life.

So there are times when people will not discern the Lord's discipline at work in your life (but I hope you do!), and there will be times people think God is somehow disciplining you, or you yourself are to blame for things, when, in fact, there is a *'pruning'* at work – not because you're out of favor with God, but actually because you are a fruit-bearer for God.

'Jesus said, '... every branch that does bear fruit, my Father prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.' (John 15:2)

Listen to the Lord. Listen when he is speaking to you about you, and listen when he is speaking to you about another.

Mission

Life is busy as it is. Survival is a full-time job. Jesus knew this, Jesus lived this, like the rest of us.

Christianity is not something that is separate to our daily lives. It is not another thing we have to factor in. Well, honestly, 'Christianity' might be, but Christ is not, and therefore Christianity should not be.

Christ is God. We are humans who need to know God, worship God, take hold of his forgiveness, help, salvation, joy, encouragement. We need God. We have found him in Christ. Life is short. We need Jesus to give us life after death. This is what Christianity is about.

Now, with Christ in our lives, our hearts, we not only have a message and hope to share with others, but we have a new kingdom – an eternal one – that we can build. I say 'can build', because according to the Bible, we can go through this life, even as believers, and not build God's kingdom. We can be saved, but with no inheritance of note in the next life.

'Each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved – even though only as one escaping through the flames.' (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

This is an admonishment to work, but to work God's way. God's way is a work of 'faith', a childlike following of Christ. In this following we invest, we store up treasures in heaven – often without even realizing! (Matthew 25:31-46, note vs.37)

Jesus was clear about this. Look at this stunning word of Jesus:

'The work of God is this, to believe in the one he has sent.' (John 6:29)

As a believer in Jesus, and a follower, you build the eternal kingdom. You are making bricks of gold, laying bricks of gold. You are living your life worshipping the Lord, and doing what you do in his name, with your heart set on him:

'Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.'
(Colossians 3:17)

Now, my friend, there may come a time in your life when life itself, and survival, is not fulfilling you. I would defer to you that the Lord may be calling you deeper into his mission work – where you start to invest more in this, less in that.

At one time you did what you did in the name of Jesus – work and play. But now, maybe, the Lord is prompting you to do some more specific mission work. Not where you are bringing his name into your activities, but where you are bring your activities into his gospel and name.

The Lord may be calling you a little deeper into specific mission. For example, praying for

colleagues, and asking God for opportunities to share the gospel with them. Or, maybe, giving more money to particular outreach work, where people are not just being blessed by Christian charity, but reached and spoken to about Jesus Christ.

Is the Lord calling you a little deeper into kingdom action? Is food not fulfilling you? Look at what Jesus said to his disciples:

'I have food that you know nothing about... My food is to do the Father's will, and to finish his work.' (John 4:32,34)

There was a time in my life where it was challenging enough just to be true to Jesus in my everyday life. Just being a Christian in the secret places of my own, personal life was tough enough – and this is where it matters most! (Matthew 6:4,6,18)

But then the Lord pressed in. He moved in on me with an increased measure of 'call', a hunger for more spiritual purpose in my everyday life. In my personal case it was a call and an equipping to evangelize, i.e. to share the message of the gospel with people directly.

After grappling with this call and pressure, I can remember the day I 'braved' it. I asked a colleague in a natural, Spirit-led prompting, who Jesus Christ was to her. Her whole face lit up, and it was as if I had accessed the real her. It was a privilege, it was exciting. She began to share with me about God in her life, her story, and where she was at now. I began to share with her the call of God on her life, his love, his power to redeem. I was so impacted at the 'world' I had just accessed by sharing Jesus. I had accessed the true spirit of the person, and their

true standing with God. And I was honored by God to meet them in this space and help navigate them to eternity. I was hooked!

Oasis

We don't get far in life before the idea, the picture of an 'oasis', means something to us. An oasis is not just water in a desert – literally and metaphorically. It's escape, safety, quietness, beauty.

If I ever 'choose' a screensaver or a calendar, it's always the paradise island, the blue skies and crystal waters.

But it is not long after an 'oasis' comes to mean something to us, that we discover there really is no oasis here on earth. Not in the pure sense that we long for. Why? Because our real issues in life are from the inside out. You can go to an oasis, but you can't be an oasis. You take with you mortality, sickness, dishonesty, your past, and the untrustworthiness of other people.

