

PEOPLE OF THE WORD

A Service Manual For the Underground Church

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PEOPLE OF THE WORD

She's a single mother with a grown child. She works day shift at a Chrysler plant in Detroit. She connects easily with all kinds of people. Prostitutes and pimps seem to feel comfortable around her. So do doctors and lawyers. Bea is a sign of the future.

Bea prays with a stranger outside a store in downtown Detroit. Tears are streaming down the stranger's face. They will never see each other again, but the impact of that prayer was eternal.

Bea is a sign of the future. While living a simple, down-to-earth life in the real world, her life is ruled by one thing: the Word of God. Not words on a printed page, but the Word Made Flesh. Not some "doctrinal position," but the living Word that convicts, judges, redeems, heals. She is quiet, soft-spoken, a good listener. But her words and her actions radiate light. They manifest the Kingdom of God. Bea is one of the advanced troops in a unique army of "resurrected dry bones" which is beginning to appear.

The nations of the earth are about to be shaken with a message from God so powerful that the whole world system will tremble. This message will arouse violent opposition. It will also cause many, who never gave God a second thought, to fall on their faces in repentance.

This message from God will be delivered, not through satellite transmission or celebrity evangelism, or science-based strategies. It will spread like fire on the ground level through an army of "resurrected dry bones" who will cover the earth with the consuming blaze of the living Word. These "resurrected dry bones" are people who can best be described as People of the Word.

They alone will be the true laborers in the Final Harvest of the Kingdom of God.

When the master tells us that the harvest is plentiful and the laborers few, he makes no attempt to teach us how to become laborers. He simply commands us to pray to the Lord of the Harvest to send out laborers.

Who are these laborers? What do they look like?

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved.

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come."
Matthew 24

These "resurrected dry bones" will be laboring in a hostile world. They will not exude prosperity. They will suffer tribulation. They will be hated by "all nations" for their allegiance to the Master. While many believers are falling away, while hearts are growing cold, these people will be delivering their message with such power that no one who hears it will be able to ignore it. The Word will cut into hearts like a flaming sword.

These "resurrected dry bones" will have an appearance, a message, and an authority far different from the typical present-day evangelical Christian. They will lack the clean-cut look. Their smiles will be fleeting. Their egos have been consigned to the Abyss. They will be down-to-earth and matter-of-fact as they go about their daily lives.

They will come from every walk of life. There will even be a few clergy among them. They are embedded in the real world. Nothing in their appearance will arouse our curiosity. But when they open their mouths, not a word goes to waste. Wherever they go, strange things happen. Those who hear them will know that they have heard God speak, for the light of heaven has exposed their hearts.

These men and women will have one gift, one source of life, one burning reality: the Word. Not words on a printed page. Not words memorized by rote, but the Word as a burning flame, which, like Moses' Burning Bush, keeps on burning, while the bush remains green.

We call them People of the Word because the Word is all they have. They depend on nothing else. They need nothing else. In the following pages we are going to look at what it means to be equipped with nothing but the Word. For those who answer the Spirit's call to be such people are the ones who will truly set the world on fire before Judgment falls.

CHAPTER 1 --THE WORD

THE WORD AS A PERSON

*In the beginning was the Word
And the Word was with God
And the Word was God.....*

*And the Word became flesh
And dwelt among us.*

John 1

Her brother, Jack, had been depressed for months, so Sally convinced him to come and let the elders cast out whatever demonic power had gripped his mind. What could he lose? Nothing else had worked.

After the service when the folks had all gone home, Sally and Jack and the elders gathered at the front of the sanctuary. They began with quiet prayer, which gradually rose in volume and pitch as elders addressed the demon in the name of the Lord. "In the name of Jesus, depart from this man!" shouted the man who was regarded as one with a special gift.

Jack began to sob. The elders raised the volume. Jack began to sweat. "Come out, you foul spirit!" they shouted.

In his heart, Jack was getting angrier by the minute. "This is ridiculous," he thought to himself. "These people are half crazy. How did my sister get mixed up in an outfit like this?"

A stranger appeared at the rear of the sanctuary. He came forward and watched as the elders screamed and shouted. Finally the stranger interrupted things with a quiet rebuke. "The demon is not deaf," he said. He asked the elders to take a break and step back. Then the stranger, with an even voice, said, "Leave this man, and never return."

Jack rose from his knees, scratched his head, stepped over to his sister and gave her a hug. "I don't know what this guy did, but it worked. That terrifying gloom is gone. I know I'm okay now."

It was the difference between "words" and the Word. "Words," even beautiful words, are often dead. The Word is always alive, because the Word is not words in thin air, but a Person. We need to discern the eternal difference between "words" and the living Word. Words by themselves are just words.

There are glib words, hostile words, beautiful words, shrewd words, deceitful words. We hear them every day. We speak them constantly.

Then there is the Word. The Word is alive. The Word has creative power. The Word is not tainted with a shadow of deceit; it is always true.

"Let there be light."

"Rise and walk."

"Your sins are forgiven."

"Lazarus, come forth!"

The difference between words, even religious words, and the Word is the difference between day and night.

Too often we confuse "words" for the Word. We wave our Bibles around and call it the "Word." We quote scripture and call it the "Word." When Satan quoted Psalm 91 and said, "It is written," was this the Word in Satan's mouth? When are words of scripture the Word, and when are they lifeless words?

The best way to distinguish between "words" and the Word is to see the Word, first as a Person. The Word is God. The Word is God speaking. God never wastes his time on "words." When God speaks his Word, light shines in the darkness, demons tremble, arrogant souls take offence. When God speaks his Word a mark is left on every soul that hears. When God speaks his Word things happen.

When the skeptic asks with a knowing smile, "Who is God?" the answer is simply, "God is the one who has the last Word."

Through the centuries God has spoken his Word through men and women whose hearts were yielded. Occasionally God speaks through angels, his messengers. But at a pivotal moment in history God himself appeared as a Jewish prophet, an outsider in a tribe of outsiders. This Jewish prophet not only spoke the Word, he *was* the Word. He *is* the Word. ***"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."*** Jesus was, Jesus is, the Word incarnate.

Wherever the Word is present, Jesus is present. If you are living under the authority of the Word, you don't possess the Word, the Word possesses you. Jesus possesses you.

Recognizing the Word as a Person who is God the Son, we begin to understand that we cannot manipulate the Word for our own ends. For the Word in the person of Jesus the Messiah is holy. We need to take off our shoes when we hear the Word. When we speak the Word, we need to do it with fear and trembling, knowing we are in the presence of a consuming fire.

"The words that I speak are not mine, but his who sent me." Jesus the Word is the mouth of God. When he says, "Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven," he is God speaking. When he says, "Rise, take up your pallet, and go home," the living Word is empowering this paralyzed man to rise and walk.

When Peter says to a lame man, "Jesus the Messiah makes you whole," the living Word flows like a river of fire from Peter's heart to the lame man's body and raises him up.

Jesus, the Word, has not withdrawn from us. He is still here. Where he finds a dwelling place in any of us, he makes his presence known as and how he chooses. We do not control what he does through us. He does what he chooses to do, when he chooses to do it. Consider Jesus' final words in Matthew's gospel as not mere words, but the Word:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to the Word. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son—the Word—, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all the Word has commanded you. And lo, the Word is with you always, even to the close of the age."

If we are numbered among the People of the Word, our connection with the Word is quite different from our connection with the Book. The Book, as Jesus insists, bears witness to him. That is its function, its supreme function. The Book can only be understood by those who walk with him.

We can search the scriptures till the end of time; but if we do not follow the testimony of scripture to the Lamb on the Throne, we have misused the Bible and misunderstood what scripture is all about.

***"You search the scriptures, because you believe that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you will not come to me that you may have life."
John 5***

The Word is not a thing or a force. The Word is not a book you can hold in your hand. The Word holds you in his hand---if you have answered his call. The Word is a Person. The Word is Jesus himself who will speak to you, if your heart is tender, and will speak through you if your heart is obedient.

THE WORD AS SPIRIT

***"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***

They were gathered in a large room somewhere in Jerusalem, well over a hundred men and women. They were praying. Suddenly a shrill sound pierced their ears; it was like a shrieking wind. They looked up and saw a strange flame burning in mid-air. As they watched, the flame divided itself into more than a hundred smaller flames which came to rest above each of their heads. These followers of Jesus had been taken over by the Word.

The flames disappeared into their hearts, and before they knew it they found themselves praising God with unspeakable joy. The words that flowed across their lips were words like no other they had ever spoken .

They were not just words. They were the Word. The Holy Spirit was speaking through the lips of this motley crew. Soon they found themselves out on the street, still uttering words that baffled the crowd of onlookers which had gathered to see this strange sight and hear their amazing testimony.

The difference between dead words and the living Word is the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Word is the Spirit! ***"The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and life."***

There are those who claim that their words are "anointed by the Spirit." If we are speaking the Word, we don't have to make any claims. The Word will accomplish whatever it chooses. For the Word and the Spirit are one.

If I say, "Good morning," I have simply spoken words. But if the Spirit is in charge of me, my "Good morning," becomes more than words. These words convey a blessing from heaven. The Spirit never wastes words, is never "wordy." But the Spirit can cause the holiness of heaven to flow through whatever words he chooses as he transfigures them into the Word.

"Do not weep," Jesus said to the widow of Nain. Jesus was not giving her sympathy. He was speaking the Word, which was soon confirmed, as Jesus restored her son to life. Through that simple "Do not weep" the Spirit was comforting the widow and preparing her for her son's restoration.

And when Jesus said to the corpse, "Young man, I say to you, arise", Jesus was simply uttering what his Father through the Spirit was giving him to speak.

"The words that I have spoken are Spirit and Life."

Of course we can never anticipate where the Spirit will go or what he will choose to say. We do not possess the Spirit, the Spirit possesses us. But he possesses us as the Word.

The proof that the Holy Spirit is moving in you is not that warm glow you feel inside, or the strange trembling that comes over you, or the heavy breathing that takes hold of you when you feel "inspired", but the fact that the simple, clear, Word of God is in charge of your mind, your heart and your mouth.

Jesus never broke the bruised reed or quenched the smoking flax; he never demoralized people with a lion's roar. But when he addressed a demon, even in a quiet voice, the demon shuddered with fear. The Holy Spirit within him relied on nothing but the authority of the Father.

Elijah felt the earthquake shaking the cave where he stood, but "God was not in the earthquake." He was blown backwards by a wind that rent the rocks, but God was not in the wind. He felt the heat of a fire roaring across Mt. Sinai. But God was not in the fire. Then Elijah heard a "still small voice," the voice of a gentle stillness. He heard

a quiet Word, and he knew that he was in the presence of God. Trembling, he wrapped his face in his mantle. Elijah understood, better than most of us, that when the Spirit of God visits as the Word, we're in the presence of the Holy.

The Spirit and the Word are one.

The Messiah and the Word are one.

The Father, the Son and the Spirit are one.

Our only true link with the living God is the Word he speaks to us.

THE WORD IN SCRIPTURE

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4

When we consider the Word in scripture we need to keep in mind that the Word is not "words" but a Person. Jesus is the Word. Scripture, from beginning to end is the light that shines on him, bears witness to him. *Scripture is his creation, and we must make sure that scripture does not become his replacement.* The Word in scripture is Jesus himself. Once we understand this, scripture becomes a window of revelation into the heart of the Living God. We need to let the Word, Jesus himself, open the scripture to us as only he can.

Jesus declared himself the fulfillment of the law and the prophets.

"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them"
Matthew 5

All the requirements of the Law, and all the promises of the Prophets---both the approaching judgments and all the shining glories---are fulfilled in him. His poured-out life is the life of God the Word taking away the sin of the world. His risen life as the Firstborn of the New Creation is that of a Judge who makes no mistakes,. He will be vindicated, and he will vindicate his own.

Jesus declared the scripture to be holy.

"For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished."
Matthew 4

No one on earth ever treated the scriptures with more honor than Jesus. As the Word through whom all things were created, he had inspired the flawed human beings who wrote the words. As Jesus of Nazareth the man, he was steeped in scriptures. Nearly every word Jesus spoke can be traced back to the Law and the Prophets, including the Psalms. Jesus was intent on making sure that scriptures were fulfilled. And yet.....

Jesus proclaimed himself to be Lord of the scriptures.

"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire!"
Matthew 5

Whether it is murder, adultery, or an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, Jesus the Word makes whatever changes to the words of scripture he sees fit to make. "You have heard it saidbut I say to you." No one can do this but the living Word.

Jesus insisted that the purpose of scripture was to bear witness to him.

"You search the scriptures, because you believe that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you will not come to me that you may have life."
John 5

If the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law had been approaching scriptures with hearts tender toward God, they would have fallen on their faces before the Galilean. They would have stopped their mouths and opened their ears to every word he spoke. But these men, like many people today who consider themselves "well-versed" in scripture were taken up with words and missing the voice of the Word.

For the woman or man whose heart is given to the Word, the scriptures become their spiritual Mt. Sinai, the place where they meet God and hear him speak. Led by the Shepherd, they climb their Mt. Sinai and as they read the Psalms and the gospels and the prophets, they begin to hear the Shepherd's voice. They are given light for their path, strength to conquer the powers of darkness, holy peace.

And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4

Scripture does not bear witness to itself. Scripture never dares to call itself God. Scripture bears witness to the Incarnate Word.

"You search the scriptures, because you believe that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me." John 5

THE WORD IN YOU

"And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you". John 14

If you have denied yourself, taken up your cross, and are following Jesus, he declares you to be the light of the world. You are a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden. You are light in a dark place.

The light that is in you, rules you, judges you, empowers you, is the Word.

The light within you does not make you a "walking concordance," or a "master of scripture quotes", it is much more alive and personal. The Word, the Spirit, the Lord Jesus himself, strives within you to empower you to be a living witness to his lordship over all.

Of course, when we are indwelt by the Word, there are vast regions within us that resist the Word and insist on going their own way. There is a war within between our flesh (our ego), and the Word.

We often mouth the words, "I am crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ, who lives in me..." But being crucified with Christ and alive only to God is not a static thing, it's a relationship which needs to be renewed continuously. Daily we need to die to ourselves and give the Word place, until the Word becomes so clear and strong within us, we find ourselves yielding to its power with fear and trembling.

*If I say, "I will not mention him,
or speak any more in his name,"
there is in my heart as it were a burning fire
shut up in my bones,
and I am weary with holding it in,
and I cannot. Jeremiah 20*

The Word burned within Jeremiah as a solitary prophet. But the day of solitary prophets ended with John the Baptist. The Word in you and in me binds us together in unity around our Master. The Master within you and within me makes us one. And we remain alive in the Word---and the Word remains alive in us---only when we walk in unity. The Word within us allows us no peace until we find our way into that motley crew which the Lord Jesus established as Temple of God on earth---his Body. As we interact with other men and women who have abandoned their lives to the crucified Lord, the fire of the Word turns each of us into a burning Bush, a sign of God's kingdom, living proof that Jesus is alive from the dead. We are the light of the world because the Word has made us one.

The Word rarely abides for long in an isolated believer. The Word is sustained in believers as they serve God together, encouraging, admonishing, supporting each other, as they wash each other's feet.

*Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and
admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing
psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in
your hearts to God. Colossians 3*

"As you teach and admonish one another." "One another" is the theme of the living Temple of God on earth. This Temple is far less formal than the Temple in Jerusalem of old. And far less programmed than many of our churches today. It's not people sitting in pews, while a religious professional conducts the meeting. The true servant leader in the Body of Christ never forgets that they are on exactly the same level as the rest of the flock. Jesus calls for no Rabbis, no Masters, no professionals---all sisters and brothers under one Teacher, exhorting and encouraging each other to press on with the work of the harvest field.

"One another" is the mark of the Spirit-inhabited Temple of God on earth. "One another" is the true dwelling place of the living Word. "One another" is the mark of the reborn.

"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." **John 13**

The Word who became flesh and dwelt among us is now pleased to dwell within us---always as the Word, to whom all authority in heaven and earth has been given.

"Christ in you, the hope of glory."

CHAPTER 2 -- THE WITNESS

"But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning."

John 15

He picked up a hitchhiker on this winding Nova Scotia road. The hitch-hiker told how he had been in an accident along this road and got his head battered in , in the process. He was brain-injured.

"How did it happen? Did you lose control?"

"You could say that," he replied, "I was high."

"You off drugs now?"

"Definitely!"

"How did you get off drugs? Was it the trauma of the accident?"

"No, it was Jesus." Then he began to talk about his Lord as if he were talking about a friend. It was very simple and powerful. The Spirit was bearing witness to the Lord of Lords through one of his own as they drove along the Lawrencetown Road.

The Spirit witnesses in many ways. He convicts, heals, encourages, judges, calls us to repentance, empowers us to rise out of our paralysis and follow the Master. The Spirit is the supreme witness to the Lord of Lords.

THEIR WITNESS CONVICTS

Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

John 16

"You mind if I ask you a question?" Johnny said as he drove me to the nearest subway station. Johnny was a cab driver who wouldn't hesitate to roll a drunk for his money on a Saturday night. But Johnny was always in church on Sunday morning. He was the mainstay of that little church in a run-down inner-city neighborhood of Philadelphia.

"Go ahead," I said, expecting Johnny to ask a bit of spiritual advice. I was in for a shock.

"What the hell were you talking about in that sermon? I didn't get a thing out of it."

I was mortified. I had just given the folks a super-sermon.

But Johnny had given me a Word from God more truly than anything I had given him in my sermon. I was convicted. The Spirit used Johnny to call my pompous soul to repentance.

When the spirit convicts through whomever he chooses, he doesn't shout nor breathe fire. People can be convicted by a word of comfort, a healing touch, a simple handshake. In a mystery my soul was struck by the presence of the Holy and began to turn toward the light.

Peter fell under conviction, when, after a night of fruitless fishing, the nets came up bursting with fish. Jesus did not thunder at Peter, "You are a sinner!" All Jesus had said was, "***Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.***"

And when Peter fell on his knees in the boat and cried, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" Jesus simply answered, "Don't be afraid. From now on you'll be catching people."

Our life with God usually begins when we fall under conviction, when we suddenly get a glimpse of ourselves as God sees us. This is when we fall from our pedestals of vanity and begin to taste what it is to be poor in spirit. We didn't need to have a prophet point his finger at us and call us vain. We simply encountered the Holy in some surprising way, and began to repent of ourselves.

Conviction comes to the people we witness to in the same way. We cannot (thank God) engineer another person's repentance. No evangelist can program true repentance. He can manipulate people to cry or raise their hands or "come down to the front". But only the Spirit convicts the soul that is ripe for conviction. And he will do it through us, when we are sufficiently crucified with Christ and obedient to the Spirit in the simple things he puts before us. Things like taking time to truly listen to a person whom everyone regards as "a bother."

People of the Word are always "ordinary folks." They do not "fill a room" with their presence. They simply live their lives in relative obscurity and serve the Master wherever he puts them. They don't try to convict anybody. The Spirit does the convicting as they live their lives to the glory of their Master.

THEIR WITNESS HEALS

Bill was teaching school in Nova Scotia when he became convinced the Lord was calling him to teach in a place where teachers were scarce. Soon he was teaching children of Masai tribesmen in Africa.

A severe drought hit the region and the Masai people were suffering. One day the tribesmen surrounded Bill and said, "If your God is so good, why don't you ask him to make it rain?" Bill was stunned. He had been telling them that God not only sent his Son to drain away the evil that lives in us, but he also cares about our daily needs. "Let's see if your God really cares for us."

Bill was on the spot. Can he really expect God to answer their cry for help? Surrounded by these men, Bill offered to God a simple prayer for rain.

Within 30 minutes the sky grew dark and soon it was pouring down buckets of needed rain. Bill was awe-struck. Frightened. He himself had never witnessed such a dramatic answer to prayer.

The following day the Masai people came to Bill with all their sick, and begged him to heal them. This was too much! "I'm no healer! What if nothing happens when I pray? No! I can't do this." He sent them all away, angry and disappointed.

Before we get too angry with Bill we need to ask ourselves how well we met the challenge when we are put on the spot. How many times the Lord has opened a door for us to manifest his mercy and we have shrugged our shoulders and turned away.

Bruce, a farmer from Michigan took his family to Bolivia, where he began preaching the gospel and planting little churches in a region near the border with Peru. Bruce was a modern John Wesley, moving, preaching wherever he could find listeners.

Bruce crossed over into Peru and, arriving at a little village he would say to the people, "Bring me your sick. I would

like to pray for them." After prying for God's healing on the sick who always came, Bruce would tell them how Jesus shows his love and forgiveness by healing and restoring, as he gathers us into his Kingdom. Bruce did not preach healing, he preached Jesus. But his witness to Jesus was a simple portrayal of the Jesus of Nazareth who had such compassion for the shepherdless multitudes. And everywhere Bruce goes, to this day, the Lord Jesus confirms Bruce's simple witness with signs of his kingdom.

What else is the Word, but God forgiving our sin, draining our guilt into himself? And God does this in the person of Jesus the Lamb. The experts in God's law were offended when they saw the Word in action. "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?"

"Which is easier? To say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?"

Jesus lifts the paralyzed man into a forgiven walk: "Rise, take up your pallet and go home." Healing is a confirmation, a visible extension of God's forgiving grace, where and when God chooses to impart it.

Healing in the name of Jesus, healing in the power of the Spirit, is a sign of the coming Kingdom. It takes place at God's pleasure, not ours. We don't make it happen, God does. But from the earliest days of the Body of Christ on earth, healing has been seen as a confirmation of the Word.

The People of the Word carry within them a witness that heals. This witness has been neglected by many, abused by many. But where men and women are truly crucified with Christ, this witness is essential to their calling. The Lord Jesus will heal through them---through us.

THEIR WITNESS DIVIDES

"I'm never going back there again! That man was probing my soul. He was up there preaching, and I was sitting low in my seat. He put his finger on stuff inside me that's none of his business! I go to church to find serenity, not to have my soul searched."

"That's odd. It didn't hit me that way at all. I feel like I've just taken a spiritual bath. Those words shook me, but it seemed like God was talking to me. He woke me up, put me on my feet. I know what I've got to do."

Two people hear the same words. One is attracted, the other repelled.

"Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division; for henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against her mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

Luke 12

The Word is a two-edged sword. It cuts to the heart with both mercy and judgment. It raises the fallen and brings down the arrogant. It binds up the broken heart and offends the heart of stone. It divides.

From this moment until the King divides the sheep from the goats before his glorious throne, wherever the Word is present, it sets "a son against his father and a daughter against her mother." It calls for a loyalty above all loyalties, which makes the loyalties left behind bitter with resentment.

"He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it."

Matthew 10

The witness of the Word is good news. But not all who hear this witness perceive it as good news. Those who are offended by the Word become its enemies. And as we near the Day of the Lord the divide seems to be widening.

THEIR WITNESS BREAKS THE CEDARS OF LEBANON.

*The voice of the Lord is powerful,
The voice of the Lord is full of majesty.
The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars,
Yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon.
Psalm 29*

The Lord God makes his voice heard through those who are ruled by no other master but the Word. Their witness breaks the cedars of Lebanon, majestic trees that stand like kings in what's left of the ancient forests. Their witness breaks the power of the great ones of this world that rise up against the living Word.

The path ahead for the People of the Word is not strewn with flowers. Danger and uncanny hostility is waiting for those who dare to leave their comfort zone and follow the Master toward their waiting Calvary. Yet, the greater the danger, the stronger their witness. The more violent the enemy becomes, the more deadly the judgment that falls. And this judgment needs no guns to enhance its power; judgment falls through the spoken Word and cuts to the bone and marrow.

"But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.

This will be a time for you to bear testimony. Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict."

Luke 21

Our Lord never broke the bruised reed or quenched the smoking flax; he never demoralized those who were struggling to find their way. Jesus spoke with a stern kindness. "I'm here to help you, but don't be playing games." The thirsty multitudes found in that kindness the door to a new life.

But when hypocrites began pushing against him, Jesus soon set their hearts trembling---not with rage, but with fear. Demons groveled as he came near. One word from him and they began feeling the heat of the One who is a consuming fire.

And now, the risen Lord lives in those who have dared to place their lives---and their futures---under the power of his Word. *"Christ in*

you, the hope of glory." When these servants of the Word speak, the mighty cedars of Lebanon break into pieces and begin to skip like calves on the hillside.

***But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior;
therefore my persecutors will stumble,
they will not overcome me.
They will be greatly shamed,
for they will not succeed.***

Jeremiah 20

THEIR WITNESS RESTORES

John was an art professor at Wayne State University in Detroit. He was a highly talented artist with a growing reputation. John was also part of the art community in New York City. He maintained a studio in New York, even while he taught in Detroit.

On the surface John was a big success. Yet beneath the surface, the thing that kept him pumped up as he raced back and forth between New York and Detroit---a 13 hour drive each way---was alcohol, along with drugs.

One day, after 17 years of this rat race, John hit a stone wall. Something snapped inside him, and he fell apart. He gave up being king of the universe, and for 90 days in a row, without missing, he made himself attend AA meetings. During that time something else happened to him: John met Jesus---for real.

One day John turned up in a church in a broken-down neighborhood of the city. He saw himself as part of the "motley congregation" and spent days rethinking his life in his storefront studio. He gave up painting for a season. He was shutting down his old life, spending time with God.

John and his wife, Ann, bought a house a few blocks from the church, right next to a motel where the prostitutes took their clients. Then one day, in the garage at the back of his house, in front of a huge mirror, John began to paint again. He painted himself wearing nothing but grave wrappings, emerging from his tomb.

John was literally raised from the dead, as Jesus raised Lazarus. Lazarus was a corpse. Dead. But when Jesus said, "Lazarus, come out!" Lazarus, from another world, heard the call and found his way back into that lifeless corpse. He struggled to his feet and came staggering out of his tomb, still tangled up in his grave wrappings.

Jesus said, "Unbind him and let him go." Because, even after Lazarus was alive, he still had to be freed from those grave wrappings.

The Lord Jesus who raised John from the dead also freed him from his grave wrappings.

So we have two problems: 1. Our deadness 2. Our grave wrappings.

Our deadness. When John raced back and forth between New York and Detroit, you could say he was alive. He walked, he talked, he painted, he joked with his friends. But inside he was empty. Nothing there. Dead.

No different from a lot of people who look just fine on the surface. They walk and talk and eat and sleep, have their oatmeal for breakfast and watch TV at night. But inside, they're empty. Nothing there. Dead.

No different from many religious folks, even respectable Christian folks. On the surface they seem to be cruising along in style. They go to church, they watch TV. They walk and talk and chat with their friends. But inside there's a desert. A vast emptiness. They're dead.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear (who pay attention and act) shall live."

John 5

On the surface we seem to be doing fine. We walk and talk and go for groceries and roar down the freeway. And yet, inside there's an emptiness. We're spiritually hollow. Dead. Then comes the moment when we hear that Voice. It cuts into our hearts like a hot knife. Now it's up to us to decide whether we're going to pay attention and respond and rise from our grave, or whether we'd prefer to ignore what we hear, allow it to fade and leave us unchanged.

"Those who hear---who pay attention and respond---shall live."

Our grave wrappings. Lazarus came out of his tomb. John came out of his tomb. You and I come out of our tomb. But we're still tangled up in our grave wrappings. Stuff from our old life still clings to us. We're not free. We need to be unbound and inbreathed with the Spirit of God.

We need to be restored. And once we are restored—truly restored--our witness restores others. For what other reason has the Father kept us on this earth?

*And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written,
"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."
Luke 4*

If we are truly People of the Word, we continue what our Lord began. We are the means by which he restores the poor, the rejected and forgotten, the captives, the sick and the blind and the lame. He raises them from the dead and he sets them free---through us.

CHAPTER 3 -- CLOTHED IN THE KING'S NATURE

Her name is Carol. But for the last 10 years she has gone by the name, Miriam. Ever since she went to Turkey and started mixing with the people, she has chosen a name that makes sense to Muslims.

Carol, (Miriam) is 70 years old and looks like a typical Turkish woman as she walks the streets of Istanbul. If you were to sit down and talk with her in a coffee house, you'd find her down-to-earth, easy to talk to. You would also find out, as many over there in Turkey have, that beneath that ordinary exterior a strange power seems to flow.

She's smart, humble, cheerful, gutsy. She burns with an invisible fire that ignites many a life that she chooses to touch.

One day Miriam walked into a store owned by a rather grumpy Muslim shopkeeper. She would often stop by to visit with this man, but lately he seemed more distant and grumpy than usual.

"I don't know why I keep coming here," said Miriam in her broken Turkish. "You tell me you want me to come, but when I get here you act as though you really don't want to be bothered."

"Keep coming," said the man with his eyes on the floor. When I see your face I know that there is a God."

Of course, the Muslim shopkeeper knew that Miriam was as flawed a human being as any. Yet, when she entered his shop the atmosphere changed. And that changed atmosphere made this man homesick for heaven. Miriam, flawed and struggling as any of us, is clothed in the King's nature.

Until we are wrapped in the King's nature, until our speech and actions radiate the very nature of God, our witness is weak.

...He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and become partakers of the divine nature.
II Peter 1

God does not suddenly inject us with his divine nature like a shot of adrenalin. He offers us his nature as a wedding garment as he welcomes us to the marriage feast of his Son. But it is up to us to put it on, and keep putting it on every day.

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices, and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.
Colossians 3

We put on the new nature through simple obedience to the divine command which is written on our hearts: ***"Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and your neighbor as yourself."*** The Spirit of God helps us in our weakness, as we strive to walk in

the light. And the Word who now lives in us, causes us to take on the marks of his nature.

THE ESSENTIALS: FAITH, HOPE, LOVE

Faith, hope and love are gifts from heaven. They do not originate in us. They marked the life of our Lord as he walked this earth in flesh and blood. They mark our lives as well.

FAITH

While faith is a gift from heaven, it only becomes ours as an act of the will. I need to deliberately take the risk the Master calls for when he says, "Follow me." I need to leave my boats behind and follow Jesus into unmarked territory.

Talking faith is not faith. Feeling faith is not faith. Doing faith is the only way. ***"Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me"*** means abandoning ourselves to the Word, to Jesus' commands and promises, daring to leave the future in his hands.

HOPE

Hope is a gift from God. Heaven gives us the spark, but it does not burst into flame until we carefully fan the spark by choosing constantly to look forward with hearts expectant toward God like a little child greeting the new day with joy.

"My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him."
Psalm 62

Hope is waiting upon God with expectation as an act of the will. Choosing to turn my eyes toward heaven and expecting the fulfillment of all its promises----when and where God chooses. We need to discipline ourselves to put on the garment of hope every morning when we get up, and keep it on through all the challenges of the day.

LOVE

"But the greatest of these is love," which is also a gift from God. Agape love, God's love is simply not part of our nature. And to put it on as a garment, to make it part of our nature requires a continuous act of the will.

It's easy to get so caught up in our "ministry" or our "spiritual journey" that we bypass the core of the new nature and become warped.

*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.
If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

I Corinthians 13

Paul continues his teaching in I Corinthians 13 by telling us what love is not....and what love is. Love is not arrogant, not easily provoked, not resentful, doesn't insist on its own way. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. And, of course, when the Spirit begins to get specific, who of us does not begin to squirm? Because the new nature does not fit easily over our bloated egos.

But the Spirit, though relentless, is also patient. He seems to break down this awesome gift of love into smaller pieces, so we can apply ourselves, limited as we are, to the new walk.

FORBEARING AND FORGIVING

The hard lesson of forgiving becomes easier for us to learn, when we first form the attitude of forbearance.

Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice. Let all people know your forbearance. Philippians 4

Forbearance is simply the generous overlooking of insult or injury. Giving folks the benefit of the doubt. Backing away from our rapid-fire judgments. Softening our brittle attitudes.

Forbearance is not being pliable. It is not a weakness. Forbearance is not a matter of trying to "be loved" by everybody. Forbearance flows from strength. If I know who I am before God, why do I need to walk around with my sword unsheathed, ready to vindicate myself at a moment's notice? I need to give the folks a break! God knows them better than I do, and he doesn't seem to be nearly as upset as I am. The Spirit of the Lord Jesus is far more forbearing than I am, puts up with a lot more than I do. I need to get over myself and enter the domain of holy forbearance.

The Wedding Garment of heaven, without which no one enters the City of Light, is held together by a single golden thread. Remove that thread, the whole garment disintegrates. It's called Forgiveness.

*Forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
When you stand praying,
Forgive if you have anything against anyone.
Not seven times, but seventy times seven.*

How can we dare to partake of his broken body and his shed blood--given for us, shed for our sins---if we refuse to forgive our neighbor? If we're having trouble forgiving the "unforgivable," we look to the Master to help us. "Lord, I can't do it! Help me to do the thing you command me to do!"

Most of the resentments that trouble our hearts are petty and often childish. They are the "little foxes that spoil the vines." And for these we need only to reflect on the Mercy which floods our lives, repent before the Master, and soften our hearts in gracious forgiveness.

CLOTHED IN A LIFE OF DISCIPLINED PRAYER

People of the Word are not babies. They have long-since crossed the Red Sea, where God's hand was so obvious to their innocent eyes. They are in the Wilderness of Reality, where they have grown up, and are walking by faith, even when things seem desolate and monotonous.

The thing that sustains them is prayer, disciplined prayer, which connects them with the unseen world of the Almighty One. Most of these people have learned the hard way that they cannot afford to be careless or casual, when it comes to prayer.

They are not experts. There are no experts at prayer. But they keep at it. Because they have found that without disciplined prayer they lose their way.

There is no set pattern. Each disciple finds their own way. But they have these things in common, as they seek to stay connected with heaven:

- They spend a serious period of time alone with God daily.
- They find strength to pray by connecting their hearts to the prophets and apostles in scripture.

- They use the prayer book which the Master both inspired and used: the Psalms.
- They present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God.
- They turn their minds away from the darkness and open them to the light of God's Spirit, seeking the grace to love God with all their hearts, and their neighbors as themselves.
- They intercede. They lift their loved ones, their friends, their enemies, their neighbors, nations, world rulers, refugees, and even tyrants---up before the Throne of God.

People of the Word consider prayer to be their major ministry. The real work. The foundation of everything they do. And they never quit.

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

The Apostle Paul, a man of deep, consistent, disciplined prayer, confessed his need of help. He approached prayer, not as an expert, but as a needy soul. And he received the help of heaven. And so will we.

SCOURING THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA

The Pharisees could not understand how Jesus, if he was from God, would waste his time with tax collectors and sinners. Even John the Baptist was perplexed by the fact that Jesus, whom he had introduced as the Lamb of God, the Messiah, was forever spending his days with the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind---the useless ones in this troubled world.

Sadly, while Christendom never ceased to generate "projects" to help the poor, and calls for "justice" in the halls of power, it actually spends little time or energy among the forgotten ones of earth. Most congregations of believers are amazingly homogenous, made up of folks who know how to get along and "make something of themselves."

People of the Word follow the example of the Master and scour the bottom of the sea, as they fish for souls.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4

It is the nature of the Master to draw near to the ones whom everyone ignores. The little ones who seem to have no value, the wounded ones who have nothing to exploit. The Master treats these souls with high honor, and so do the People of the Word.

If we are clothed in the nature of our Master, we are not "spiritual social workers," dealing with troubled clients, we are forgiven souls reaching out to others for whom our Master shed his blood.

We are scouring the streets and lanes of the city, bringing the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind to the Banquet of the Kingdom. We leave the big-time methods to the big-timers, and simply mingle with the folks and let the Spirit lead.

God can accomplish more for his kingdom with a cup of coffee shared with a stranger at McDonald's than a two-hour "Christian Spectacular" TV production. The People of the Word are focused on street-level, personal connections with ordinary folks. If Nicodemus hears about it in his Wall Street office, he'll come down and join the celebration.

CHAPTER 4 -- SMALL BEGINNINGS

Born in a stable, raised in the Boondocks, after thirty years of obscurity, he finally appeared at the edge of the Jordan to be baptized. Nobody knew who he was except John the Baptist.

Anointed by the Spirit, as he emerged from the water, the Holy One of God, withdrew into the wilderness and was seen by no one for forty days. Finally he began his work by proclaiming that the Kingdom of heaven had drawn near. From these small beginnings a fire began to spread over the face of this planet which continues its mysterious mission to this hour.

Jesus insisted that everything he did was done at the Father's command. And everything Jesus did was done at ground level. No pomp. No subtle manipulating of people. No self-promotion.

The People of the Word follow in the Master's steps. They begin small, they continue small, they end small. And the holy fire spreads where it will. Only God himself sees the impact. Who else needs to see it?

"He'll have a relapse, he'll never get better, he's a broken man," insisted Brother Elmer one morning in the gospel mission when Harold's name was mentioned. That was forty years ago. Elmer has long since left this world, but Harold, now in his eighties, continues as the servant-leader of a Messianic Congregation which meets on the northern edge of Detroit. Harold and his wife, Grace, live close to the edge, financially.

Their congregation worships the Messiah in Jewish tradition, but is a mix of Jew, Gentile, Black, White, Hispanic. It, too, lives on the edge financially. But their meetings are flooded with the humble atmosphere that is always present where the glory of God is at work.

Harold is not pursuing numbers. He's pursuing the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and anyone else who wants to come along. The motley crew that meets each Sabbath to hear the Word and give God glory is a sign of things to come, a foretaste of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

In order to function as People of the Word, followers of Jesus need to get over their obsession with numbers and money. The fire of the living Word is never dependent on money. It never appeals for funds. It never implies that "if we had more money we could do

more good." The focus is on the Kingdom, taking the Master at his word, that the Father will provide.

Nor do the People of the Word look to numbers as a measure of success. They understand that the Father gathers and sifts, numbers rise and fall. Time and again, when our Lord Jesus attracted large crowds, he would sift them down with hard words:

Now great multitudes accompanied him; and he turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple."
Luke 14

The People of the Word take two paradoxical commands of the Master as their guide: "*Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,*" and "*Go, make disciples of all nations.*"

The lost sheep.

Until Pentecost, the focus of our Lord was Israel. Jesus basically confined his ministry to Israel as a nation. "*I have not been sent, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*"

And in Israel, Jesus aimed his efforts toward the "lost sheep." "*I have not come to call the righteous (whoever they are) but sinners to repentance.*" Jesus spent the major portion of his time with tax collectors and sinners, people who were outside the borders of orthodox respectability. This baffled the religious establishment and even confused John the Baptist. Jesus never exploited wealth or cozied up to people in power. Nicodemus, and people like him, were welcomed, when they came to him. But Jesus never targeted them. Jesus graciously accepted, when Simon the Pharisee invited him to dinner, but he did not hesitate to give Simon a brutal dose of truth. Simon the Pharisee was a lost sheep, but did not know it.

Jesus' very presence at this man's table was a call to repentance. When Simon looked with scorn at the sinful woman washing Jesus' feet with her tears, the only hope for him was to hear blunt words from his humble guest from Nazareth.

To this day there are lost sheep who know that they're lost. And there are lost sheep who have no idea how lost they are. Jesus is there for both kinds, and so are the People of the Word. But neither Jesus nor his true disciples waste time trying to convince the lost how lost they are. Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.

All nations

For those first believers, who were all Jewish, it was a strange command---"Go make disciples of all nations..." As Jews, they had been taught for centuries that they were a separate people; they were never to mix with the idolatrous nations around them. No pious Jew would ever sit down to a meal in the house of a Gentile. And now comes the command to take the gospel of the Kingdom to the whole world!

It took a heavenly vision to convince Peter that it was God's will for him to go to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile officer in the Roman army. But the Spirit prevailed, and the Jewish believers began to spread the fire of the Word out into the Gentile world.

Today the measure of how serious we are about making disciples of all nations is not how many missionaries we send overseas, but by how welcoming we are toward the nations which surround us in the city where we live. If I'm white, and support missionaries in Africa, but avoid the black family which moved in next-door, the Lord Jesus must be shaking his head with disappointment.

The nations are scattered and intermingled everywhere. Refugees are on the move across the globe. The first step for the People of God is simply to do what the Master did: spend time with the folks. Get to know them. And, above all, pray for them by name.

Of course, there are those who answer the call of the Master to cross the ocean and take the gospel wherever he sends them. But the power and witness of these servants of the Word will vastly increase when the rest of us, who claim to be disciples, have our eyes open to the harvest field of "outsiders" which now surrounds us.

Unlike political parties or revolutionary movements, we don't need to raise funds. We don't need to set up a chain of command. All we need to do is start washing feet in the place where we are, and the Spirit will decide who can be trusted with the authority of heaven and raise them up to serve and suffer as servant-leaders among us. For the People of the Word have a master who transfigures small things into eternal events, and takes broken souls like you and me into the counsels of heaven.

***"...for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict."
Luke 21***

CHAPTER 5 -- THE ALL-ENCOMPASSING WORD

When Rex B. Andrews began to emerge from seven years of shame, he found his way to Psalm 119. Each of its 176 verses spoke to him of the one thing: Word. Andrews meditated on this Psalm, soaked it into his soul, and found the living Word raising him out of his misery and restoring him to the life of the redeemed.

Only God knows what went on in this man's heart as he drank in the words of this Psalm, but Andrews could not have failed to be moved by how all-encompassing is the living Word. It sustains the universe. It empowers all who have ears to hear.

THE WORD AS OUR SHEPHERD

"My sheep hear my voice..."

The Word is not a "thing" to be handled by human hands. The Word is not a "message" which we can edit and adapt to our purposes. The Word is a Person. The Word is our Shepherd, who calls us by name and leads us out of our self-obsessed wilderness.

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me. And I give them eternal life; and no one shall snatch them out of my hands." **John 10**

He is our Shepherd, not our rule book. A rule book can be tampered with. You can rip out a page here and there which displeases you. You can put your finger on a paragraph that supports your opinion and win an argument. But you can't do that with your Shepherd. With your Shepherd you listen and obey. You follow.

Old Dr. Michaelson's raspy voice came blaring through the radio at 6:45 a.m. A struggling young preacher was listening. Michaelson spoke of the time when he, a Jewish man, and a judge in pre-Hitler Germany, met his Messiah in a life-changing vision. Every time Dr. Michaelson spoke of his Lord he would call him "My Jesus!" almost as if in a prayer of desperation. Michaelson was no smooth-talker. He was almost unpleasant to listen to. But the young preacher couldn't turn him off. There was something about his words....

When Michaelson came to town, the young preacher went to hear him. Michaelson was hardly a slick evangelist. He

was old, crippled and worn. Yet there was something about his words.... When the preacher gave Michaelson a drive to his cheap hotel, the conversation was intense. The old man demanded, "Do you know Jesus?"

"Don't be mouthing words. Do you know the Word? Do you know the Shepherd? Are you following him?" The old man's words burned like fire. Through his aging frame the Shepherd was speaking.

THE WORD AS OUR SHIELD

"His truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

Once we abandon ourselves to the Lord Jesus and begin to follow in his steps, the world becomes a strangely hostile place. On the surface everything looks the same. Our friends tolerate us, although they are uncomfortable with the change in us. Sometimes they patronize us, as if we have checked our brains at the door. It's a changed atmosphere. A strange hostility is in the air.

Now there are forces at work to distract us, to intimidate us, to lure us into places of amazing "spiritual beauty" which in fact leads to the darkness of nowhere. We will find ourselves under attack by the powers of darkness, and the only protection against these uncanny deceptions is our Shield: the Word. The living Word. The more truly we are indwelt and ruled by the living Word, the more limp and ineffective are the darts of the Deceiver.

It's not simply a matter of memorizing scripture and firing off Bible quotes. It's a matter of knowing the will of the Father as he speaks to our hearts through the living words of his Son. Walking in the light, living the mercy of God, our minds find a wisdom which is not our own. This shield is not external. It is deep inside. Our Master's prayer of protection is answered by the Father.

"While I was with them, I kept them in thy name, which thou hast given me; I have guarded them, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst

keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth."
John 17

THE WORD AS FIRE

For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.
Jeremiah 20

When that fire begins burning in your heart, you cannot hold it in. It will burn its way out of you, whether you like it or not. Once the Holy Spirit nails your life to the cross, and your mind focuses on the one thing needful, the fire consumes your life.

When Milton returned from the war in Vietnam, he bounced around in dope houses for a year. One summer evening his friends took him to a gathering in the park where all the junkies hung out. A guy who looked like Fidel Castro was leaning against a tree talking about Jesus. Nobody interrupted him. Nobody heckled him.

Milton, a Jew, listened. "Jesus is the Messiah, and he's coming back soon!" Night after night Milton came to the park to listen. Something inside him caught fire, set his life in order, turned him into a disciple of the Jewish Messiah.

Within a year, Milton knew more scripture, and it's meaning, than many a Bible College graduate. The Word simply ignited him, turned him into a Burning Bush for any stumbling traveler to see and draw near.

The fire that hovered over the believers on Pentecost, pierced their hearts and burned in them for the rest of their lives. And those flames continue to burn in all who abandon themselves to the Master. They carry his presence. They impart his words. These flames anoint the People of the Word with the authority of heaven.

THE WORD AS ROCK

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock." Matthew 7

The Living Word is the stone which the builders rejected and has now become the Cornerstone of the Eternal Temple, the Kingdom of God. It is the Rock that endures all, and remains standing when everything else has washed away in the flood of Judgment.

We live under the shadow of this Rock in our troubled world. It never fails us. It sustains us as nothing else can. The Word, alive and glowing with life, is in this respect our Rock, our anchor. Everything around us trembles with uncertainty. All the things we put our trust in---apart from the Word---turn out to be ephemeral. Whether it's our bank account or our best friend, eventually they will fail us as we leave this world behind. Only the Rock remains. This Rock, unlike any other, is eternal and alive.

John was unstable and directionless. He could not seem to stick to the path. He kept changing direction, switching loyalties.

Until he met the Rock.

In all the years since, and a thousand external upheavals, his love for his Master has never changed.

People of the Word are sustained by the Eternal, through flood and fire, in season and out of season, the one Reality that never changes.

"Heaven and earth will pass away; but my words will not pass away."

THE WORD AS A SWORD

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Hebrews 4

The Word is a Sword. But this sword is not at our disposal; we are at the Sword's disposal. So before we ever think of wielding this Sword against the enemy, we need to yield to its power as it cuts deep into our own hearts. Before we speak the Word with power, we hear the Word with fear and trembling. We yield to the Word in simple obedience.

Strange thing about Jean. She doesn't talk a lot. She ponders things, especially the Word. But when she speaks her words, they cut to the heart. They bring life.

There is a direct connection between what the Sword does in us and what the Sword does through us. God guaranteed the integrity of Ezekiel's witness by keeping him speechless for long periods of time. When Ezekiel said, "The Word of the Lord came to me..." the message that followed had power---a power that burns through Ezekiel's words to this day.

Once we have developed the habit of opening our hearts to the two-edged Sword, the Spirit begins to guide us into the world as witnesses. He puts the Sword in our mouths, often when we are unaware of its presence, and causes the life of heaven to flow from us, piercing hearts and opening deaf ears to the truth of God.

It seems that we are at our best as witnesses, when we are unaware that we're witnessing. When we are simply in conversation with that friend or stranger, listening and responding to the things which are on their hearts. Self-conscious "witnessing" is often flat and shallow, compared with the words that come from our hearts in normal conversation.

Years later, a friend will remind you of something you said that made an impact on their life. You can't remember that you ever spoke those words. Those living words flowed from heaven through you, and you were unaware.

THE WORD AS LIVING WATER

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" John 7

At first the Woman at the Well was baffled when Jesus spoke about living water. But she kept pressing for an explanation, and soon found herself undergoing a profound change. She was drinking in this Stranger's words and finding strength unlike anything she had ever tasted.

"Come see a man who told me all I ever did. Could not this be the Messiah?" Her words were so charged with life, that the village which had scorned her in the past could not resist following her to the well.

Living water is never stagnant. Living Water is always flowing. Flowing in, and flowing out. There can only be a fresh outflow if there is a fresh inflow. Hence the People of the Word need to be constantly drinking in a fresh flow from heaven, with hearts always open for a word as they go about their lives.

At the same time, the inflow of the Word will only remain fresh, if it flows out ---both as words and deeds. Believers who run from Bible Study to Bible Study, but never allow the Living Water to flow out of them in the everyday world, soon stagnate. This stagnation has a suffocating effect on their Bible Studies and all the meetings they attend. Receiving the Word without living the Word hardens the heart and dulls the mind.

LIGHT: THE WORD IN ACTION

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid, nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven"

Matthew 5

If we are People of the Word, we are the light of the world---as we walk in the light, as we do the deeds of light. The light of God is never still, it is always moving. From the time God said, "Let there be light" and there was light, down to this moment, Light is the holiness of God breaking through the darkness of this world, setting the captives free.

Light is not what you know. Light is what you do as a servant of God. Light is your walk as a follower of Jesus. ***"Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."***

When you, as a servant of the Lord Jesus, give a cup of cold water to a thirsty stranger, you are flooded with the light of heaven. When you turn aside from your own agenda to spend time with someone who needs a listening ear, you are light. When you share your wealth with hungry ones on the other side of the earth, you are light. When you bring hope from God to a soul in despair, the glory of heaven shines through every word you speak. When the Word lives in you and rules your actions, you are among the sons and daughters of Light, scattered across this troubled earth.

Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."

John 12

CHAPTER 6 -- THE WORD OF THE CROSS

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
1 Corinthians 1

The deepest mystery in the gospel of the kingdom is the event that took place on the edge of Jerusalem on a hill called Golgatha. What really happened when the Son of Man breathed his last on that Execution Tree? And what does this event, which took place so long ago, have to do with billions of souls walking the earth today? And why does Paul call it the *Word* of the cross? Does this mysterious event have a voice? Does it speak? And who has ears to hear it?

If the Incarnate Word atoned for the sin of the world on that cross, this event must have a voice. If the Lamb of God took our guilt on himself and drained it away in his lonely death, how is the world to know unless the Crucified One emerges from the realm of the dead and causes his voice to be heard?

Whether God speaks to the whole human race, or whether he speaks to a solitary soul, every word passes through the Lamb's blood at Calvary. At the beginning of Time, God came looking for Adam in

the garden, "Adam, Man, where are you?" That voice, calling out to our father Adam's trembling soul, was a Word of Grace, flowing from the Eternal Cross.

When Isaiah saw the Lord "high and lifted up," his terrified soul only found peace as the burning coal touched his mouth. The cleansing Isaiah received that day was the blood of the Lamb still to be shed.

The power of the Cross, which occurred at a specific place in a specific moment in time originated outside of time and space in Eternity. The Cross of Jesus proclaims an eternal message with an eternal voice to all people of all times.

"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

"And I, when I am lifted up (on the cross) will draw all people to myself."

The Word of the Cross is meant for all people. And the Father will see to it that it reaches all people, with or without, our cooperation. If the Word of the Cross has already found its way to us, we need to pay attention to what it has done for us, what it does in us, and what it intends to do through us.

THE WORD OF THE CROSS FOR US

The one necessary thing which we could never do for ourselves was done for us. Who but God could absorb the guilt which corrupts our hearts? Who but God could replace our heart of stone with a heart of flesh? Who but God could tear down the wall which barred us from his holy presence? In a universe where evil acts always have consequences and self-idolatry destines the soul to outer darkness, only God can save us from ourselves. And the price God pays to redeem us is beyond human comprehension. In a mystery, the God of the universe chose to die in our place, to swallow the darkness we were destined for, so that we could live in the light.

When the Incarnate Word died, the real earthquake was not in Jerusalem but in Eternity. There was a shift in the Ultimate Realm. The Curse was broken. The powers of darkness were denied their claim on the human race. Death itself became subject to the Dying One and was soon lying at his feet. This event has made it possible for

us to rise from our dark self-obsessed spiritual graves, and live in the light.

Of course we will actually live in the light only if we allow the Word of the Cross *for* us to become the Word of the Cross *in* us. God does not force salvation on us. This new life becomes ours only when we choose to receive it--and live it.

THE WORD OF THE CROSS IN US

"I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me."
Galatians 2

When Jesus says, "Follow me," he is not merely saying, "Follow me as I heal the sick and preach the gospel," he is saying "Follow me to the Cross. Die with me." Every follower of Jesus carries a Cross inside. Every follower of Jesus has died, and continues to die to their old life. On our way to glory, each of us will pass through a personal Calvary. The Cross within is the source of our life. It is our power. The Cross is our center of gravity. Every day we live on this earth we are learning to lay down our lives. We allow death to work in us that life may flow out to the ones we touch.

The power of what our Lord did for us at Calvary can only begin to work in us if Calvary begins to inhabit our bodies and minds. What Jesus did for me on the Cross must become what Jesus does in me as his crucifixion becomes the central reality of my being.

***"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 any one 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

THE WORD OF THE CROSS THROUGH US

The Master commands us to make disciples of all nations. Disciples. Committed followers of Jesus. And there is only one power that creates disciples: the power of the Cross.

"When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

I Corinthians 2

Paul, the most effective servant of us all, relied on only one power: the power of the Word of the Cross. Paul was indwelt by the power of the Cross, ruled by it, driven by it. He relied on nothing else. If Paul were among us today, he would be appalled at the gimmicks and bribes which are accepted by believers as "tools of evangelism." He would be disheartened at the value placed on money as a means toward "winning souls." He would weep at the strange fruit these efforts produce: "saved souls" that have no conception of what it means to be crucified with Christ, lives that are ill-prepared for the days which lie ahead.

Those who are obedient to the Spirit of God have only one gift to give to the wounded world out there: the Word of the Cross. The Word of God speaking through crucified lives. A living Word flowing from our inner Calvary. Good news of the kingdom, lived and spoken with such integrity that the Spirit is able to confirm the Word with signs of his presence.

"The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them."

Matthew 11

CHAPTER 7 -- AS GOD SEES THEM

Christendom, even in this chaotic world, is full of success stories. Mega churches are thriving. Statistics coming from the developing world show dramatic growth in the number of professing believers. But where do people of the Word fit into this picture? They seem to be missing from the structures of Christendom.

The People of the Word are aliens in Christendom. Even though they attend churches and mix with church folks, they seem to be out-of-sync with main-stream Christianity. For all practical purposes they are invisible. Even the fruit of their work seems to be invisible.

But not invisible to God.

The same Lord Jesus who saw deep into the hearts of the seven churches of Revelation sees into us all. He sees beyond statistics, numbers, and money to the depth of our hearts. And from the day they first appeared on earth (Pentecost) the People of the Word have conformed to the call of the Master in three ways:

They are servants of God.
They are servants of one another.
They are servants of the forgotten.

THEY ARE SERVANTS OF GOD.

"If any one 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

Above all, they are servants of God. This is their focus. This is the vision which dominates their hearts. It is one thing to quote the words, "We were bought with a price; we are not our own." It is another to have that truth driving our lives.

A servant has one desire: to please the Master, to do the Master's will. A servant whose heart is given to the Master needs little prompting. The servant just knows, and acts accordingly.

The People of the Word cheerfully serve wherever the Master puts them. They go about their daily lives like everyone else. They go to work, they raise children, they buy groceries, they visit friends. But they see themselves, wherever they are, as servants of God, fitting into his program in the everyday world. They are broken bread and poured-out wine in the hands of the Master, conveying his presence and fulfilling his Word.

Like any servant, the Person of the Word checks in with the Master daily. Alone before God the servant opens their heart in prayer, drinks in the words of the apostles and prophets, who have left us an eternal witness to the Lord Jesus.

A major service performed by the People of the Word is intercession. Alone before God, they lift up names and needs, and even nations before the throne of heaven. And in a mystery, the Spirit wraps these intercessions in the glory of heaven as redemptive power flows over lives completely unaware of the grace which hovers above them.

People of the Word faithfully pray the Father for laborers in the harvest, in obedience to the Lord's command. This is an essential part of their service to God.

Service to God takes place before the eye of God, not the eyes of men. True service to God is covered by God's hand, so that the glory of this service rises to God alone. God's servants never aspire to greatness in the eyes of people, but only to conformity to the Master's will. Their service to God is hidden in God.

THEY ARE SERVANTS OF ONE ANOTHER.

"You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."
John 13

The Body of Christ is not only a "school of forgiveness," it is a "school of servanthood." This is where we learn to wash feet. Our witness to the world remains weak and powerless until we learn to serve each other simply and quietly, without glory or fanfare.

An authentic congregation of the People of the Word is almost never homogenous. The Spirit draws diverse souls into the assembly, people who are logically incompatible. We are truly a "motley crew." We were gathered from the streets and lanes of the city, the highways and hedges---we were the odd ones, the "speckled birds" of society.

Most of us carry wounds of one kind or another. So we take care of each other. We encourage each other. We pick each other up, when we're stumbling. We wash each other's feet.

A simple phone call. Or a cup of coffee together. Perhaps a bit of financial help, given discreetly. And, above all, we pray for each other.

When the People of the Word gather, it is never a "spiritual supermarket," where individuals pick up their "spiritual food," and hurry on about their business. It's a "family feast," where folks share with each other the riches of the Kingdom.

And let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
Colossians 3

In the process of serving each other, strains develop between us. Some feel neglected. Some are overbearing. Thoughtless things are said. Feelings are hurt. But as we wash each other's feet with words and deeds of encouragement, the strains between us are swallowed up in the Peace of Christ which rules our hearts.

THEY ARE SERVANTS OF THE FORGOTTEN.

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me." Matthew 11

John the Baptist, sitting in prison, could not believe that Jesus kept wasting his time with people who are of no account: the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind. This is the Kingdom of God? This is how God's Messiah spends his time? Are you the one who is to come, or do we have to look for someone who knows how to take hold of power and get things done?

It's fine to help the poor and reach out to the marginalized, but things will never change if we don't get some clout in the halls of power. We need to make the world sit up and take notice, if we are ever to effect change!

So the thinking goes in Christendom to this day. But the People of the Word have chosen to follow the Master by focusing their efforts

as servants of the forgotten ones that languish in the shadows.

Servants, not "professionals" dealing with "clients." The People of the Word live their lives at the street level. No matter how well-off or well-educated they may be, their approach to the forgotten ones is always horizontal, never "from above."

When the Lord of the Universe chooses to shake things up, he can do it in an instant. He alone is the one who brings down the mighty and raises those of low degree. Our job is to keep serving the forgotten ones right under our noses. Give them a taste of God's mercy as we open our hearts to share what we have. We cause them to hear the good news, as we "speak a sustaining word to those who are weary." This kind of service enables the King to make his voice heard as we "bring good news to the poor."

In the days when the Body of Christ first burst on the scene, Paul and the other apostles understood this. They focused on the forgotten ones, just as the Lord Jesus did during his days in flesh and blood.

For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; therefore, as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord."
I Corinthians 1

We thank God for the NGOs that are feeding the hungry in massive refugee camps across the earth. We thank God for the men and women who are putting their lives on the line to help victims of earthquakes and plagues. Scattered among them are people of the Word, working side-by-side with other caring souls. But there are billions of people who barely eke out a living in the everyday world who get no attention from anyone but the unseen God. And the unseen God is sending the People of the Word to serve them as a sign of his presence until the Day of Accounting arrives.

CHAPTER 8 -- THE PEOPLE OF THE WORD AND THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come."

Matthew 24

The Lord Jesus is not begging us to do it. He's telling us that it will be done. This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations. It will happen, just before the End.

It will happen without fund-raising. It will happen without celebrity endorsement. It will happen without the permission of princes and presidents and dictators. It will happen without committees and conferences and official declarations. It will happen because the People of the Word have emerged from the shadows and are walking the streets of every city on earth.

What the nations of the world will hear will be the gospel of the kingdom, pure and simple. The gospel of the kingdom was around long before Thomas Aquinas or Luther or Calvin or Mary Baker Eddy.

"The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the good news."

The good news is that the World of God has already invaded the earth. A world where God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. A world where God sets the captives free from their chains by his word of command.

To enter this world you don't have to join a church or learn the Apostles Creed, or make a financial pledge. All you have to do is repent before God and open your heart to receive the forgiveness Jesus brings you through his atoning death. You die to yourself in the waters of baptism and rise into the life of the Kingdom as the Spirit floods you with the life of heaven.

Once you do this, you're in God's World, God's Kingdom. And now you grow in the Kingdom as you live the mercy God has shown you by the power of the Spirit God puts within you.

Soon you find yourself in a family of servants. To your astonishment, you find that you are part of God's "Motley Crew." People who have been redeemed by the same blood and are crucified at the same Cross and are guided by the same Spirit.

When the People of the Word proclaim the gospel of the kingdom, those who have tender hearts enter with joy. Those who take offense turn away, but they will not be able to claim ignorance.

The gospel of the Kingdom is simple. It can be understood by a child, yet the wisest soul on earth cannot penetrate its depth.

The gospel of the Kingdom is charged with power. At God's pleasure it is confirmed by signs of healing, deliverance, answered prayer. When proclaimed with integrity, people feel the impact. They know they have heard truth.

The gospel of the Kingdom is contagious.

It spreads from heart to heart like wildfire. It rouses dormant souls to action, causes them to repent and walk and talk like disciples of the King.

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM CREATES DIVISION.

"Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division; for henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against her mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

Luke 12

As the gospel of the Kingdom spreads over the earth, divisions will occur in families, churches, tribes and nations. Those who enter the Kingdom will find a cold reception, even outright hostility, from former friends. Choosing the Lord Jesus above all other loves is costly, but the only way to true freedom.

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM RAISES THE DEAD.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live."

John 5

It is the gospel of the Kingdom when the speaker walks in obedience to the Messiah. Those who have ears to hear rise from the dead and follow the Master. Like Lazarus shaking off his grave wrappings with the help of his friends, the new-born follower begins to live with unspeakable gratitude and joy.

The gospel of the Kingdom shatters the powers of darkness.

The demonic powers are no match for the authentic gospel of the Kingdom. The People of the Word don't have to attend seminars to learn how to cast our demons. They simply go about their business and deal with the dark powers as naturally as brushing off a mosquito.

The gospel of the Kingdom breaks through the gates of death.

The region of the dead once had a one-way door. Those who came in were in for good. There was no way back. But the gospel of the Kingdom has changed the atmosphere of that dark place.

But they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to the dead, that though judged in the flesh like men, they might live in the spirit like God.

I Peter 4

The gospel of the Kingdom is not limited by human apathy. It cannot be held back by our unbelief. It will be heard wherever the living God chooses to make it heard. Even during the long seasons of spiritual drought, when human ego seems to have taken control of the Great Commission, the gospel of the Kingdom is still bursting into the darkness with God's light.

The People of the Word are vessels of this gospel, servants of this gospel. They don't carry the gospel, the gospel carries them! Rules them. It is their only security, their only source of life.



CHAPTER 9 -- PENTECOST IN THE STREETS

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. And they were amazed and wondered, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?"

Acts 2

The Spirit fell on the believers as they were gathered in a house. Yet suddenly we see a multitude rushing together to hear these Galilean Jews proclaiming God's power in languages unknown to them. They are no longer in the house; they are out on the street!

Out in the open square the crowd swelled into thousands. They were moved by the Spirit to be out among the people, to be out in the ordinary, everyday world. It was a sign of things to come, when *"this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached as a testimony to all nations."*

When the Spirit falls on us, his witness is never confined to our house, or our church. His fire spreads into the avenues of daily life, ignites ordinary folks going about their business.

Revival initiated by the Spirit of God, and "revival" engineered by us are vastly different. The "revivals" and "spiritual renewals" organized by us are like Abraham and Sarah arranging to have a son through Hagar.

If God promises us an outpouring of his Spirit, he does not need our help to speed the process. He requires only our obedience, and our patience.

"Wait in Jerusalem, until you receive power from on high."

The People of the Word understand two facts which are often missed in the "Christian world":

1. Genuine outpourings of the Spirit are always initiated by God.

2. Genuine outpourings of the Spirit always find their way into the streets.

Genuine outpourings of the Spirit are always initiated by God.

We don't make it happen. We don't set the date and time. We don't even set the stage. We simply take the Master at his word, and ask....and wait.

"If you, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Luke 11

So we ask. And we wait for the real thing. We don't rush ahead, doing things our way. We keep serving God in the place where he puts us, and wait his time. God never fails to fulfill his promise. There will be an outpouring. And when it comes, we will not be able to contain it.

Genuine outpourings of the Spirit always find their way into the streets.

Jesus walks in the everyday world, where ordinary people live their lives. The Woman at the Well did not stay at the well. She felt compelled to go back to the village, where she was far from popular, and proclaim, "Come see a man who told me all I ever did. Is not this the Messiah?"

"Get them to our church, and get them saved," has the smell of human flesh. When the Spirit is in charge it's, "Get out there in the real world and show them the door to the Kingdom."

When the Spirit begins to move among us, we don't have to plan our outreach. The Spirit simply drives us out there and causes us to shine as the light of the world. You'll be standing at a bus stop, and suddenly a stranger begins to talk with you. You'll be sitting at your table at Starbucks, and three people join you out of nowhere, opening their hearts. The man next to you on the flight to Philadelphia begins to pour out his anguish to you, and the Spirit gives you a sustaining Word.

Why is all this happening to me? Because the Spirit has decided that it's time to cause the voice of God to be heard. The sick and the mentally troubled will draw near, as if they could see a healing fountain flowing at your feet. There will be healings, as simple and matter-of-fact as if you were giving them water to drink. Always at

the initiative of the Spirit, like a mysterious breeze blowing around you.

People of the Word are always people in the world as salt and light.

"As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they may be consecrated in truth." **John 15**

They are in the world as people who have been sent. Sent by the King. Sent with authority from heaven to reveal the Kingdom as they wash feet and gather the forgotten ones and lead them to the doorway to Life.



CHAPTER 10 -- APPROACHING THE END

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Rejoice then, O heaven and you that dwell therein! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short! **Revelation 12**

The last days of this age will not be pleasant for anyone. But for the People of the Word those days, for all their suffering, will be days of conquest. Not with guns and bombs, which have been the weapons of choice for religious fanatics worldwide, but with three burning swords which never fail.

The blood of the Lamb.

The word of their testimony.

Their willingness to die for the name of Jesus.

THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

After centuries of violence, war and plague and pestilence, God accomplished an act greater than the creation itself: he broke the grip of evil on the human race. He drained away the guilt which had twisted every human heart since the days of Adam.

God died in our place. God suffered the consequences of our sin. The Father laid on his beloved Son the weight of our wickedness, since he alone could wash it away forever.

All we like sheep have gone astray, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
Isaiah 53

Wars are still raging. Kingdoms are still falling. Souls are still groping in darkness. But the days of evil and suffering are now numbered. Sin and sadness will soon end. And as a foretaste of the coming glory a door is now open, on to God's realm of peace. Open to all.

It happened the instant Jesus of Nazareth died on that cross. The Prince of Darkness, faced with this fact, is terrified by the sight of Jesus' blood. He trembles before those who are washed in that blood, for he knows that the blood of the Lamb is their victory.

To the world this blood is meaningless. Yet no other substance in all creation can open the door to the Kingdom of God.

The People of the Word rely on the blood of the Lamb as their only claim on the mercy of God, and their primary weapon against evil around them and within them.

THE WORD OF THEIR TESTIMONY.

It's a simple testimony:

Jesus rose from the dead and is now Lord of all.

The People of the Word are a living sign of the resurrection of the Lord. Resurrection power shines through their actions and rings in their words.

Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well. This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.
Acts 4

The word of their testimony is not simply repeating endlessly "what Jesus did in my life." It is much more. It is proclaiming to the world that this Jesus, who was crucified, is alive from the dead and Lord of all!

Of course, just saying the words, "Jesus is alive from the dead," is no guarantee of their truth. The words become fire from heaven only if they are grounded in the power of the cross. Only those who are crucified with Christ are anointed by the power of the resurrection.

People of the Word live their lives in the power of the Lord's resurrection. Having died with the Master, they rise with him moment by moment to walk in his light and proclaim his truth.

THEIR WILLINGNESS TO DIE FOR THE NAME OF JESUS.

There are two kinds of martyrdom for the name of Jesus: *quick martyrdom* and *slow martyrdom*. Stephen was stoned to death for the name of his Lord. It was a quick martyrdom. But there is also a slow martyrdom. Watchman Nee tells of an English woman who spent her life in an obscure village in China, serving the Lord Jesus. She too laid down her life as a martyr for the Master.

Both this woman and Stephen poured out their lives unto death. They both overcame the Prince of this world by their martyrdom.

The People of the Word are martyrs. They are unafraid to die for the name of Jesus. They are willing to lay down their lives for him in whatever way he commands. For some it will be a sudden death. For others it will be a life poured out in faithful obedience in places that will seem insignificant. But the fact that they honor the Master by offering up their lives to him wherever he chooses makes them shining stars in the spiritual firmament.

"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**

"Whoever serves me must follow me"---to a cross....to death. And this death, for most of us is not once-and-done. This death is a fire we carry in our hearts, even as our Lord Jesus carried his cross from the moment he emerged from the waters of the Jordan. Jesus' entire ministry was a death which began at the Jordan and ended at Calvary. Out of this awesome death flowed a River of Life which is now making its final journey across this planet in the swelling numbers of this Army of Light: the People of the Word.

We are proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom as a testimony to all nations. We are conquering the Prince of this world by the Blood of the Lamb, by the word of our testimony, and by our willingness to die for the name of Jesus.

And then the End will come.

CHAPTER 11 -- WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

The People of the Word are the work of God, not of human genius. God is calling them to life through the voice of his Son exactly as he raised the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision through the prophet's voice. The heart hears the call, rises to answer, and the breath of heaven gives it life. And that breath is the Living Word.

This time the Valley of Dry Bones is the earth itself. The bones are scattered through the nations. But when they hear the Master's voice they rise up and begin their work.

"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth (on the cross) will draw all people to myself."

"I will draw them, not through angels, nor through human ingenuity, but through the Word, burning in the hearts of men and women and youths who have abandoned themselves to Me."

All people, all nations, all cultures will be shaken by the appearance of men and women who are focused on one thing: living the Word. No bushel will hide their light. No one will mistake the message. Their words will burn with fire. Their call to repentance will be so strong that no one can miss it.

Will you see them on the evening news? Not likely. They are the Underground Church, the "shock troops" of the Kingdom's final push.

Where are they now? They are alive on the earth at this hour. They are beginning to hear the Master's call. They are awakening. They are clearing away the clutter from their hearts. Their minds are beginning to focus on the "one thing needful."

Are you and I among them?

CHAPTER 12 -- MIDNIGHT

As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." Matthew 25

"They all slumbered and slept." Nobody was aware of the time, as they slept. The midnight hour was a surprise to all, including the wise virgins. But those wise virgins were ready. They had oil.

The Bridegroom's delay is a form of judgment. It separates fleeting faith from enduring faith. Shallow faith won't make it. Faith based on anything less than radical commitment to the Incarnate Word will flicker and falter at the Midnight Hour.

Faith is God's gift. Obedience is our response.

People of the Word are sustained to the end by one thing only: obedience. Obedience in season and out of season. Obedience sustained by the Spirit of the Lord.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven." Mathew 7

The faith that sustains the People of the Word is a gift from God. They do not earn it. It is a gift. But what is often missed, as we thank God for his fathomless grace, is that true grace always produces obedience.

Faith and obedience are two sides of the same miracle. Obedience is impossible without faith. And faith without obedience is a sham.

The power to obey comes from the Word. If Jesus says, "Rise and walk ", I can rise and walk. If Jesus says, "Love your enemy", I can love my enemy. If Jesus says, "Forgive, as you have been forgiven", I can forgive.

If Jesus says, "Go, make disciples," I can make disciples. His word of command is charged with the power to obey. But I must do the obeying. He will not do my obeying for me.

Jesus prays for me---and for you. But he does not do our praying for us. As we do the things he teaches us to do, commands us to do, the power of heaven floods our lives and sustains us for the long haul.

Only God knows when Midnight will arrive. Only God can sustain us to the end.

But only we can obey.

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WHO WAS SLAIN
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