

SUBSTANCE



Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1

Imagine what it would be like if our land was struck by a plague in which 80% of the population is infected with a disease unheard of before for which there is no vaccine or antibiotic. In this plague, the victim slowly changed from flesh and blood human beings into immaterial spirits. With each day that passes, the victim has less and less substance, becomes more and more like a shadow, eats less and less, is less and less visible or audible, has less and less contact with the world of matter, until finally there's nothing left at all.

How would you like to be married to a spirit? How would you like to cook dinner for a ghost that can't even hold a fork? Absurd as this may sound, there is a disease very similar to this which, since apostolic days, has attacked the church of Jesus Christ at certain times. We're witnessing such a plague even now. A plague in which followers of Jesus.... the more "faith" they seemed to have, the more "spiritual" they seem to become...**lose their substance.**

They don't become ghosts, they still have bodies. Yet there is something insubstantial about them. Something cloudy, nebulous. It's as if they were only half there anymore. You wonder if they leave any footprints when they walk in the mud. It's almost as if they've already left this world for the world of spirits, while their bodies and their faces and their voices keep going through the motions of living.

These people are often sweet, tender, full of gentle praises to God. They like to gather together and hear good teaching....

.... But nothing ever comes of it in their concrete life.

Their concrete life of flesh and blood is hardly distinguishable from the lives of people who never met Jesus.... Except perhaps, for a lack of zest. The blood of Jesus has no effect on their dinner table, their marriage bed, their jobs, their studies. These things go by remote control while their spirits take off into the world of mist, shadow, and vapor.

This is not what it means to be born again of the spirit....

This is not what it means to become a spiritual man or woman....

This is not what it means to be a stranger and a pilgrim in this world....

This is a disease!

When believers lose their substance, They're not spiritual, they're sick!



“And the Word was made flesh and lived among us.”

God the Son didn't come here as a ghost.... He came here as a man.

When he died on that cross, he bled real blood. And Jesus didn't come here to change us into ghosts.

He healed sick bodies.

He opened blind eyes.

He fed the hungry.

The people who drew near to him and committed their lives to him in faith, far from melting away into the spirit world became....

more concrete,
more solid,
more real than ever before.

Unstable Peter became exactly what Jesus made him.... A rock.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Modern translators have eliminated that word substance and put in assurance, confidence etc. No doubt they know what they're doing when it comes to translating Greek into English. But there is a truth contained in the old King James rendering which is badly needed at this time.

When a man believes the word which God speaks to him, he immediately has within him the substance of the thing God promised.... The things he's looking forward to.

When he believes God's promise to him, he is no longer wishing, he is no longer playing games with himself as he does when he buys a lottery ticket and dreams of what he'll do with his winnings.

He's got something solid and real in him that makes him solid and real and holds him while the storms of change rage around him. For instance,

If Jesus says to us, *“I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* And we believe that, (the very believing which is itself a miracle of the Holy Spirit) is somehow a substantial fulfillment of the promise. We don't just have the “feeling” that he's there, we have his actual presence. And as we continue to believe, Jesus manifests his presence right down in this world of flesh and blood.

If Jesus tells us, “*Wherever two or three of you are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of you*”, and we believe that, and we are careful to gather in his name and no other, than the very confidence that Jesus is here becomes a window through which we see into that other dimension which penetrates this world, and here he is. And the evidence that Jesus is here crosses over from the world of spirit into the world of matter.

His presence becomes substance indeed.

If Jesus tells us, in the face of all the condemnation and hopelessness and discouragement we feel, that our sins are forgiven and we believe him, our very believing his word becomes a substance of the peace we were looking for. Now it's not just for forgiveness out there talking to us, it's forgiveness in here.... in our hearts. If the substance of the things hoped for isn't there, inside your heart, then whatever you have is not really faith. It may be positive thinking, or wishful thinking, or self-hypnosis, or auto suggestion, but it's not faith in the living God.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for...

Faith is that solid anchor which holds you even when the misgivings and doubts and temptations rage like a hurricane on the surface of your mind.

All through scripture we see that substance is the one characteristic of the man or woman of faith.

Abraham had substance.

Moses had substance.

Esther had substance.

Jeremiah had substance.

They weren't ghosts, they were real people who took God at his word until God's word became substance in their very flesh.

They didn't escape this world for the world of the spirit....

They brought heaven down into the world of matter.



Through their flesh and blood bodies, by faith, they ministered heaven to the people around them.