I don't mean to be morbid, or a kill-joy. But I trust you know what I mean. We long not just for 'escape' in the sense of vacation, but *the* 'Escape' in the sense of that **'life that is truly life.'**
(1 Timothy 6:19)

We don't just want to change location for a while, like in a 2-week holiday; we want our soul to change location, our past to be *truly* forgiven, and even rewritten. (*Jesus does this!* – 2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

We don't only want a healed spirit, but a *'new heart and new spirit.'* (Ezekiel 36:26) We don't just want the 'safety' and comfort of a hotel room for a few days, we want walls around us that will never decay or crumble, and surround us no matter where we go or find ourselves.

'The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and are safe!'

(Proverbs 18:10)

Jesus said something that was 'transporting'. He said that if we believed in him, streams of water would flow *'from within us.'* (John 7:37-38) This picture of flowing water as from a spring within our soul, is different – deeper, other – than any spring or oasis we could experience here on earth. This is from the inside out.

Another verse I love about God's presence over us, all around us, is this:

'Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls. All your waves and breakers have swept over me.' (Psalm 42:7)

Here there is a vision of tumbling and tossing in the Spirit of God, complete takeover. It is blissful. It is all Spirit.

The true oasis that our souls cry for – or even 'glimpse' in metaphors here on earth – is Spirit. It is God's Spirit. It is Christ in our souls, and his kingdom up ahead.

Revelation Reflection

I know Jesus is real. I know he is true. I also know that the space of 'spirit' in our lives is so much more expansive than the space of what we can see, and what we think we know.

I know this – this revelation of God's truth – but I can't seem to 'hold' it, or contain it. I think of trying to convey this truth to a neighbor, and I just don't have the power to convey it. I can say it, describe it, but even in myself I feel like I'm trying to do the impossible. This is not a 'truth' that can be conveyed or imparted through human effort or persuasion.

So I think of how God has actually revealed himself to mankind. Well, he did just that – he 'revealed', it is 'revelation'. God's revelation, not ours. Mankind could not find God – could not, and still cannot.

'Where is the wise person?... Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?... the world through its wisdom did not know God...'

(1 Corinthians 1:20-21)

We cannot find God through our wisdom, and we cannot 'impart' or convey God through our wisdom. God revealed himself to us. We share him by sharing, or 'reflecting' his own revelation.

'In his light we see light.' (Psalm 36:9)

Moses was close to God in a personal way. One time Moses asked God to see his glory. So Moses gazed upon God's glory for days. When Moses returned to the people, the glory of God was now reflecting off Moses' face. It was so bright that he

had to cover his face when dealing with people. Moses could not describe God's glory. But he could see it. And when he truly gazed on it, he reflected it. (Exodus 33-34)

This captures the nature of how we share Jesus and his gospel. Yes, we do need to 'speak' it. But we need to speak it in the Spirit of God. How? Well, by walking with him, listening to him.

'How can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?... Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.' (Romans 10:14-15,17)

The most powerful moments in a person's testimony about coming to see and believe in Jesus, usually are not to do with convincing arguments. It is usually to do with a truth or revelation of God actually 'sinking in'. We often hear of 'suddenly seeing' or 'suddenly hearing as if for the first time...'

Jesus called us to stand with him, 'acknowledge' him before men. (Luke 12:8-9) He did not tell us to gather up all the answers to defend his truth, archaeology, infallibility...etc. He called us to testify to him.

'Let us, therefore, go outside the camp and bear the disgrace he bore.' (Hebrews 13:13)

When I was a teenager and began following Jesus, the hard part was 'being' one of his disciples – stopping cursing and immoral behavior, and telling my friends that my 'reason' for this was because I

believed in Jesus and was now following him. Standing with him, and ‘testifying’ to him as Lord of my life, was hard.

The easy moments in my early days were when people were asking me about this or that, and I found myself in intelligent, deep conversation. That’s not hard. That’s the easy part, because there is already a framework of respect around this moment and my ‘knowledge’ of the Bible; there is quiet opportunity to express understanding and kindness, establishing rapport with the listener. But when this ‘respect’ and framework has not been established, and I find myself in a circle of boys talking immorally, and I have to step away or avert my eyes, and then am asked by the group ‘why’ I’m doing this... here I stand with Christ, here I testify. This is standing with Christ without the buffer of explanation and reputation.

And it is here, my friend, sharing humbly and honestly with another that Jesus Christ is Lord, here the power of God moves. Remember that the gospel is the *‘power of God for salvation’*. (Romans 1:16) The gospel is that Jesus is. When we testify to him, faith bears fruit, and his Word will not return empty. (Isaiah 55:11) Here the Holy Spirit moves to convict hearts about your faith-filled, and Spirit-led testimony. (John 16:8)

Humbly standing with Jesus – and not your wise words of persuasion – is what honors God and breaks forth power.

‘Whether he is a sinner or not, I do not know. One thing I do know. I was blind and now I see.’
(John 9:25)

Number Our Days

Since I was quite young I remember the conflict in my mind when people would say, *'Well, at least they're alive!'* Let me explain...

Sometimes people would say this in the context of things being quite bad, even in health, and yet the fact that they were still 'alive' seemed to be the most important thing. Now don't get me wrong, life is amazing, and we must prize it, we must hold on to it! But there is another 'prize' we are called to also focus on, even *'set before us'*, and that is life hereafter.

'Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away... Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.' (Psalm 90:10,12)

Numbering our days is primarily about noting their very short number. This is why the Psalmist even specifies the numbers, *'seventy... or eighty'*. He also notes that the *'best'* of these are *'but sorrow'*. The Psalmist is not being morbid. He is noting the fact that we all *'fly away'* after a short life here. So when he speaks of numbering our days, it is so that we *do* use life to take hold of that ***'life that is truly life.'*** (1 Timothy 6:19) Anything else is futile. This life speeds along. We must note this fact, and take hold of God.

Now, the life hereafter is much longer, and less urgent than this life. When we pass into glory, and through the (very real) gates of God's city, we won't need to be numbering anything, nor straining to get our focus right. There will be no darkness to

deceive, no mortality to rage against. (*When you can, read and ponder these two short passages at the end of the Bible, for a stunning glimpse of heaven itself: Revelation 21:1-5 and Revelation 22:1-5*)

So speaking of heaven, let's consider the afterlife 'focal point' briefly.

Jesus himself had heaven in his sights, which helped him '*endure the cross*':

'For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.' (Hebrews 12:2)

Paul tells us that our '***faith and love***' in Christ, actually '***spring from the hope stored up for us in heaven***'. (Colossians 1:5) There is a picture here of the winds of heaven actually pouring down to and through our hearts, and rising again in faith and love. It lifts our vision upward to the Source, even when considering the faith and love in our hearts.

This heavenly focus was very much a discipline of Paul, and he called us to do likewise:

'So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.'
(2 Corinthians 4:18)

I love the picture we're given about Abraham. He was a man who lived in the desert and moved around, as God led him. But look what it says of his ultimate focus and hope, in the book of Hebrews:

'By faith Abraham... was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.' (Hebrews 11:8-10)

Jesus cast his disciples' eyes and focus to heaven, when he said, **'In my Father's house there are many rooms. I am going to prepare a place for you, and when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that you can be where I am...'** (John 14:1-3)

Stephen caught a glimpse of heaven when he was moments from going there. (Acts 7:55-56) Elijah never saw death but was 'picked up' in a chariot of fire and whisked away. (2 Kings 2:11) Jesus himself ascended to heaven, visibly moving up and out of sight into the clouds. (Acts 1:9)

Paul stated clearly, **'I would prefer to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far...'** (Philippians 1:23)

It is natural and true that we value and hold to this life. But this life *'flies away'*. Jesus came to save us, now and forevermore. Take time to contemplate heaven. Take time to consider where we are going after we die. Allow the beauty - the stunning beauty of this truth and reality - to encourage your hearts here and now.

'May the beauty of the Lord our God rest on us.' (Psalm 90:17)

Bling

God has written his laws on people's hearts.
(Jeremiah 31:33; Romans 2:14-15)

On the one hand the state of the world disturbs me. People are corrupt, and immoral. The inclinations of the heart is evil. I see it in myself. I see it on the news. I hear it in conversation.

On the other hand, I see how powerfully God's hand *is* on the world, and how powerfully his Holy Spirit is *holding back* evil, and stinging the consciences of people, even in secret. If God were to pull back his conviction of sin, the world would destroy itself in a matter of hours. There is a powerful, merciful, hand of the Father on every soul.

Some of the 'best' people I know, do not know Jesus. They just have a conscience of right and wrong, and they are tender-hearted and live good lives. Here we see the move of God in people!

However, there is a disturbing deception that dates back to when God first revealed himself to people, to the nation of Israel. It seems that everything 'physical' or 'material' that we identify with God, will soon become either an idol we worship instead of God⁸, or something that brands us as deeply hypocritical - in that we 'have' or wear or tattoo something of Christ on ourselves, but we are not living his life.

'Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.' (1 John 2:4)

⁸ E.g. The Bronze Snake (Numbers 21:9; 2 Kings 18:4)

This hypocrisy in the believer is worse than ignorance and general disobedience in the unbeliever. It is *'salt that has lost its saltiness'*, according to Jesus. He goes on to say, jarringly, that it is now fit for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled *'underfoot'*. (Matthew 5:13)

Again, Jesus addresses this issue with the churches in Revelation 2-3. He speaks to seven churches, and only one of them is without rebuke and strong warning. This striking verse comes from this 'address' from Christ to the church of Laodicea:

'Because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth.'
(Revelation 3:16)

When Jesus actually walked the earth, he warned his disciples about the pervasive, destructive 'yeast' of the Pharisees, which he defined as 'hypocrisy'. (Luke 12:1) Regarding hypocrisy, Paul writes:

'God's name is being blasphemed... because of you.' (Romans 2:24)

We are accountable for 'stumbling blocks' we put in the way of others. We can actually be accountable for another person's sin, according to Jesus, if we were the cause. (Matthew 18:6)

Hypocrisy – wearing a cross but living immorally – undermines the cross in the eyes of people. They see the cross, and with it they see your lifestyle that denies the cross. And so they see no power in the cross, no hope in Christ. We will answer for this.

Jeremiah the prophet spoke so strongly to the issue of being one of God's people, but not living God's life.

'Behold, you have spoken [prayed, testified, worn a cross, etc.], but you have done all the evil that you could.' (Jeremiah 3:5)

Isaiah puts it this way, which is quoted by Jesus himself:

'Your lips are near to God, but your hearts are far from him.'

(Isaiah 29:13, quoted by Jesus in Mark 7:6)

A strong verse in the New Testament puts it this way:

'They profess to know God, but by their actions they deny him.' (Titus 1:16)

It's important that we encourage one another to *walk the walk*. Jesus himself preached repentance and faith. (Mark 1:15) The whole preparation 'campaign' for the coming and presence of Jesus, was John the Baptist preaching repentance of sin.

We know the enemy will infuse the concept of repentance with his own death spirit, twisting it into 'legalism'. So we ask for more of the Holy Spirit over our understanding of repentance. Legalism has nothing to do with true, liberating repentance of sin. It is a dark, controlling, self-righteous spirit. Paul is aggressive about this spirit, if you read through the book of Galatians.

But I fear that my generation, perhaps stung by legalism, has stepped away from repentance altogether. This is only possible if we also step

away from reading the Scriptures, and from communing with Christ in prayer, worship, relationship.

I see so many crosses on necklaces and rings and tattoos and fish stickers, etc. Maybe it's also where I live. (Southern State of the US, NC). But I also see these same people living immorally. The cross swinging off their eye-catching chain, but a complete denial of Christ in their lives. This is to take the name of the Lord in vain. (Ex 20:7) This is to undermine the meaning of the cross. This is a stumbling block to our testimony to the world that hungers, thirsts, for truth.

'They dress the wounds of my people as though they were not serious. 'Peace, peace!' they say, when there is no peace.' (Jeremiah 6:14)

No News is Good News!

Two personal things I want to consider. First, when I share Jesus with people – in word, or through material, or even in action – I sometimes wonder if any of the gospel is actually getting through. I feel like everything is just being absorbed and overlooked, or completely missed. No impact.

However, at other times (so we're onto point two here), when I share Jesus with people, I see how much of the gospel has already been part of their life. Not, maybe, as a personal, clear belief and faith, but so much influence! They have a reverence for the Bible, for prayer, for Jesus. I see a ground quite deeply tilled, a soul that has been invested in, in many ways by many people. And as a result there is an 'openness' to more. There is an openness to a deeper conversation. Some of these people have a living faith, but without the 'jargon' and personal clarity. They are known by the Lord. (2 Timothy 2:19) Others, perhaps, are '**close to the kingdom**', as Jesus said to one man. (Mark 12:34)

Now, point one and point two above kinda merge and overlap. And I need to remember that there needs to be much 'seeding', and ground preparation, for the soil to be good and bear fruit. Things I share, in Jesus' name, even though I feel they are 'missed', are true, living, strong spiritual arrows. The '*Word*' is the '*sword of the Spirit*'. (Ephesians 6:17). And God's word never comes back empty! (Isaiah 55:11) I need to remember, believe, and pray into this truth.

I was also reflecting on this point: A movement of evil does not rise up or show itself, without first gathering force. There is a time period where evil is

not checked, not frustrated, not challenged, and here it takes root.

I believe that Christians, doing their part daily to pray, to walk the walk, and to share Jesus, are constantly cutting across the schemes of the enemy. You might feel that your faith – and the faith of the church – is not making dramatic headway, but the truth is, if evil in a place is not breaking forth in systems and movements, then the testimony and work of the saints is truly bearing much fruit. It is keeping the gates open to the name and power of Jesus. No news, in a sense, is good news! In other words, a quiet space or land, where the testimony of Christ can continue to ‘seed’ quietly through God’s people, well, the very ‘quietness’ of this space, this freedom to share Christ, is fruit! It is a healing of the land.⁹

‘Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.’
(1 Thessalonians 4:11-12)

‘I urge that... petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.’
(1 Timothy 2:1-4)

Now if we fail to ‘salt’ this space, if we grow lethargic in our freedom and opportunity to advance

⁹ 2 Chronicles 7:14 – ‘... and I will heal your land.’

the kingdom, we could lose the advantage. We could wake up in months or years, and realize that a deception in the hearts and minds of people has become quite pervasive, and has now ‘budded’ into systems or philosophies or computer games or habits or policies... And this taking of ground could have come because our lights were not on their stands, but under bowls:

‘You are the light of the world... People do not light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.’ (Matthew 5:14-16)

I say all this to say – ***‘Do not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.’*** (Galatians 6:9)

What you are doing even quietly – prayers and actions and gentle words of testimony – may not seem to be ‘breaking ground’, but it is! You are ‘salting’ the ground, and lighting paths here and there, and darkness just isn’t able to gather force.

Quiet Waters

God is not something or someone we just choose to believe in, or not believe in. He is also someone we need to get to know – *and* believe in. Let me explain what I mean here...

Sometimes I – and others – talk about God as if we already know him, and just need to decide whether we believe in him or not. It is as if to believe in God is to already ‘accept’ something or someone we intuitively know. In one sense yes, in another sense, no.

‘Yes’ insofar as the ‘reality’ of God is a revelation in the core of mankind that can be accepted or not accepted, acknowledged or denied.

‘...what may be known about God is plain to people, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.’ (Romans 1:19-20)

So when someone is considering ‘acknowledging’ this revelation in their soul – i.e. that there is a God and he needs to be acknowledged – well, this is a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ that does need to be selected, switched on/off. This is the question of ‘yes’ or ‘no’. But this is only the beginning. This is only stepping into the realm of truth. Then there is the key question of ‘*Who*’...

Who is God? This question - and its answer - are everything!

Saul was a man who believed deeply in God. But he had the 'who' wrong, or incomplete, and this even led him to persecute true believers of Jesus.

'... suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied.' (Acts 9:3-5)

This revelation of Jesus being God, one with the Father, and the 'door'¹⁰ to salvation, to forgiveness, to the presence of God in your soul, this is not intuitive. This truth does not come automatically with a belief – even a genuine belief – in God.

'How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?... Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.' (Romans 10:14-15,17)

And then, my friends, after hearing the gospel message about Jesus – 'God with us'¹¹ – and opening our hearts to Jesus, to his Spirit, we then begin to get to know his character, his voice, his ways, his wonder, his mysteries.

'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.' (Isaiah 55:8-9)

¹⁰ John 10:9

¹¹ Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 7:14

Now we come to the 'quiet waters'. The quiet waters that Jesus has for you, even here and now.

You see, even in the midst of suffering and sorrow in this broken world, salvation has come. Where the favor of God falls – on those who see and receive Jesus Christ – peace falls.

'The angel said to the shepherds, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people. Today... a Savior has been born to you; he is the Lord.'

Suddenly a great heavenly host appeared... praising... saying,

'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.'

(Luke 2:10-14)

We meet Jesus where he is at. We lock our eyes on his eyes. We don't philosophize about what or who we believe a sovereign God *should* be, and then fit Christ into this philosophy or theology.¹² No. We meet Christ. We see him. We hear him. We watch him. And we ***'take captive our thoughts and make them subject to Christ.'*** (2 Corinthians 10:3-5) We submit our 'ways' to his ways, ***'in line with the gospel.'*** (Galatians 2:14) We quieten our minds, and let them reshape, ***'transform'*** and ***'renew'***, according to the person and truth that Christ is.¹³

Here we find ourselves with Jesus. Here he takes our hand leads us to 'quiet waters', even though outside some dark waters rage.

¹² Colossians 2:2-4,8

¹³ Romans 12:1-2; Psalm 19:7

Here he loves all people, but walks only you to a quiet brook. Here he has compassion on all people, but meets just you in peace. Here he longs even for his enemies, but lays a table before just you, closes the door, and dines with you.¹⁴

‘The Lord is my Shepherd... He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He lay a table before me in the presence of my enemies.’

(Psalm 23)

¹⁴ 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; Matthew 18:14; Matthew 9:36; Revelation 3:20

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