

THE GRIP OF GOD



After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him.

Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?"

John 6

The minute we show any serious resolve to follow Jesus, things begin to happen in and around us that try to destroy that resolve.

As soon as the seed is sown it's vulnerable.

- Birds come along and take the seed away.
- It grows on rocky soil and withers under the sun's heat.
- Thorns spring up and choke the growing plants.

There is not one of us who has not felt the pressure to turn away from the light - to compromise, to back off and fall asleep.

How many of those who started out with us have long since given up and gone back to their old life! Will we be next?

But some of the seed does grow. There is always a remnant that makes it all the way.

Our Lord prays on his last night in flesh-and-blood,

"Those whom thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition that scripture might be fulfilled."

All the big guns of the enemy had been aimed at those men to blast them out of God's hand. But there they are, in spite of devastating temptations, still focused and alive, because these men were held in the grip of God.

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

And we say, "That's where I want to be! In His hand."

I want to be held in the grip of God so that no one can tear me out of God's Kingdom – ever! That's where I want my children to be, and my loved ones, and my brothers and sisters."

"Lord, get us through this uncertain world where the enemy has the power to mislead and destroy us. Bring us into your grip and hold us."

But the grip of God is not what a lot of people seem to think it is. They picture God reaching down and grabbing them, and lifting them to glory with or without their cooperation.

God will grip us, hold us, carry us to glory.

But never against our will. And never without our cooperation.



When many of our Lord's disciples drew back and no longer went about with Him, the little handful that stuck with Jesus was clearly held in the grip of God.

But notice, it was not as if Jesus said to these men,

"You can't leave me. Others, yes; but you I hold in my power. You have to stay."

On the contrary, Jesus makes a point of reminding them that they are free. They can go if they want to.

"Will you also go away?"

Jesus never built a wall around them and said,

"Now you're safe. The devil can't get in and you can't get out."

Jesus never took them out of the world. He kept them safe from the evil one in the midst of all the dangers, because their hearts were freely given over to Him - every day, every hour.

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

It's hard to say whether it was a vision or a dream. I was climbing this mountain when I began to hear the most beautiful singing. Were they angels? Or were they human voices? I came up over the edge of a plateau and saw an immense glass dome several hundred yards ahead and could hear the singing coming from its open door.

From all directions people were streaming toward the giant dome. As I got closer, I could distinguish the words of these beautiful songs. They were praises to God.

At the door of the dome a man was directing the new-comers to various open spaces under the dome that were not yet occupied by people. As I entered I made the unsettling discovery that the people who were rapidly filling the dome and singing these magnificent praises to God were not sitting on chairs, nor were they standing. They were actually planted in the ground like flowers! It almost seemed that their hands, lifted heavenward in praise, had become leaves.

Were these people turning into plants before my eyes?

Was this good or evil?

All these questions were swept out of my mind by the absolutely heavenly songs.

One man, walking down the aisles between the groups of singers, seemed to be in charge. Under him were various workers with sprinkling cans, hoses, bags of fertilizer, who went among the singers cultivating, watering, adding nourishment to the soil.

"This is the most magnificent singing I have ever heard," I said to the man in charge.

"Would you like to join us? Commit yourself to this endeavor and you'll be praising God too.

Moreover, you will be safe in here from wind and storm. Like these, you too will grow in the sunshine of God's love."

Suddenly I felt as if I were choking and knew I had to get out of there. As I ran for the door I could hear the leader and his workers shouting after me.

"You unbeliever! You selfish soul! You individualist! You'll never survive out there!"

Nor did I stop running until the singing was out of earshot and the dome was out of sight.

I came to a gorge in the mountainside where a scruffy collection of hard-looking types were sitting together on the bank of a stream. They too were singing God's praises. "



But what a contrast! Half of them couldn't carry a tune, and the chap who was trying to play the guitar was forever breaking a string.

"Welcome!" shouted one of the group as he spied me climbing down into the gorge.

"Have a bite with us. We're combing the mountains calling people into the Kingdom. There was a clap of thunder, followed by a downpour of rain, but these people went right on singing and eating as if the sun were shining.

"Back to work!" shouted the leader. And they broke into pairs and fanned out through the mountainside with stretchers and bandages, looking for wounded souls.