This climaxed with the son of God himself.... who walked this earth as a man, trusted his Father for every breath he drew, prayed as every other man has to pray. And he made things happen in the world of the flesh.

The thing about Jesus was that he had substance.

The world could despise Jesus, it could reject him, it could belittle him, it could mock him. But it could not turn him away from doing the Father's will. It could not frighten him or discourage him. There was, in this frail man, who got tired and thirsty and hungry like any other man, the substance of the Godhead.

And the word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.

The eternal word by whom the world's were made is embodied in this man.

In him dwelleth the boldness of the Godhead bodily.

He atoned for human sin in a body...

He rose from the dead in a body....

He sits at the right hand of glory in a body.



When Jesus says to us, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me,”* He is offering us now, in this life and in these bodies, the substance of the God our hearts have been thirsting for.

1. **“I am the Way.”** The way to the Father is not a ghost or a docetic appearance but a man. In Jesus the material does not melt into spirit.... The spiritual comes down *into ordinary matter and makes it a sacrament*. God and man are sat down at table and commune over bread and wine. And if you follow Jesus as the Way, you do what he does. In his name you pour yourself out to others in ordinary material ways.... You share your bread with others and your table becomes like his table. You share your car, your house, your handshake, your small talk with somebody at work.... all become sacraments. The more you follow Jesus, the less spiritual you appear in this world. But God is in every ordinary thing you do.
2. **“I am the Truth.”** In Jesus, truth doesn't evaporate into a philosophy. Truth descends from the highest heaven and embodies itself in a man who can be known and loved and who does things. “What is truth?” says Pilate. He's looking into the very eyes of truth made flesh and can't recognize it because it has substance.

*If you continue in my word, then you are my disciples indeed
and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.*

....You'll be free from your spiritual ego to do God's will in ordinary flesh and blood life.

3. **“I am the Life.”** Life is not some mystery you unlock through monastic discipline on a far off mountain top.... life is not something you experience by degrading this material body through carousing and dissipation. Life is something you enter by knowing Jesus. And when you know Jesus, and keep knowing him, that life takes on substance in your flesh.

“He that hath the Son hath life. He that hath not the Son hath not life.”

Our Lord invites us to his table not as ghosts.... not as half dead bodies whose spirits have gone off into the other worlds.... But as real people.

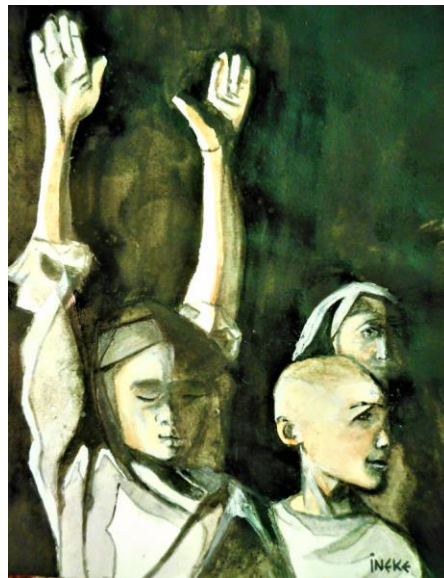
He died in a *real body* for our healing and now he gives us *real bread* to eat for our healing.

He shed *real blood* for our forgiveness and now he gives us *real wine* to drink for our forgiveness.

Then, Jesus Christ the son of God sends us out as *real flesh and blood people* to be sacraments to *real people* with *real problems* out there in the *real world*.

And when he says that he goes with us and dwells in us.... we can be sure that his presence in us is as real as the bread and wine in us.

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God grant that the truth of this may be confirmed to us. That the ordinary movements of our lives may feel the touch of the hand of Jesus as we serve him in these bodies of flesh and blood.

Prayer: Yes, Lord Jesus, give us substance. Dwell in us in such a way that our lives are more than fleeting shadows. Make our lives and our faith so solid, so concrete, so real, that we bring your healing, your real substance....your very real presence to those around us. Draw us so close to you that we are able to bring heaven now into this world of flesh and blood...sharing ourselves in very real, ordinary ways...wrapped up in your truth...filled with a sacramental life that nourishes this world with your real body and your real blood. Amen.

Maranatha Mirror

Message: Richard E. Bieber Unknown date....but found in a recently discovered old booklet “Discipleship, A Positive View” in which some of the other sermons were from 1972&1973

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HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN