

**SPIRITUAL POWER**  
**For The Underground Church**

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THE LAMB  
WHO WAS SLAIN  
HAS BEGUN  
HIS REIGN



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## YOUR BURNING BUSH

(Based on Exodus 2:11-3:12)

You can be sure that Moses had been a religious man all his life. Though he was raised in Pharaoh's palace he was a Hebrew, and he never forgot that he was a Hebrew. But in those early days, Moses' religion, like the religion of so many of us, was mixed with a thousand impulses of his own flesh.

He killed an Egyptian for abusing a Jew and figured he had done a religious thing.

It was a blundering religion that got him into trouble and finally drove him into exile in Midian.

It was a mixture of faith and doubt.

One can imagine that Moses alternated, as so many of us do, between moments of deep piety as he stood on those wild semi-desert slopes, and moments of excruciating doubt.

"Where is the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

Why does he not hear the cries of his children?

Why am I spending my life out here in this wilderness away from my people, cut off from my own soul?"

One can imagine that there were entire days when he did nothing but pray as he looked out over those flocks, whole days when he did nothing but brood,

and wonder,

and question, as the years of his life kept slipping by.

Then came the day when Moses met God personally at the burning bush.

***"Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."***

Now a clear road is opened up before Moses and God says,

"Take it! Walk in it! Do what I tell you!"

Moses' days of standing around brooding and guessing and wondering are over. Now it's either "Go and accomplish the work that I've sent you to do", or "Take your own road and the consequences it leads to".

Like Moses, in those early days, we too may be religious and still not be getting anywhere. We say our prayers at night, and think about God, but deep within is the question;

- Is God really there?
- Are things really the way I want to believe they are?
- Does it make any difference whether I believe or don't believe?

Sometimes you seem to have faith – strong faith – you feel as though you could move mountains. And sometimes there's nothing but doubt. Gradually you bring your faith and doubt into balance. Now you have what they call sane, “reasonable religion.”

You have enough faith to quiet your uneasy conscience when it starts jumping.

And you have enough doubt to keep you from turning into a fanatic.

And so you walk down the road with other decent, sensible people doing your bit for humanity and taking your share of this world's delights.

But then one day you come to a place where the road divides.

- The branch to the right arches up into the mountains.
- The branch to the left bends down toward the mud flats.

As you stand at that fork in the road, God speaks to you.

"Take the branch to the right", He says.

"No", says your flesh. "Don't be a fool, take the one to the left."

Now you've come to your burning bush, the days of your neat little compromise are over. Now it's either the way of faith or the way of doubt. One or the other.

There may be some reading these words who have already passed that fork in the road – you've made that crucial choice. Your life has now begun to ascend or to descend, as the case may be.

But there are many who have yet to reach that place of decision. You are travelling on your merry way – a kind of dual citizen. You have a claim on heaven, and a claim on earth. But soon, you too will come to your burning bush.

No one can tell you when or how it will be.

- It may happen while you're sitting in your kitchen drinking a cup of coffee.
- Or when you're standing by the lifeless body of a loved one.
- Or when you hear the crack of gunshot piercing the night in your quiet neighborhood.
- Or when you're sitting in a chair reading the New Testament.
- It is even possible that you might arrive at your burning bush this very hour.

But when it comes, everything that happened to Moses on Mt. Horeb will happen to you.

Some ordinary thing of this world will begin to burn before your eyes like the bush which was enveloped in flames but remained green.

- It may be the face of a child in the newspaper one day that will somehow burn in your mind all day long. You won't be able to forget it.
- Or a passage of scripture that flashes upon you with glory and brands itself on your memory.
- Or a word someone speaks to you that turns on a light in your mind.

And out of that fire – out of that light – God will begin to call your name even as he called, "Moses, Moses".

Suddenly you'll forget all your questions about whether there is a God or isn't a God. And all your questions about whether the Bible is right or wrong, or whether fanatics are crazy or not. And you will know, without the shadow of a doubt, that right then and there God

is calling you by name, not Preacher Jones telling you how it is – God Himself calling you to open your ears and listen to what He has to say. 99 times out of 100 there will be no audible voice, no vision, no bells ringing, no angel choirs, but you will know that it is God.

***"Don't come any closer. Take off your shoes, for the place where you are standing is holy ground"***, said God to Moses.

And now you will begin to know what it means to be standing on holy ground. Whenever you are in the presence of God, in such a way that God is speaking to you, you're on holy ground.

- You take off your shoes,
- you get down on your knees,
- you bow your head,
- and you confess your sins.

The soldier who watched Christ die,

- beat his breast,
- walked away with a shudder running through his body,
- knew that he was on holy ground!

God the Spirit was speaking in his heart as God the Son laid down his life for that man's sins, and he was filled with awe.

Pity help the people whose eyes are open and they see that Cross and what it means, but they refuse to take off their shoes!

Pity help the people who see their Redeemer and hear His word of forgiveness, yet they stand there as if they're at a carnival!

When God brings you up on Mt. Horeb and reveals Himself, and manifests His glory, take off your shoes and bow down before Him! Humble yourself in His sight even if it makes you look like a fool in the eyes of men.

And now, God begins to tell Moses what He wants him to do.

"Come, I will send you to Pharaoh.... there is work for you to perform, by my power."

God doesn't reveal himself to you so that you can sit down and write a book about your mystical experience. He reveals Himself to you to tell you what He wants you to do – to put you to work.

***"Go work in my vineyard and when the day's over, I'll give you what is right."***

***"You didn't choose me, I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bring forth fruit."***

If it were merely a matter of saving your soul, God would have wrapped your soul in plastic and whisked it off to heaven long ago.

***"As many as received him, as believed on his name, to them gave he power to become sons and daughters of God."***

....and they live the life of sons and daughters of God,

....and they do the work of sons and daughters of God.

"Occupy till I come!"

"Prepare the earth for my return!"

Now if you haven't been to the burning bush, you may still be able to sit around and be pious. But once you've been to the burning bush you're going to have to get out there among those people and work.

Your job is to bring them out of bondage. Get them out of the clutches of Pharaoh. Take them through the waters of remission. Show them the way to the Promised Land.

"Who am I Lord that I should do such things?"

"What do you mean 'who are you?' If I say I'll be with you it doesn't matter who you are. Go and do what I command you!"

When Moses walked down from Mt. Horeb he was no longer a citizen of Midian, or a citizen of Egypt, or anywhere else.

- He was a citizen of Heaven.

- He belonged to a city that cannot be found on this earth,

- whose builder and maker is God.

And for the rest of his life and forevermore,

his eyes are on Heaven,

his mind is on Heaven,

he gets his orders from Heaven,

he lives in the dimension of Heaven,

he grapples with earthly problems as he never grappled with any problem before, but he solves them with the power of Heaven.

And when you walk down the mountain from your burning bush, you too belong no longer to this earth.

***"For our citizenship is in Heaven from whence also we look for the Savior....",*** says Paul in an epistle.

And, if our citizenship is in Heaven, that's where our minds are, that's where our eyes are.

***"Our Father who art in Heaven....."***

The proof of whether or not a person is really in Christ is,

where's their citizenship?

where do they belong?

what country are they living for?

***"For many walk, of whom I have told you often and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the Cross of Christ"---*** even though they claim to be Christians.

***"Their God is their belly. Their glory is in their shame. They mind earthly things."***

They're not citizens of Heaven. Their minds and their bodies are chained to the earth.

When you walk away from your burning bush a citizen of Heaven,

- keep your citizenship alive,

- by keeping your mind where it belongs.

***“If you are raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on things on the earth. For you have died; your life is hid with Christ in God, so that when Christ, who is our life appears, you will also appear with him in glory.”***

One thing is sure: Every single soul reading these words has either come to the burning bush, or will soon be there. If it hasn't happened to you yet, it will.... soon.

When it does,

- May God help you to take that road that rises up toward that heavenly city in the distance and stay on it.

- May God help you to walk right through the troubles of this world with your eyes on Him.

- May God help you to stand before Pharaoh and his magicians and every high thing that exalts itself against God....

that you may do the work that God put you in this world to do, by the power of the Spirit he gives you to do it with. So when the end comes for you and for this age, you may be able to stand before Him without shame.

***“Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.”***

***“Go, make disciples of all nations.....”***



## **HE GATHERS, HE SIFTS**

When Jesus saves, he saves all the way. He doesn't save you for five minutes or a year-and-a-half. He saves you forever. Nor does he save you from Hell, and then let you go through the rest of your life having temper tantrums or going on weekend binges.

***"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away and behold, all things have become new."***

***"Whoever follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life."***

***"He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"***

From the moment Jesus Christ takes up his abode in you, and forevermore, **if you walk with Him**, your life becomes a fountain of living water in this desert-dry world. Your mouth becomes an oracle of the living God. Your hands, as the hands of your Lord, lift up the fallen and feed the hungry and heal the broken-hearted.

Salvation is not just a feeling, it is a life. When you went down to the altar in some church and fell on your knees, there was a feeling of God's presence, an inward peace. Or should you come down to the altar today and ask Christ to come into you and take over, you'll feel relieved and clean. But the important thing is not that feeling. The important thing is the life, the divine life, that burns in you when you get up from your knees and start living as a reborn son or daughter of God.

The life of the Son of God in you is a life that stays with you when the going gets rough, a life that increases in purity and power as you obey its leadings. Your body ages. Your circumstances keep changing. But the life of the Son of God in you burns on and on, brighter and brighter, stronger and stronger.

***Blessed are the men whose strength is in thee, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. As they go through the valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs. The early rain also, covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength.***  
***Psalm 84***

And in the strength of God they bear fruit. They bring forth a harvest. They turn men from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

These so-called "saved" Christians, who are sitting around in their spiritual plastic bags, with their hands folded and their eyes shut to reality, these so-called "saved" Christians who never lift a finger to help their fellow man, who never go half-a-block out of their way unless they smell some kind of reward for their ego or their pocket-book, who think they're saved because they had "that feeling" once-upon-a-time. Time will test them. Time will show what they are. Give them a little time and you'll hear them hollering, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

No, my friend, the proof that you are saved is not that feeling. The proof that you are born of God is that you are walking with His Son, even when His road takes you through fire. In fact, that's why we're put through fire; to sift out those who love Jesus Christ from those who are in love with their own emotions.

The people who stood along the road into Jerusalem that day just couldn't help themselves, as Jesus came riding along, the multitudes singing and the children waving their palms. They were overcome by a spirit of praise. Men who'd never cried since they were children begin to weep. Women who ruled their households without ever raising their voices start shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

Who can explain it? These dead, flat, colorless people are praising God and calling this man the Messiah! Heaven has broken out-upon-that street and there's glory all around. Their eyes are opened and they can see that this is God's Anointed. "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" "That God should let me live to see this day with my own eyes! Praise His name!"

Now the same Spirit that poured out glory on that multitude has lately been stirring this church as He has never stirred this church before. I'm not saying that this is the only church where this is happening. I know that it is happening in many places in this city and across the earth. But it is happening here. Many of you reading these words have already been caught up in this spirit. You've been awakened. You've begun to see the Son of God with new eyes. There's power moving in you that you never knew before in all your days.

And some of you will be touched by this thing for the first time today. Something inside you will break and there will be a flood of God's forgiveness pouring over your mind and rushing through your heart.

You will see Jesus by faith. And you will worship Him. You will fall on your knees before Him.

For some of you it will take a little longer. Perhaps you'll awaken from a dream some night soon and you will know that the Spirit of Christ is in the room. Before long, in some way, every soul who is hungry for God will be awakened to a new vision of the Son of God.

People who never came to a bible study in all these years will start turning up at bible studies with a Bible in their hand, a Bible they suddenly begin to read and love. People, who in all these years never talked about anything after church but the weather and the latest gossip, will now be talking about the things of God.

People will begin to pray for each other as never before, and for their friends and for their enemies.... and gathering to worship God and His beloved Son will become more important to you than food and drink.

You'll want to gather with others believers to fellowship and worship together. You'll have to come. It will no longer be a duty or a habit or an occasional ritual you go through to prove you're respectable. It will be both necessary and a thing of joy.

People in the neighborhood, people among your friends will catch wind of this thing and come, and be caught up in the Spirit of God with the rest of us. Again and again you will look up and wonder if you're "seeing things" as someone you never ever expected to see here walks in.... perhaps kneels at this rail.

How fast this thing will develop or how long it will go on I do not know. It has only barely begun and it is already glorious. But you might as well know now that this glorious time of revival and God-consciousness and worship and praise that we have begun to enjoy will be followed by a sifting.

Jesus gathers the multitudes to Himself, gives them vision, blesses them. Then He sifts. He shakes that multitude. He causes the winds of God to blow upon that multitude. He builds a fire under that multitude and soon the dross is consumed and only the gold is left. The chaff is driven away in the wind and only the wheat is left. The half-baked souls who want a cheap salvation are offended by His words and only disciples, true disciples, are left.

In Matthew 21 we read that as soon as He reached the Temple this King of Zion, meek and sitting upon an ass, gets off that ass, climbs the Temple steps and starts turning the place inside-out. He drives out the merchants, upsets the tables of the money-changers.

***"It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of thieves.'"***

This was the beginning of the sifting.

Read through to the end of Matthew and you'll see how that sifting goes on---how Jesus offends more and more people by calling them to turn that Palm Sunday joy into concrete living, obedience, true worship of the living God day-by-day and hour-by-hour. And this is precisely what Jesus is going to do with the multitude He is gathering and is going to be gathering throughout the world in the coming days. He is going to gather. Then He is going to sift it down to the disciples who are serious. Then He is going to send those disciples forth to gather others and sift them down. This is, and will be, going on in many places, until He has literally gathered and sifted the whole earth. Then comes the End.

And there's one thing which determines whether you will remain true or fall away when the sifting comes: your obedience.

Not your grasp of the doctrines.

Not your good intentions.

Not your strong religious feelings.

Your obedience to Jesus Christ.

You have to do more than say, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" You have to do what the Son of David tells you to do or your "Hosannas" will turn to "Crucify! Crucify!"

Obedience: The disciples "went and did as Jesus commanded them." And Jesus, riding that donkey, was doing what His Father commanded Him. He was riding that donkey toward His cross.

***And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.***

The Kingdom of God is made up of those people who obey the Son of God--- Just as the Son obeyed His Father, so we obey the Son. We don't just do good deeds according to our own whims. We obey Him. That obedience to Him is our life, our strength, our power.

As we obey Him, He lives His life in us. As we obey Him, He manifests the Kingdom of God through us.

Please, for your own good, understand what Jesus Christ is really after as He breathes His Spirit of glory and holiness upon us today.

- He's glad to see our tears of repentance.

- He's glad to see you kneeling and surrendering yourself to Him.

- He's glad to hear you calling on His name and He will answer you and bless you.

But what He really looks for in you, as you weep and kneel and pray, is a heart that is set to obey his commandments. It is the only thing that will hold you when He begins to sift.

Is your heart set to obey His commandments?

***"If you love me you will keep my commandments."***

This is my commandment:

- that you love one another as I have loved you.

- love your neighbor in deed and in truth. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, welcome the stranger.

- confess me before men without shame.

- abide in me and let my words abide in you.

The blessing of Christ is for everyone. But in that blessing is a call to obey Him---all the way...with your whole life ... even unto death. God help us to answer that call now, while the door is still open.

O Jesus, I confess that I have been far from what you have called me to be. I fall on my face before your Cross, name my sins, and ask to be made clean by your blood. Then give me power by your mighty Spirit to begin anew to follow you all the way, whatever the cost, to serve you wherever you put me, however you choose to use me, until the hour of your glorious appearing. Amen.

## SURE OF THINGS HOPED FOR

*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, certain of what we do not see. Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)*

If the church we belong to is going to be more than a Sunday morning spiritual Supermarket, where we get our goodies for the week (hopefully) and go our separate ways ... if we're going to function as the Body of Christ. Function as the Body of Christ, not only in the assembly where we gather but also out there in the crazy world where we're sent to live and work. And to truly function as his Body, we need a vision....

- a vision we all share,
- a picture in our minds which we all agree is our goal as a body.

Every gift God gives us as a body of believers is given so that we can fulfill a purpose, accomplish a task, move toward a goal, and we are responsible to hold that goal in view and press toward it together.

In each congregation we choose between three possible goals:

**First, we could have as our goal our own survival as an assembly.**

Survival ... times are bad, life is dangerous.

- Let's not over extend ourselves,
- Let's not take any chances,
- Let's pull our wagons in a circle, set up camp, and survive.

**Or secondly, we could choose as our goal to expand our own kingdom.**

We look at what we now have going. Then we calculate the best ways to attract the people who are likely to buy into what we've got here. Then we structure our growth so it keeps on increasing. After all, if we've got five talents why not double them to ten?

But remember, whatever we build has to stand the test of fire. And, if we're merely building a religious kingdom of our own we're building with wood, hay and stubble. One day it will all go up in flames.

**Or, thirdly, we could choose as our goal to see and to fit into the Kingdom of God ... to get a clear picture in our minds of what the kingdom of God is doing on the earth at this hour and enter into that with everything we have.**

***....who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.***  
***Titus 2:11***

....to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

***After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brethren, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name..."***  
***Acts 15:13-14***

***....a people for his name.***

The Kingdom of God is God calling out, raising up, purifying a people for himself. A people who are zealous for good deeds.

***But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.***  
***I Peter 2:9-10***

The Kingdom of God is God raising up a people whose lives are totally given up to him ...

to his service,

to his praise,

to his will.

Jesus died, rose, returned to the Father, poured out the Holy Spirit in order to raise up such a people. Do we see ourselves as such a people? Do we see this assembly as part of this people Jesus is raising up as a sign of his presence on the earth .... as a signal of his imminent return?

***Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, certain of what we do not see.***

The thing we hope for, the goal toward which we press is that we become, in fact, a people who manifest the presence of God in what we do, the way we live, how we think ... that we become an unmistakable sign of the Kingdom of God here, where God has put us. To have faith is to be sure that in God---

We will be such a people, certain that God is now so changing us, and to keep pressing on.

*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, certain of what we do not see.*

Specifically,

**1. Faith is being sure that God is now bringing us into a union with Jesus which absolutely fulfils and transfigures our lives.**

.....union with Jesus, a corporate life lived in his presence.

*Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle around his breast; his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.*

*Revelation 1:12-16*

Notice where this glorious one with the flaming eyes is standing: in the midst of the lampstands; among his people.

We are transformed into a purified, holy, godly people by being in the presence of this life-giving Jesus. Somehow looking into his face, hearing his voice. What else is it that draws us together and holds us,

and lifts us,

and heals us,

and restores us, but Jesus' presence among us?

But we apprehend his presence only by faith, recognize his voice only by faith, by being sure that Jesus is here to join us to himself, to fill us with his Spirit, to transform us into his likeness ... believe this, be sure of it:

"I have drawn near to you," he says, "now you draw near to me."

"Draw near with your heart. Trust me."



*"Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am meek and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls."  
Matthew 11:28-29*

**2. Faith is being sure that God is raising us up as a people who aren't afraid to spend themselves.**

*...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, scorning the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God...*

*...then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys the field...*

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any one serves me, the Father will honor him."  
John 12:24-26*

We go through our lives saving our strength conserving our energy. What are we saving it for? The whole purpose of this life God gave us is to spend it! --- to pour it out! --- to lay it down!

What good is a grain of wheat lying on the shelf? But if you drop it in the ground and let it die, then it produces life.

Faith is being sure that Jesus came forth from his tomb burning with life to reproduce himself in us. And he came forth with life because he was willing to go into that tomb ... to spend himself, to pour himself out.

*"If any one serves me, he must follow me ... If I lay down my life, my servant lays down his life ... If I bear fruit, my servant bears fruit."*

So we renounce our fear of spending ourselves and we get up in the morning, not to see how much we can acquire today, but to pour ourselves out today,

to lay down ourselves today,

- to give,
- to spend,
- to serve!

And now the Spirit of the Lord begins to fill our sails like a mighty rushing wind and we start to move!

**3. Faith is being sure that Jesus is sending us out into our city to bear fruit.**

*"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you."  
John 15:16*

Faith is being sure that we will bear fruit, not just wishing we could bear fruit ... but knowing we will!

We are going to go out into the streets and lanes of this city and bring the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind into the Banquet of God. We are going to go out into the highways and hedges of suburbia and compel them to the Banquet of God.

*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, certain of what we do not see.*

Our goal lies beyond the reach of our natural eye,

- yet in the realm of Spirit,
- in the realm of hope.

We see it,

We press toward it.

And we bring it down into this realm by being sure that God is now raising us up to a life of service in him... more effective, more pure, more fruitful than we could ask or think.

*So let's lay aside our fears and doubts and go out into that harvest field being sure of things hoped for certain of things we do not see.*

**The Master is out there now, waiting for us to join him.**

## **FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT'S POWER**

*As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Christ, John answered them all, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Luke 3:15-16*

The religious leaders of Jerusalem were in a position very much like ours....

- They knew their scriptures,
- They were teachers ... theologians,
- They were acquainted with all the burning issues of the day and had an answer for every problem in society.

People addressed them by their proper titles. They sat up in the chancel and had the better seats at banquets. Yet these religious leaders knew that they were not making an impact ... just as we know that we're not making the impact we need to make. They knew that the generals and the wealthy merchants, and the big shots in Herod's court were laughing at them behind their backs. The masses were restive and unruly and would stop talking when these religious men walked by ... not out of respect, but out of contempt.

Here comes Jesus out of the Galilean hills and everybody's electrified. The religious leaders want to ignore Jesus...

"He's just one more crazy prophet. He's a crowd manipulator ... He's up to something."

But those Jerusalem heavies who take the trouble to even watch from a distance are shaken by Jesus. This man has power. Power! Power that's frightening because there's nothing shady about it.

Nicodemus is so troubled he sneaks off to Jesus in the dark for a private interview.

***"Rabbi, we know that you must be a teacher from God. No one can do what you're doing or speak like you speak unless God is with him."***

Notice Jesus does not answer,

"What do you mean, 'Unless God is with me?' I am God!"

because Jesus is not doing what he's doing out of his divinity. God the Son though he is, has emptied himself of his divine prerogatives and is now truly human. Whatever Jesus does ... whatever Jesus says ... comes from the Spirit of the Father.

- Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One.
- Jesus is filled with the Spirit's power.

And Nicodemus, though he's a teacher and theologian, will not be able to grasp who Jesus is or what he's doing or how he does it, until Nicodemus has his eyes opened, his mind opened, and his heart opened by the same Spirit that anoints Jesus.

"Until you are born of the Spirit ... until you are filled with the same Spirit that fills me... you can't even see the Kingdom of God, much less enter it."

This was the beginning of a pilgrimage which ultimately brought Nicodemus, this religious man, this professional religious man, to the place where he could see and think and act and speak in the dimension of the Kingdom of God.

*As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Christ, John answered them all, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."*

Many of us have been struggling for a long time to find out what that means ... how this prophecy found in each of the four gospels can be fulfilled in our lives and because we have seen, not just in the New Testament, but in the flesh and blood lives of certain people we have met, a power which we lack. Not a shady power, but one which is clear as the light ... which has the integrity of the Holy Spirit of God running through it.

*John answered them all, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."*

The apostolic church came into existence when this prophecy was fulfilled. And to this day there are people who carry in the earthen vessels of this flesh a heavenly treasure of grace which rises up through every death they die, pours out of them like a river of life,

as they keep laying aside their garments, wrapping themselves in the towel of servanthood and wash feet.

I'm talking about a power which sets them free from themselves and anoints them with the mind of Christ, and

gives them prophetic eyes,  
a prophetic heart,  
a prophetic tongue.

Not charismatic emotional thrills ... not hooting and hollering and jumping up and down, but an authentic anointing which enables them:

- to bring good news to the poor,
- release to the captives,
- sight to the blind,
- freedom to the oppressed,
- hope to the hopeless, with heaven's power.

I'm talking about a power which lasts more than a month-and-a-half ... which endures year-after-year through dry seasons and wet seasons, Red Sea crossings and wilderness journeys.

It's the power which drove the apostle Paul through years and years of labor...

trouble,  
persecution,  
injustice,  
slander,

and bitter opposition, and kept him fresh and clearheaded and effective. That's what it means to be filled with the Spirit's power.

And this awesome power of the Holy Spirit which was so real to our Lord and became so real to his apostles is not far from any one of us. It's closer to us than our own breath. It's available at any time if we want it badly enough.

***"...he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."***

Here are four considerations which will help us receive this baptism and keep receiving it and living it.

1. We will be filled with the Spirit's Power when we despair of our own power.

***"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit," saith the Lord of hosts.***

***And the devil took him up, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory; for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" Luke 4:5-8***

Christendom is still paralyzed by this temptation ...hypnotized by the wrong kind of power. We think,

"If we had more money we could do more good...

If we had a few more of the right kind of people in our church we could do more good...

If we had a few connections in the right places we could do more good."

...always going after the wrong kind of power. When we repent of this and confess, "the one thing I need is the authentic power of the Spirit of God", then and only then will the Spirit move.

The Holy Spirit will not share the throne in our heart with anything else. When we get our eyes off these other hopes and put all our hope on him, then wonderful things begin to happen. If we put as much effort into finding the Spirit as we put into finding a hundred and one useless kinds of power, we'd soon be wearing Elijah's mantle.

2. We will be filled with the Spirit's, power when we repent of our peer fear...

...our fear of what our colleagues and friends might think if we start getting too "pious" in our search for the life of God.

***Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come***

*from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him."*  
*John 3:1-2*

We know why Nicodemus came to Jesus by night...he didn't want his buddies in church headquarters to find out he was getting serious about Jesus. This fear of man slowed down his search.

The woman at the well, on the other hand, may have come to the well at noon because she figured nobody would be around to bother her ... but at least she came in the daylight. And her conversation with Jesus was open and unguarded. Nor did she worry about their opinion of her when she returned to the village and said,

*"Come see a man who told me all I ever did. Is not this the Messiah?"*

If you really want the power of the Holy Spirit, start looking out in the open, out in the daylight. What does it matter if you lose ground in the eyes of your best friends ... it's worth it!

3. We will be filled with the Spirit's Power when we get desperate enough to ask.

And by asking, I don't mean a little whimper every three months when you get depressed...I mean;

aggressive,

persistent,

relentless asking.

*And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything'?..."*  
*Luke 11:5-7*

This man didn't go to his friend at midnight and pound on his door so he could have bread to put in his window or decorate his table. He came knocking and hollering and crying for bread because someone came to him for food and he had nothing to give.

*"And I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son*

***asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." Luke 11.9-13***

When I see how totally inadequate I am to help these people who come to me, how empty I am of wisdom, how lacking in power to bring them healing, then I start asking God for his Spirit.

"Lord Jesus, you tell me to feed your sheep.... give me food for them! Give me a living word! Give me your Spirit!"

....and he will.

Finally, we will be filled with the Spirit's power when we fit in with the Lord instead of trying to make him fit in with our arrogant strategies.

***Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.*** Acts 13:1-3

Notice they didn't hold a "committee meeting," put a list of priorities on the blackboard, boil it into a statement, call it their strategy and then ask God to bless it.

They worshiped God,

They fasted,

They waited, believing that God might very well have a plan of his own.

There was a poverty of spirit,

a willingness to fit in,

a child-like submission to the living God.

And soon a word came to them which they all agreed was straight from God.



*"What I'm doing here in Antioch in this wonderful mixed church of mixed cultures and nations and races, I want to do in other places ... set apart Barnabas and Saul for this work."*

"Barnabas and Saul? What's going to happen here in Antioch if Barnabas and Saul leave? ... Lord, it's too soon, we're not ready!"

There was none of that ... there was awesome hushed submission

And, after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. And the Spirit moved through Barnabas and Saul. And the Spirit moved with increased power in that church at Antioch ... it didn't fall apart.

It may seem nutty and scary to us to think we might do business in this fashion, but really, what have we got to lose? It's worth an earnest attempt to corporately fit into the mind of the Spirit of God.

***As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Christ, John answered them all, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."***

This baptism of the Spirit is not some safe ritual which we control. It's an invasion of divine life which will absolutely disrupt our dull predictable lives. But with the disruption will come power.

We can have this baptism of the Holy Spirit when we make clear to God and to ourselves that we really want it. We will be filled with the Spirit's power;

1. When we despair of our own power and seek the Spirit from the Lord who gives the Spirit.
2. When we repent of our peer fear and seek the Spirit from the Lord who gives the Spirit.
3. When we get desperate enough to ask for the Spirit.
4. When we fit in with the Lord instead of trying to make him fit in with our arrogant strategies.

***"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"***

## WHAT HAVE WE GOT TO LOSE?

*Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."*

*Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." But the Lord said to me,*

*"Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you," says the Lord.*

*Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me,*

*"Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."  
(Jeremiah 1:4-10)*

In each of the major prophets we can find a passage similar to this. God calls the prophet – the prophet confesses his inadequacy. Then God touches his mouth, or puts a coal on his tongue, or gives him a scroll to eat.

"Now you're ready....Go....Speak....Don't be afraid.... I am with you."

And we say, "How wonderful!"

But we forget that from the moment of his call, for the rest of his days, that prophet's life is no longer his own. He is utterly at the beck and call of the Word of God.

If God tells him to do some costly thing, or some heartbreaking thing,  
he does it.

He's not a prophet Monday through Friday from 8 to 5, but all the time.

- If he has a wife, it's as if he doesn't have a wife.
- If he has a house,

or a pair of shoes,

or a horse to ride, he knows that these things are about as permanent as the morning mist.

The only solid, permanent thing Jeremiah had, or Ezekiel had, was the Word of God. Everything else kept fading and falling away.

The price of being a prophet, a mouthpiece for God, is that God assumes possession of everything in your life that you would normally think of as yours and he gives you only one thing to possess as your own – his Word. Indeed, you don't even possess the Word of God so much as that Word possesses you.

Now the call that came to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, each at a crucial time in the history of Israel, and wrenched them forever from what might be called a "normal" human life, is now coming, not to an individual man or woman, but to an entire people.

The Spirit of God is now laying hold of a people who are scattered over the earth and doing to this entire people exactly what he did to his prophets of old – wrenching them out of what might be called a "normal" human life, assuming possession of all the things they thought of in the past as their own, and giving them but one thing as their own: his Word.

This prophetic people whom God is now raising up will bring that Word of God to bear on the whole earth before its judgment hour, even as the prophets brought God's word to bear on Israel.

This people will be in sharp contrast to the uninspired, flat, loveless, cowardly, vain, self-indulgent crowd which has claimed to be the church in so many places for so long.

This people which God is now calling out of the lives they've been living – out of the allegiances they have formerly had – will be a burning witness to the reality of the living God, to the lordship of Jesus the Messiah, and to the presence on earth, right now, of God's Holy Spirit.

No one will be able to withstand their word – for it will be verily God's word. They will be hated as the prophets were. despised, often killed. But the more violently the world comes against their message, the more awesome their message will become, until suddenly the Messiah they proclaim will appear and their job will be completed.

Until the Word of God came to Jeremiah and took hold of him, Jeremiah was free to be half-baked. He could excuse his cowardice by saying,

"I'm only a youth."

But once the Word came to him, he was no longer free to be half-baked. It's either go along with God's program, or forget about God.

This is exactly what's now happening to us. Most of us still think of ourselves as God's little volunteers. We consider ourselves heroes because, as we say, we've committed ourselves to Jesus Christ. We say that,

- our possessions are his,
- our plans for the future have been turned over to him,
- our habits,
- our loved ones,
- our virtues,
- our claim to fame,

have been surrendered, and now we're walking the "Calvary Road." And yet, we know that so far our commitment to Jesus Christ has been more a thing of words than a thing of deed.

"Take me Lord, and use me,"

we've said perhaps a thousand times. But when he reached down to take us he found that we were clinging so tightly to where we are that he couldn't take us.

"Lord, I want to be used for your glory. I'll go anywhere, do anything."

But when Jesus comes to use us as we asked him, he finds us clutching our set ideas, our set ways, and our stagnant life so tightly that he simply can't use us.

But now God is doing a new thing. God is calling out a people exactly as he called Jeremiah. And once we've heard that call we can never again be half-baked.

***"Do not say, 'I am only a youth.' For to all to whom I send you, you shall go. And whatever I command you, you shall speak."***

We have come to a fork in the road where suddenly the life we've lived, up to now, becomes impossible. This road we've been traveling where we've mixed God's Word with this world's safety,

this world's comfort,

this world's hopes, now divides, and the mixture ends.

- One branch leads along the way of bare faith, daily surrender, baffling and dizzying changes, with only one certainty: that Jesus is with us.

- The other branch leads through a land where the comforts and pleasures and dreams are multiplied tenfold, but faith is gone, Jesus is gone.

And we have to take either one branch or the other. This call of God – this fork in the road – may start with a phone call from someone who wants your help. Or it may begin with a knock on the door and someone standing there with a need. Or, it may hit you as you sit here, that you have to either take that step the Spirit of God has laid on your heart or quit pretending that you love God.

If we're married, we may have been hesitating by saying,

"But Lord, I don't think my mate is ready for this."

Now you wake up and find that your mate has more guts than you do.

***Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."***

The price of being part of this Body which God is now setting over nations and over kingdoms is that God's hand has touched our mouths, meaning that what comes out of our mouths is jealously guarded by God. And the life which is behind the mouth is owned and ordered by God in a new way.

If you don't want God's hand to touch your mouth, then the best thing you can do is turn and run as fast as you can.

Because for every one of us who is now being touched on the mouth by the hand of God, it's going to mean three things for the life behind the mouth.

## **1. Disruption.**

If God is going to use us to pluck up and to break down, to prepare the way for the Messiah, there is first going to be some plucking up and some breaking down inside our lives. Life will not go on and on as it has been.

- Those things that have dulled our minds to God's word,
- Those things that have blocked the flow of God's love in us,
- Those things that have hindered our unity with each other,
- Those things that have made us slaves to our bodies and to our vanity,

will be plucked up and broken down. Deep roots of self will have to be pulled out.

## **2. To be touched on the mouth by the hand of God will mean discomfort.**

If we are to be a people who, by means of the spoken word of God, will destroy and overthrow lies that have mislead this earth for centuries... those lies will first have to be destroyed and overthrown within us.

It will cause me discomfort to...

- have to learn that my idea that "me and my Christian friends" in this part of town can exist as a world unto ourselves is a lie.

To swallow my pride and confess my sin and try to get along with those other, rather strange, brothers and sisters is going to be uncomfortable.

My set ways that are locking me in this rut.... it's going to hurt as God begins to destroy and overthrow them, as he will.

## **3. To be touched on the mouth by the hand of God is going to cost us some dislocation.**

God is going to move me from where I am spiritually, perhaps geographically, to where he wants me. He's going to fit me into a niche in the Body where he wants to put me.

- He's going to build me into the temple where he sees fit –  
and that's never quite where I see fit.

If we're going to be used by the Spirit of God to build and to plant,  
we first have to learn, by the Spirit, to be built and planted.

***The wind blows where it wills and you can hear the sound  
of it, but cannot tell where it's coming from or where it's  
going ... so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.***

There's not one of us who thinks about these things which are now  
taking place in our lives, and in our fellowships, who doesn't get  
scared.

How far is the Lord going to take me?

How fast is he going to make me move?

Can I survive all the changes he brings upon us?

But the real question is:

What have we got to lose?

You say, "This half-baked life is good, don't knock it. We'll miss it  
when it's gone." The same could be said about drug addiction, alco-  
hol.

Wake up and look at this mixed road we've been walking. What is  
it?.... Nothing!.....

If this is living, why go on?

If this is why I'm on this earth --- to go through this routine  
over and over and over until I wear out, why not die and get  
it over with?

All Jesus is telling us to give up is this empty existence. And the  
death Jesus is taking us through is the death of this insipid stupor  
we've been in.

***The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have  
come that they might have life and have it more abundantly.***

***Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.***

Will we dare to answer that call? To believe that of all the calls that have beckoned to us since we were born on this earth, his call is the one we can really trust?

Will we dare to hold still and let him put forth his hand and touch our mouths and take whatever consequences follow?

***Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth;  
and the Lord said to me,***

***"Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."***



## **PRAY AND DO NOT LOSE HEART**

*Abraham answered, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Wilt thou destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." Again he spoke to him, and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." He said, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it."*

### *Genesis 18*

Abraham haggling with God? Negotiating? Where did Abraham find the audacity to do this? And how come God doesn't strike him down for his chutzpa?

Because God sees Abraham's heart. Abraham is not being cheeky. Abraham is interceding for the protection of his nephew, Lot, and his family. This awesome episode is preserved to us to teach us how to intercede. How to plead with God for others. How to pray, and not lose heart.

Each of us, as a follower of Jesus, has been called into a ministry. The root of that ministry is prayer. Yet many of us feel inadequate. Deep in our hearts, we don't think we're up to it, when it comes to prayer.

"I can't pray. I just can't pray!" people will often say --- people who are serious about following Jesus – people who have committed their lives to him, who are trying to walk in his will. Something seems to be hindering their prayers, discouraging them.

It's like the spirit inside has become dry and heaven above has turned to brass, the soul itself is paralyzed, and "I just can't pray!"

Sometimes all conscious prayer has come to an end – the mind can't even think of words to speak in God's direction.

It's like the experience people have after a bad accident and they don't even want to get back into a car.

Perhaps they continue doing the things that need to be done. They go to work, eat their meals, watch TV, tumble into bed. But they cannot get up the courage to pray.

Others say their prayers, but their prayers seem hollow, empty, barren – like they are talking to thin air.

Still others won't admit they can't pray – not even to themselves.

Why is it so difficult, even to find time alone with God every day when we know that there is no other way to stay spiritually alive in this cynical world?

When we're alone in our room with the door shut, that precious time, which should be really the most delicious hour of the day, our spirit becomes blank. What's going on here?

Perhaps we're discouraged. Perhaps disappointment hangs over us like a cloud. Does the Master sympathize with us? No way! He commands us to get over ourselves and start praying with persistence.

*And he taught them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man; and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Vindicate me against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes will he find faith on earth?"*  
*Luke 18:1-8*

The widow didn't lose heart. She refused to give the judge any peace. She persisted in wearying him down, until he yielded to her pleas.

In the same way the elect of God, these people who cry to him day and night, know that they are going to be vindicated. God will not let them down. We need to join them.

Of course, this world does not support such faith. "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Don't expect this world to encourage your prayers.

The faith which cries out to God and never loses heart, does so surrounded by an atmosphere of despair, that considers faith to be absurd. But faith goes right on praying. And God hears. And God answers.

The word of God to each of us, even in our most hopeless circumstances is :

Pray, and do not lose heart!

Never mind how things are going, whether they are going great or falling apart. Never mind how you feel. Forget about what people are saying. Get on with the one thing which is within your power to do, the one thing where heaven's help is guaranteed:

Pray!

And keep praying!

When we feel guilty before God, and we want to repent, we want to get things right, but we just can't seem to do it, the one effective thing we can do is to pray and not lose heart, even if the only prayer we can pray is: "God be merciful to me a sinner".

*When I kept silence (that is, when I didn't pray), my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long (still not praying). For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. (Then I finally decided to pray...) I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto Thee in a time when Thou mavest be found.*

*Psalm 32: 3-6*

When our spirits are heavy with guilt, this is no time to run and hide in the bushes like Adam and Eve.

We follow the example of David and go straight toward God, crying out for his help:

*Have mercy on me, O God according to Thy loving kindness, according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my*

*transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight; that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest.* *Psalm 51:1-4*

We often say, "Yeah, but I've committed the same stupid sin a million times. God must be getting tired."

And it's true, he is getting tired ... in the sense that we just can't keep on and on and on, and think that he'll put up with us forever. There is a limit.

But this doesn't change the fact that the one helpful way to begin to change is to bring the whole mess, and dump it before God in prayer without losing heart.

We're up against an obstacle that just won't move out of the way ...

- an impossible work situation,
  - a problem in a marriage,
  - a flaw in our own character that just won't change ,
- ... and we can't see a way out of it.

The one thing we can do is pray and not lose heart.

The grouchy old judge is standing between the widow and justice. There's no one to take her part. Never mind, she knows what to do! Pester the man! Don't give him any peace.

This is precisely what Jesus is telling us: Keep praying, and keep praying, and keep praying until God himself moves the mountain. He will. He will move it.

What if we feel totally dry inside? "How could God ever listen to my prayers? I don't even know if I have any faith." Answer: pray and do not lose heart. Keep praying, even if you feel like you're praying into thin air.

*I will say unto God, my Rock, "Why hast thou forgotten me? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me, saying, 'Where is thy God?'"*

*Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why are thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God. For I shall yet praise thee, who art the health my countenance, and my God.* *Psalm 42*

To hope in God is to pray without ceasing.

Pray out loud. Let the words flow from your heart to your mouth.

Sometimes we get the idea that we cannot pray until we feel the presence of God. Big mistake! We pray in faith when we feel nothing. When we see nothing but darkness, we pray. We just keep praying, refusing to lose heart.

And here's what we often forget: The instant we start praying --- even if we're stumbling and fumbling and confused --- heaven comes to our aid. The Spirit of God visits us in our weakness and helps us to pray.

But the Spirit can only help us to pray when we make a start. The Spirit can only strengthen our prayers when we keep praying.

Those mountains will begin to move. Those doors will begin to open, when we take our Lord at his word, and act.

Pray, and do not lose heart.

Pray, and do not lose heart.

***And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily.***

## INTERCESSION

*Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that, I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.*  
*Ephesians 6:18-20*

If the enemy can't get us off on a wild tangent in our ministries, trying to build some flashy kingdom of our own that will have to come down again, then he will try to put our lives in suspension so that we go on and on marking time, waiting for our "ministry" to really begin. It's surprising how many of us secretly feel that our real calling hasn't come yet. We think we're still in the marketplace waiting to be hired into God's Vineyard, when in fact we're in the vineyard and have fallen asleep in the shadow of the vines.

Our ministry, if we are followers of Jesus, began the minute we left our old life to walk with Him.

"Wait a minute!" you say. "I'm only a disciple, a pupil. I'm trying to learn what the Kingdom of God is all about and you want to shove me out into a ministry untrained, unseasoned, and ill prepared!"

But if you are a disciple of Jesus, He's teaching you by giving you work to do. You learn as you labor.

- Not by taking copious notes and stuffing them away in a filing cabinet,

but by doing!

And the basic ministry each of us is given to do, which affects everything that goes on in our daily life and our labors out among men and women, is a ministry which is hidden from every human eye. A ministry which goes on only before the eye of God.

It is twofold:

1. Service to God in worship.
2. Service to man in intercession.

Nothing we do out among men will accomplish anything redemptive if this hidden ministry, this interior ministry, is sick. But if this ministry before the eye of God is,

flourishing,  
strong,  
passionate,  
consistent,  
true,

our walk in this world will open rivers of living water everywhere we go, bring healing to everything we touch. It will be good news!

Of our ministry to God in worship, much as been said among believers these days. And we continue to pray...

***"Let all the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee."***  
***Psalm 67:5***

And we need to give ourselves to it more and more.

But, of the other aspect of our interior ministry, intercession, very little has been said. And much needs to be done.

There needs to be a radical change in our own thinking about the value of intercession, praying for people.

The reason we give so little of our time and strength to it is because it doesn't seem to be that important. In fact, it seems like a cop out. If someone comes to us in need of food, and we say, "I'll pray for you," we know in our hearts we're copping out.

Many times, people have doors shut in their faces by pious believers who smugly say, "I'll pray for you." And yet, if these people kept their promise, and really prayed they would soon be involved with those needy lives and mighty things would be happening on every level, because the most effective thing we can do, the starting point of every service we can render our fellow man, is intercession prayer for them. The basic ministry we perform on behalf of others is not preaching, or teaching, or even feeding and clothing.

It is intercession!

- Our preaching and teaching will always be shallow,
- our deeds of mercy will never even begin to scratch the surface of people's needs,
  - until these outward ministries begin to ride on a torrent of intercession.

You think I'm exaggerating? Look at Jesus. We see glimpses of this vast subterranean prayer life for others in John seventeen.

***"I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me..."***  
**John 17: 20-21.**

Or, when Jesus says to Peter,

***"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you (all) like wheat, but I have prayed for you, (Peter) that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.***  
**Luke 22:31-32**

Do you think those hours Jesus spent with the Father were only spent on Himself? When Jesus spent all night in prayer to God and the next day chose His twelve apostles, do you not think names were rising from His heart to the Father? How could he not have been praying by name for many as He sought to arrive at the ones who were to share the load as apostles.

But the central event of our Lord's life among us, indeed, the pivotal event of all history, was His death on the cross. And what was that death if not an act of intercession? In fact, the act of intercession on which all intercession rests:

The Lamb of God interceding for the human race with his very blood.

Interposing His blood between our sins and the Father's glory.

That's intercession; "Behold, the Lamb of God; who takes away the sins of the world"!

"Father, take the guilt away from them and put it on me."

"Father, forgive! Forgive! Forgive."

And by the power of that mysterious and awesome and holy and glorious blood sacrifice, His intercessions continue.

***Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us?***

**Romans 8:33-34**



***Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.***  
***Hebrews 7:25***

From the Father's right hand the Lamb sends the Spirit into our midst. And what does the Spirit do? The same thing the Son does --- he prays for us!

***Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.***  
***Romans 8:26-27***

The Son intercedes.

The Spirit intercedes and those who have entered into the Son, and have opened their hearts to the Spirit are brought into this same ministry.

***Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.***  
***Matthew 18:18-19***

On whose behalf do we bind and loose? And for what purpose do two of us agree on earth for something to be done for us by the Father, if not especially for other people?

Intercession!

Prayer on behalf of others!

And if you are willing to admit that one of the most fruitful ministries ever exercised by a human being on this earth was that of Saul of Tarsus, you will also have to admit that his epistles are loaded with intercession.

***"I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers..."***  
***Ephesians 1:16***

***"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy..."***  
***Philippians 1:3-4***

***"Pray for me that I may have a door of utterance."***

***Colossians 4:3***

Paul admitted that he wasn't an eloquent preacher. But somehow more happened through this man's labors than through the work of men a thousand times more eloquent ... because Paul's main ministry clearly was intercession. And here he was relentless! The mountains moved. The gates of brass yielded. The bars of iron broke.

And everywhere that man went the captives were set free.

So what happens in intercession? We simply join our hearts to the Intercession of the Lamb at Calvary, and lift people, by name, before the throne of God, and plead His mercy on them, and sometimes ask for specific help for them. Perhaps we picture divine light from the Father's face streaming down into their inmost hearts. And as we do, things happen in the unseen realm of heaven which, sooner or later, turn up in the visible realm of the earth.

"Oh, but I just don't have the driving motivation to intercede for people!"

You have the motivation to criticize people: No sweat at all! Criticism seems to be our second nature. So now we turn our criticism into intercession.

The things we see wrong or lacking in others, instead of shaking our head and gossiping about them, we pray for them. Every time you catch yourself criticizing, turn it into prayer.

There are people we worry about; we fear what lies ahead on that road they have chosen. Instead of wasting our strength on anxiety, we turn it into prayer. Keep turning that worry for your child into prayer until you're not worrying, but praying, trusting God to reach out and intervene with His merciful hand.

And once we start praying for people with zeal, we persist!

Like the widow pestering the unjust Judge, day after day after day.

Like the woman begging Jesus on behalf of her poor demon tortured daughter.

We take no rest, and give God no rest, until He establishes Jerusalem and makes her a praise in the earth, even if the prayer goes on for years.

And, as we persist in this ministry of intercession, we also set it in some kind of order, specifically we name names before God.

Our families - by name.

Our enemies - by name.

Our brothers and sisters in the fellowship - by name.

People we work with, people in our apartment house or neighborhood - by name.

Other fellowships.

Those who have gone out to serve in other places.

And as we pray, we picture the answer of God, we expect it, we know it's coming. We rejoice with all the angels of heaven that those believers we're praying for are being strengthened with might by God's Spirit in the inner man and that Christ dwells in their hearts by faith, that they are being rooted and grounded in love.

And we praise God that those who have not yet seen His mercy are being breathed upon by the breath of heaven.

***Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the Mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.***  
***Ephesians 6:18-20***

This is our ministry. God has already given it to us. And as we enter into it with our whole heart we will begin to see things happen we never expected to see --- this side of heaven.

## HOLY UNITY

*Thy Kingdom come.*

*Thy will be done on earth as it is done in Heaven.*

There is only one place where the Kingdom of God has really come and the will of God is done on earth as it is in Heaven - and that is where the saints on earth are in unity.

In the days of old Israel before the Christ appeared, there were lonely prophets who did mighty things. Jeremiah was a lonely man. So was Ezekiel. So was Amos....John the Baptist. But when Jesus of Nazareth hung on that Cross alone and forsaken, the age of the lonely prophet came to an end.

By His death Jesus brought Heaven down to this earth and there are no lone rangers in Heaven. Men and women of God began to walk together. The followers of Jesus began to experience holy unity with each other. And in that Unity they ministered with power the old prophets never dreamed of.

From that time down to this, whenever followers of Jesus let go of their ego things and enter into unity with each other around Jesus Himself - the Kingdom of God is here. Heaven touches the earth. You can see it, and feel it, breathe its life.

And whenever followers of Jesus pull back into their egos, withdraw from this unity around the Lord, divine life ebbs away, their vision becomes dark, and they become another dead, religious institution.

Heaven only touches this earth where disciples are one - together - because Heaven is together: The beings that surround the throne of God are in unity with each other.

When they sing, they sing together.

When they bow down before the throne they bow down together.

When they wage war against the dragon and his angels they work as one.

Each being of God fits into the whole glorious thing that God is doing and seeks no glory for themselves. Their joy is to give glory to God and do His will.

When you have a group of believers, a church, a fellowship where they do not have unity, the work of Heaven among those people stops.

If they're divided into factions,

If they're competing with each other for glory,

If they're hiding things from each other,

If this group is going this way, and that group is going that way,

they can quote the Bible all they like and talk about salvation, but they're like a cup full of holes. The living water runs out as fast as it runs in. Who can drink from such a cup?

We are one not because we have the same background, or belong to the same denomination, or have the same color skin, or the same taste. We are one in the blood of the Lamb. We are one in the Spirit of God.... And we have to practice that unity in our living. We have to walk in love.

Notice how Jesus stresses this.

***Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in their midst.***

Unity. Not some cheap talk about the name of Jesus. But the mind of Jesus, the Cross of Jesus, holding them together.

If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask it will be done for them by my Father in Heaven.

Unity. Two hearts have joined together in Jesus about this thing.

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

Unity. Laying aside grudges and resentments because Jesus commands us to love one another the same self-emptying way He loved us.

***The glory which thou hast given me, I have given to them that they may be one even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me: that they may become perfectly one.....***

When believers have this kind of unity then heavenly things start happening on this earth,

- lives are changed, minds are healed,
- broken homes come back together,
- blind eyes open,

because God has come to dwell in the midst of His people as He always does when they are one.

But it's got to be Holy-Unity. Sometimes people are drawn together in an unholy unity. The kind of unity that belongs to the Kingdom of Satan.

Satan's house is not divided against itself.

Satan's Kingdom is a masterpiece of organization.

There are groups of people whose minds are identical on all things because they have been seared by the same branding iron. If one person in that group insists the moon is purple you know that everyone will insist that it is indeed purple. If one person wears socks to bed you know that they all wear socks to bed. If the leader says, "Stand on your head!" every head goes down and all feet point toward the sky. These people have turned their wills over to a power which is not God. For God never takes over a man's will like that. Their minds are in chains.

There's another kind of unity to watch out for: Surface Unity - where everybody pretends a unity that just isn't there. There are families that wear this mark of unity. Everything is under control. No one dares to raise a question or disagree. But underneath they're living in a hell. There is no love there. They just conform. Then one day someone refuses to play the game and that family falls apart.

There are churches like this. The believers give the appearance of being one but their hearts are far from each other. They go through the motions of love, say the words, do those little token things that are supposed to show concern.... but their hearts are miles from the Kingdom of God.

Now understand, Holy Unity that enables God to dwell in the midst of his people is something God has to bring about.

*And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. Then the Spirit of God*

*moved upon the face of the waters and God said, "Let there be light and there was light".*

In the same way God brings us together by His Spirit ... Calls us out of the chaos and darkness of this world into unity around His Son.

God is gathering His Church.... bringing the saints together ... making them to know that they are one.

*"You are one body."*

*"You are members one of another."*

But now it's up to us to decide whether we're going to fit into this beautiful thing which God is doing. Will we be one in our living?

*"I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you were called."*

1. *With all lowliness and meekness.*
2. *With patience.*
3. *Forbearing one another in love.*
4. *Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

*"For there is one Body and one Spirit just as you were called to one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord."*

*"One faith. One baptism."*

*"One God and Father of us all who is above all and through all and in all."*

1. To walk in unity means to walk in lowliness and meekness.

Give up that ambition to be somebody special and give up the belief that you are above the other saints. People who have these thoughts in their hearts cannot be in unity with their brothers and sisters. They can pretend to be in unity, but inwardly they are dividers of the Body.

Walk in lowliness and meekness. Don't just go through an act. Be that way.

*"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am meek and lowly of heart and you shall find rest for your soul."*

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the meek."*

You cannot fit into the program of Heaven until you understand what this means and live this way.

2. To walk in unity means patience.

The school teacher who keeps writing on the blackboard while the little rascals kill each other is not patient....she's indifferent. And the Casper Milktoast who eats vegetable soup garnished with roaches because he's afraid to say something, is not patient....he's spineless.

Patience is to really care and still hold on when things go wrong. Still keep going when nobody responds. Still love when no love comes back.

God will give you practice at patience. People will try your patience. Circumstances will try your patience. Long seasons will come when your faithfulness is completely unrewarded---no encouraging signs and you keep going.

The person who becomes impatient will always break unity with the Body and go off on a tangent of self.

"I can't stand it anymore. I'm tired of fitting in. I'm going to do my own thing."

3. To walk in unity means forbearing one another in love.

Not just putting up with one another. Not just tolerating those far-out brothers and whimpering sisters, but to love them.

There are people around our churches and fellowships that we put up with. They're boring. They're tiresome. They're hard to take. But we're "Christian" about it. We put up with them. Big deal! Jesus says love them as you love yourself!

You're just waiting for sister Sue to finish going through her complaint about her aches and pains so you can get over and have some real fellowship with brother Jack.

"Brother Jack really washes my feet!"

But sister Sue needs to have her feet washed and she's talking to you: listen to her with your heart. Forbear her in love. God has been forbearing you in love for a long time.

4. To walk in unity is to do everything you can to maintain the Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

To say those things and do those: things that will really make for peace between brothers right where you are. You don't have to run



around trying to hold the Body together. The Spirit of God will do that. **You just make peace where you are.**

The self-appointed neighborhood "peace maker" is usually the neighborhood trouble maker. And the ones who run around trying to unify the Body are often tearing it up. Just be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace:

- In your household.

- In your fellowship among the believes where God has put you.

And that unity and peace will spread like the aroma of incense to places far beyond.

And the time for us to begin putting all this into practice is right now.

As we kneel in prayer, may God help to get all the ugly things out of our hearts that separate us from our brothers and sisters here and in all places. And today, beginning with the first person we talk to, to walk in meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity in the bond of peace.

God help us to keep living that way today and every day until the day Jesus brings the Unity of Heaven to this earth in all its fullness.

## GOD'S THING

***Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.***  
***Joshua 1***

For forty years the people of Israel were locked in the wilderness.

- They couldn't go back to Egypt.
- They couldn't go in and take the Promised Land because they blew their chance through unbelief.

Across the river was this beautiful country, flowing with milk and honey, that was to be their land. But all they could do was to wait for God's time. And as they waited, they learned the slow, hard way what it means to be God's people.

It was God who brought them out of bondage.

It was God who would have to bring them in to the land of promise.

They were not their own. They were wrapped up in a thing that God was doing. They would have to fit in with God's plan, not theirs - fit in with God's schedule, not theirs.

- Trust God's promises.
- Obey God's word.
- Rely on God's 'strength.
- Follow God's light.

Suddenly, after the death of Moses, after that whole generation had been wiped out, except Joshua and Caleb, God spoke to Joshua.

***"Now, go over the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land which I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. Everyplace that the sole of your foot will tread upon, I have given to you."***

A year before it would have been impossible. Even with the best weapons on earth to take the land of Canaan. They would have been butchered. But now God's time has come. God is going to give them the Promised Land.

***"Have I not commanded you, be strong and of good courage; be not frightened neither be dismayed? For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."***

And they went in and took the land, because they were moving in God's power, they were fitting in with God's program. And so long as they fit in with God, (not their ways, God's ways), nothing could stand before them.

There's a time to sit in the wilderness and wait, and there's a time to go in and take the land. When the time comes to take the land, you have to move or cease to be part of Israel.

In a similar way, the apostles spent three-and-a-half years doing nothing but sticking close to the flesh-and-blood Jesus. This was their wilderness where they really got to know their God.

- Had they tried to go off on their own, apart from Jesus, and preach the Kingdom and heal the sick,
- had they gone beyond those cities to which Jesus sent them,
- had they become carried away with their own "vision",
- they would have perished.

Even after the resurrection they stayed together, waiting for those visits of their risen Lord. Then, at the very moment when they hoped that Jesus would set up the Messianic Kingdom, Jesus instead sent them across a new Jordan into a new Promised Land, into a ministry of authority such as they'd never dreamed of.

***"Lord, will you at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?"***

***"The times and seasons are not for you to know. They belong to God. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you shall be my witnesses from Jerusalem to the end of the earth."***

***"You're going to conquer the world with the Word of God."***

The Spirit came and they crossed their Jordan. And they went in and took their promised land. They entered a life of authority and power and holiness and love that turned hearts to Jesus Christ everywhere they went.

There has been a gathering and a sifting, a building up and a tearing down of things in the Body of Christ all over the earth. Things have

been happening in the Body of followers of Christ that begin to match its earliest days, days when they had no New Testament, days when the lives of men and women were walking New Testaments.

And yet, all the things we have seen so far, and have been part of, and all the changes we've experienced in our own lives, are like the miracles that were seen by the people of Israel in the wilderness. They belong to the other side of the Jordan.

There is a place of authority, a place of power, which as followers of Jesus, we have not yet occupied. We've been standing on the banks of the Jordan looking across,

- seeing the good land,
- knowing that it belongs to us,
- knowing that our dwelling place is not here, but over there.

We hear our Lord telling us that we are to be His witnesses, that He will give us a word of authority which none of the enemies of the Kingdom will be able to gainsay, that He will confirm the word He puts on our lips with signs that will make clear that it is His word and not ours.

But so far, the ministry that we are exercising as believers is not clothed in that kind of authority. For all the crowds, and for all the joyful things going on in our fellowships these days, the walls of Jericho are still standing. The land of promise is still occupied by giants.

- We praise God for the sons and daughters we see coming to birth.
- We thank God for every single prodigal finding his way home, even as the Spirit enabled us to find our way home.

But we know that we haven't begun to make the dent in the hardness of this troubled world that God's people are meant to make, are go-  
ing to make, when they've come over Jordan.

And now a message comes to us - and not only to us - but to every body of believers across the earth. The message of the Spirit of God to the followers of Jesus is this:

***"Arise, go over Jordan and take the land..... Everyplace that the sole of your foot will tread upon, I have given to you."***

The time of waiting, and trial runs, and reconnaissance missions, is over.

It's not for us to know the times and seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority. But when the Lord pours out His Spirit upon us and sends us forth to be His witnesses, when the word of the Lord to us is, "Cross over Jordan and take the land," then we know that God's time has come. It isn't our thing at all – it's God's thing.

All we do is fit in.

All we do is obey.

We're not talking about next week or next month. We're talking about today.

***Today, when you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.***

Four things are becoming clear:

**First, that the Holy Spirit is giving us power to speak of Jesus as never before.**

- You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.
- You shall be my witnesses.

We notice in the life of the apostolic church, every time the Spirit visited them, they received boldness, power to speak without fear.

I look for all of us who are at all serious about following the Lord, to be far less inhibited in speaking of Him than we have ever been in the past.

I look for all of us to experience a boldness to proclaim the word of the Lord that will be almost frightening.

And this will be God's doing, not ours. We don't make it happen, God does.

There is only one exhortation for us in this matter:

***Today when you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.***

- Open them.
- Yield.

- Trust that voice.
- Obey what it says.

**Second, we must understand that when we speak about Jesus, our gospel will create war, not peace.**

Don't get the idea that every time you talk about Jesus, people will get tears in their eyes and fall to their knees and repent. Praise God that will happen from time-to-time. But much of the time there will be anger and rage.

"Who do you think you are?"

"Don't come around here with that nonsense!"

"Get out of here. I have my own religion."

The Israelites were engaged in war from the time they crossed the Jordan until the land was theirs. It was one battle after another. They didn't conquer the land by winning popularity contests.

Likewise, when the apostles went forth to proclaim the gospel, they weren't received as high echelon men in the religious world. They were despised!

- If you want to win friends and influence people, take a Dale Carnegie course.
- If you want to get the reputation of being a spiritual heavy, talk about heavy things and stay off the subject of the cross of Jesus.

But, if you want to take the Promised Land with the Word of God, brace yourself for war, get used to people insulting you and giving you a hard time. The disciple is not above his Lord. If they did it to the Master, they'll do it to you.

**Thirdly, if there's ever been a time when we've needed to live a disciplined life, it's now!**

*This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.*

If there's ever been a time when we've needed to seek the face of God daily in the Word and prayer, it's now!

No one survives the battle who isn't in shape, and no one stays in shape without discipline.

**Finally, don't be afraid of men.**

The Lord is with us ---wherever we go: Indeed, the hotter the persecution gets, the more clearly we'll know His presence.

*"Have I not commanded you, be strong and of good courage; be not frightened neither be dismayed? For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."*

He was with us in the wilderness. Yea He was even with us in Egypt before He brought us out of bondage. But He is with us in a new way as we enter the land and engage in the battle.

We've talked about persecution, perhaps we've even tasted a little. Now it's going to be persecution, and threats, and opposition, on a scale we've never tasted.

But, as the battle thickens we will experience Jesus walking at our side strengthening us, refreshing us, encouraging us. And with Jesus at our side, how can we lose? This is not a time to be afraid, but to rejoice and sing praises to our God.

*"Have I not commanded you, be strong and of good courage; be not frightened neither be dismayed? For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."*

## A SINNERS' FEAST

*"I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread; he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."*

*The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.... "* *John 6:51-53*

This is one of the most difficult and offensive statements Jesus ever made. It not only angered his detractors, it drove many of his disciples away from him for good. The essence of this statement is two-fold.

1. "I'm offering myself up to be your atonement for sin."
2. "I'm offering myself up to be your nourishment ... your food."

That Jesus is our atonement for sin we accept. We may not understand it, but we accept it. But that Jesus is our food ... our nourishment ... that we draw our life from his outpoured life and that this is the only life we have, this we seem to find hard to accept.

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

*Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"* *John 6:60*

*"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."* *John 6:56,*

Somehow,

- the life that was in Jesus when he walked among us in flesh and blood,
- the life which he offered up on that cross,
- the life that tore the veil of the temple and passed into the Holy of Holies of heaven itself,



- the life which blazed forth from his resurrection body and now intercedes before the Father's throne,

**- this life has to get from him into us.**

There are several ways in which the life which is in Jesus passes from him to us. One is by hearing and believing.

*"It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."  
John 6:63*

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."  
John 5:24*

Another way the life which is in Jesus passes from him to us is by doing.

*"You are my friends if you do the things that I command you."*

*"If you love me, you will keep my commandments... do them ... and I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever." John 14:15*

But one of the most difficult mysteries of the Kingdom to apprehend is that the life which is in Jesus also passes from him to us by eating.

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."*

*John 6:53b-56*

*Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*

*Matthew 26:26-28*

This meal which they ate, and which we eat, is an outward manifestation of an inward miracle ... a communion with Jesus himself ... a receiving of Jesus into our whole being --- body, soul and spirit.

Now receiving the life of Jesus by hearing and believing his word is something which we do individually. And receiving life by doing his will of mercy is also done individually. ***But receiving Jesus' life by eating his flesh and drinking his blood is something we do together.*** We gather at his table and he gives himself to us in the bread and wine ... this is a feast and we eat this feast together.

And yet, there is something in us which keeps us from really entering into this feast and receiving the life he longs to give us, something which keeps us from really being one with him and with each other. We eat the bread and drink the wine but all too often there's no communion, we don't seem to be able to discern his presence. And when we can't discern his presence we never find unity with each other ... so what's getting in our way?

***And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it they all murmured, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."***  
***Luke 19:5-7***

Zacchaeus gave the feast. Jesus was there as the guest. But Jesus was also there as the food. And Zacchaeus was able to eat this food because Zacchaeus saw himself as a sinner --- and he saw Jesus as his forgiveness,

his healing,

his life.

But there were people who stood apart that day and instead of drawing life from Jesus were offended by him.

***"He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."***

***After this he went out, and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he left everything, and rose and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his house; and there was a large company of tax collectors and others, sitting at table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes murmured against his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"***

***Luke 5:27-30***

Jesus was the guest at Levi's table, but he was also the food ... the life of that feast. Levi and his friends were able to draw life from Jesus because they gathered around him as people in need. But there were those who received no nourishment from Jesus that day. They stood apart and were offended.

***"Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"***

When the prodigal son came to himself he said,

***"How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.'" And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And they began to make merry.***  
***Luke 15:17b-24***

....a feast for a sinner who had come to receive mercy. In that feast was life for the prodigal and for everyone there. But there was one who received no life that day.

***Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. And he said to him, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound." But he was angry and refused to go in.***  
***Luke 15:25-28a***

To eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood ... in other words to receive his life ... we have to approach the feast as Zacchaeus, as Levi, as the prodigal. It's not just the act of eating, it's the attitude, the state of the heart, which makes it possible to discern who this is.

To eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood ... to draw life from him ... we have to come to his table absolutely stripped of any righteousness we even thought we had, as people who are perishing with hunger for his righteousness. And we have to come with hearts which have turned away from self to him.

- The prodigal left his pigs.
- Levi left his thriving business.
- Zacchaeus left his old ways.
- And we have to leave ours!

We come to the table as people in need, as people who are repenting of ourselves. And coming as people in need, as people who are repenting of ourselves, we find Jesus, and we also find each other.

- It's at his table that the unity or disunity of the body always manifests itself.

The prime example was the church at Corinth. The power of the Holy Spirit was moving in that fellowship.

- People were getting healed.
- Wonderful prophecies were coming forth.
- Troubled souls were being drawn in from the world.

And yet, there was something wrong.

- They were divided into factions.
- There was immorality which wasn't being dealt with.
- People were getting out of hand with their new found "Christian liberty."

And the place where the root of this problem appeared was at the communion feast. At the communion feast the different factions sat by themselves. Some people were getting drunk ... some were going hungry. Things were really messy in this born-again Spirit-filled church.

So Paul takes up the problem in a letter:

***"But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you assemble as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and I partly believe it, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.***

***For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.***

***Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup."***

***I Corinthians 11:17-29***

Paul was dealing with the attitude these people had as they came together to commune.

- They were busy with themselves.
- They were not conscious of the presence of the Lord in their midst.
- They were eating his body and drinking his blood without communing with him.

And because they were going ahead with this meal without discerning Jesus in their midst, and in the very bread and wine, they were taking it unworthily, profaning his body and blood.

But notice: Nowhere in this passage does Paul imply that these people are taking this meal unworthily because their lives are imperfect.

Nowhere does Paul even hint that, because their lives are mixed up, they're unworthy to receive this food.

All Paul is saying is, "Pay attention to the One who comes and meets you in this wonderful meal! Remember who you are and who he is and you will receive it worthily."

"How come you're not taking communion today?"

"Oh, I'm not worthy. I've been a mess all week. I have no right to eat this food."

"How come you're not communing today?"

"I've been battling with lust all week." or, "I've been mad at my boss since Wednesday morning." or, "My wife called me a hypocrite on the way to church, and I'm not going to commune in front of her."

The very reason our Lord instituted this meal was so that by it we could remember what he did for us on Calvary. So that he might visit us with forgiveness and encouragement and healing in this food.

"This is my body given for you."

"This is my blood shed for your sins."

He never said we had to be perfect or nearly perfect, or calm and peaceful for 48 hours before we eat this meal.

All he's asking is that we fix our hearts on him, come with the prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

When we draw near to him as sinners, needy ones who hunger and thirst for his healing life, this simple meal becomes a heavenly feast. The angels sing and so do we.

*"I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh." The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you..."*  
*John 6:51-53*

**It's a sinners' feast!**

God help us to come as sinners who have no righteousness but his.

God help us to come in unity with each other.

God help us to come for the nourishment of heaven.

God help us to truly commune with Jesus to know him,  
to draw life from him,

as we eat his flesh and drink his blood.

THE LAMB  
WHO WAS SLAIN  
HAS BEGUN  
HIS REIGN



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