The thunder became louder, and the wind rose. Soon a ninety mile-an-hour gale was tearing across the ridge of the mountain and I was afraid.



I remembered the words of the man in the glass dome promising safety from wind and storm, and decided to make my way back to it. But when I arrived, there was nothing left of the dome but twisted steel and splinters of glass.

The dead bodies of the singers were lying like flattened tulips all over the plateau.



In the distance I could hear the songs of the workers from the gorge blending with the wind and the rain.

God's grip is not a glass dome. People in God's grip are not hothouse flowers protected from the storms of life by smiling circumstances.

People in the grip of God are simply those who have come to the place where they say with their hearts,

***"Lord, to whom shall we go?
You have the words of eternal life and we have believed
and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God."***

And they live with Him right out there on that stormy mountain. No storm can keep them from going right on following the Lord.

God alone knows who these people are, knows each of them by name.

Here are some things to remember about those enduring saints.

1. The saints who are in the grip of God take the words of Jesus straight.



All the others eventually say, "This is a hard saying, who can listen to it." And they either turn away from his words or dilute his words and soften them.

But the tough saints who are abiding in the Vine hang on to Jesus' words and conform their lives to them, even when they don't fully understand.

"What do you mean, Lord, forsake all that I have?"

Nevertheless, I'll do it. Just keep showing the way, Lord."

"What do you mean, Lord, turn the other cheek?"

At your word I'll do it."

"And these things that you say about adultery, pulling out the eye, cutting off the hand, faithfulness to one's mate – that's not how they do things these days.

But I'll do what you say."

2. The saints who endure are those who aren't afraid to go out of their way.



They've long since given up the idea that you can follow Jesus and have what the world calls "the good life."

They know they're going to be disrupted, or perhaps sent to do monotonous tasks.

The hothouse Christians live programmed lives. Always the right temperature, the right amount of diversion - everything con-trolled.

But the saints who follow the Lamb of God are willing to be inconvenienced, to die to self again and again.

This is what gives them heaven's power.

3. Saints who are in the grip of God are not afraid of rejection.



Hothouse Christians are forever weighing their words to make sure they don't offend the Pharisees, because Pharisees are convenient friends to have in this world.

But the saints who endure know they're going to be rejected, written off by their best friends as fools, despised by the very ones whose respect this flesh craves.

***"A servant is not greater than his master.
If they persecuted me, they will persecute you."***

We're not here to win friends and influence people. We're here to do the will of our Lord. To go out there and make disciples before night comes when no man can work.

4. Finally, the people who are in the grip of God pass through tough circumstances as if they were vapor.



Their hearts are not tied to circumstances.

- They are not depressed when the results are small.
- They are not elated when results seem great.

We're here to please God, not to seek great things for ourselves.

When the woman swept her house looking for that lost coin, she didn't fall into a fit of depression after three hours of fruitless searching. She went right on searching until she found the lost coin.

Some of us are being lured by music coming from the hothouse. We're looking for a place of security where we can grow like little tulips in the sunshine of our spiritual delusions.

But if we really want to be held in the grip of God, we abandon ourselves to the Christ who still roams that stormy mountain looking for lost sheep.

He's not in the hothouse. He's out in the storm!

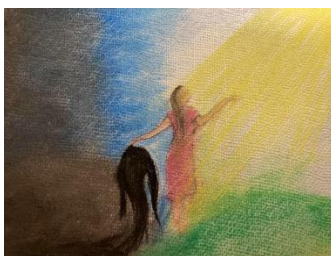


- His words are often hard.
- His path is often inconvenient.
- His goal is a cross - rejection by men.

The circumstances that surround Him are ever-changing.

But if we want the kingdom of God, where else can we go but with Him?

***"Lord, to whom shall we go?
You have the words of eternal life and we have believed
and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God."***



Prayer- Yes Lord may the call of our hearts be ... "Lord to whom shall we go...your words are life to our souls, in you we see your eternal kingdom, we know beyond anything that you are the Holy One of God". Keep us in your grip despite storms, trials, rejection. Holy, Loving Shepherd... help us to long for your grip, to treasure it, to seek it knowing we are safe in it and that you are worthy of our abandonment to you.. MM

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THE LAMB
WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN