

**WINNING
THE
REAL WAR**

By
Richard E. Bieber

WINNING THE REAL WAR

**By
Richard E. Bieber**

COPYRIGHT

This ebook has been processed by: "[A Restoration Digital Materials Library](#)" located in St. Helens, Oregon. All ebooks are free to download and share with friends.

You are also welcomed and encouraged to visit the website or facebook page of "[Maranatha Mirror Messages](#)" for a much larger collection of Richard E. Bieber's writings. They can be found at:

Website: <http://mmirror.net/>

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/maranathamirror/>

Respect the author's generosity. Although his writings are made freely available, please don't take credit for the writings or use the writings for financial gain or soliciting funds. Any quotations or reproductions should cite "Richard E. Bieber" as the author.



THE LAMB
WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN

Maranatha Mirror Messages

Contact or send us a message at:

www.mmirror.net

MaranathaMirror18@gmail.com

39039 Shoreline Harrison Twp. MI 48045
586-530-6983

CONTENTS

1. War
2. Winning The Real War
3. Conquerors
4. Power
5. His Power
6. The Blessed Forgotten
7. Claim Your Inheritance
8. Not By Might, Nor By Power, But By My Spirit
9. Wise As Serpents
10. Crashing The Gates Of Death

1

WAR

Based on: I Peter 4

Most of us understand that as this age of grace comes to an end and the living God begins to bring this world and its rulers (visible and invisible) to account, the atmosphere of this world will be that of war, universal war. War that is utterly beyond the control or comprehension of any man.

Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say, as with a voice of thunder, "Come!" And I saw and behold, a white horse, and its rider had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering to conquer.

When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say "Come!" And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another; and he was given a great sword.

Revelation 6:1-4

From the moment of the breaking of the seals until the end of this age there will be war on the earth.

War in which awesome holiness and awesome unholiness will become visible to those who have eyes to see.. There will be no question in their minds that God is doing something and that Satan is doing something. And every soul on earth will be aligned on one side or the other.

- All the facades will come off.
- All fronts will come down.
- Evil will no longer be hidden.

Men will see that Jesus wasn't paranoid when He talked about the prince of this world. And the apostles weren't deluded when they warned of the anti-christ and the false prophet.

We are living on the threshold of this period;

- the signs of its beginning are upon us,

- the day of grace is already sinking into twilight, preparing the way for a time of clouds and thick darkness of blood, fire, and vapor of smoke.

But what most of us still do not grasp is that, for followers of Jesus, even these last fleeting days of God's age of grace are a time of war. That the war begins for the believer not at the breaking of the seven seals, but the instant you begin to follow Jesus. And it doesn't stop until either you have passed out of this body of flesh-and-blood or until you give up and go down in the defeat of unbelief.

Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother.

They will put you out of the synagogues (churches). Indeed the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.

Notice;

Jesus never carried a sword,

never shed anyone's blood,

never fought over politics.

All Jesus ever did was preach the Kingdom of God and heal the sick. Yet, it was war from the time He began His ministry until they had Him nailed to that cross – at every step there were people who were trying to kill Him. Why? Because behind these people there was an unseen enemy.

The disciples went forth in peace.

- They weren't out to hurt anybody.

- They weren't trying to tear down the system.

All they ever did was preach Jesus, crucified and risen, and heal the sick. Yet every one of them, with the possible exception of the apostle John, was murdered.

To this day when men and women give up playing their little churchy games and get down to seriously following Jesus, they suddenly become the object of anger, spite, hatred.

I'm not talking about believers who are obnoxious and are despised for it---and think they're being persecuted,

I'm talking about obedient, disciplined followers of Jesus who live this gospel.

Why should they be hated? Because when you commit yourself to the Son of God, the Prince of this world becomes your enemy. He will seek to intimidate you,

to discourage you,

to confuse you,

to make you feel like a fool. He will wait for opportunities when your faith is weak to come in as a wedge between you and your Lord.

God will do His part. God doesn't let us dangle out there without help or protection. Jesus doesn't throw us into that storm center of evil and then let us spin helplessly like leaves in the wind.

"I will never leave you nor forsake you."

"Lo, I am with you always to the close of the age."

"I have said these things to you to keep you from falling away."

There is no fire so hot, or trial so severe that Jesus can't get us through.

There are believers reading these words that are facing difficult circumstances. And there are others whose trials will soon be coming. No matter how rough it is or how hopeless it looks, the word of the Lord to you is "Trust me. Trust me - I'll get you through. I'll make you more than a conqueror."

All authority has been given to Jesus in heaven and on earth. There are things that Jesus will do in your circumstances that you never even dreamed of. He will get you through!

But for the Son of God to preserve you in this war, there are some things that you have to do. God cannot do them for you - you have to do them. These things are contained in a brief paragraph sandwiched in the middle of Chapter 4 of I Peter, (which is all about the war believers have to endure).

The paragraph teaches that if you're going to make it in this war there are three things you will have to watch out for: prayerlessness, lovelessness, and fruitlessness.

Watch out for -

I. Prayerlessness: make sure that your relationship with God is clear.

"The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers."

None of us has an automatic prayer life. Maybe when you were first reborn it was easy to pray. Perhaps when you first experienced the fullness of the Spirit it was easy to pray. But it doesn't remain easy to pray for anyone.

- There are a million distractions.

- Our moods change.

- We can easily slip into a frame of mind in which prayer seems to be the most ridiculous thing in the world.

And the enemy will do everything in his power to keep you off balance so that you can't pray. And it's your responsibility to make sure that this doesn't happen.

Keep sane and sober for your prayers;

- so that you can pray without ceasing,

- so that your unconscious is anchored in God even while you are doing your daily work or playing with your children.

It will help if you start the day with your Lord and fall asleep at night with His name on your lips;

- and call on that name,

- and praise that name every hour of the day.

2. Watch out for lovelessness - keep your relationship with your brother/sister clear.

Above all hold unfailing love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another.

The army that has no unity, no love and trust binding one man to another, will fall apart when the battle starts going hard. And the believer who has no real unity with brothers and sisters will always lack the power to survive.

Unfailing love for one another – not fair-weather love – not conditional love---love that never fails, is always there.

And notice that the command of the Spirit is not;

"Make sure other people love you with unfailing love",

but;

"Make sure you love them with unfailing love (even if they don't seem to have that unfailing love for you.)"

You show hospitality to them even if they don't show hospitality to you.

When the love fails, the power of God draws back and that man or woman or fellowship begins to die.

Do we really have unfailing love for one another? God help us to start with ourselves.

3. Watch out for fruitlessness - be diligent in the exercise of your gifts so that you bear fruit.

As each has received a gift, employ it for one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

Whoever speaks as one who utters oracles of God.

Whoever renders service as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies, in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

You have a gift from God,

- you are able to speak His name,
- you are able to serve people in His name,
- you are able to discern the cry coming from their heart for which they can't find words,
- you are able to minister forgiveness, healing, encouragement, hope.

The problem is not, "Do I have a gift". Every believer has a gift from God - **every believer**. And you don't have to go to fifteen seminars to find out what it is.

The problem is that the gifts have to be exercised. And the gifts of God cannot be exercised, for instance, by lazy believers.

- You're not a good steward of God's grace when you're lazy.
- "You wicked and lazy servant", the Master said to the man who buried his talent.

There are too many believers who have been gifted by God but they're lazy - so their gifts rot!

You can't be Moses and Elijah with spiritual gifts when you're an Esau in your daily life.

Nor can the gifts of God be exercised by glory-hungry believers.

"On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name'? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you, depart from me you evil doers'."

Jesus calls them "evil doers". Why? Because they kept skimming off the glory for themselves.

"Did we not prophesy in your name? Look at all the wonderful things we did!"

When you get some of the glory, no matter how mighty your works are, as far as God is concerned they are tainted with evil.

Make sure that all service you render to God – in other words, all that you do - brings glory to God alone. None for you - all for God.

Nobody knows when the Lamb is going to begin to break the seven seals and the rider of the red horse will take all peace from the earth. But the war which will come to the surface on that day is already raging in the unseen realm of spirit and if we are born of the Spirit we are involved in war now.

There are only three things that can defeat us,

- prayerlessness
- lovelessness
- fruitlessness ; failure to exercise our ministries.

If we're stumbling it's because of at least one of these three things. God help us to see exactly which one it is and do something about it.

If you need to get back into relationship with God - do it.

If you need to get back into relationship with your brothers and sisters - do it.

If you need to get back to the work God gave you with the gift He gave you - do it.

And do it now!

WINNING THE REAL WAR

Imagine for a minute that the town where we live has become a war zone. The big bombs have done their work and now two armies are battling for control of what's left. Those of us who have survived are staying in our houses and apartments. Food and water are in short supply. We're trying to get up enough nerve to venture out and see if some abandoned house might at least have a little rice or flour or a can of beans. But the chatter of automatic weapons and the rumble of exploding shells frightens us....

"Maybe we better wait and stretch out what little food we have left."

Suddenly, in the middle of all this chaos, we hear singing. We pull back the drapes and look out on the street. And to our amazement we can see an old truck piled high with sacks of potatoes and rice and fresh fruit and corn. Behind it is another truck with jugs of water. Men and women, singing at the top of their lungs as if there were no war at all, are carrying food and water from the trucks to each house ... and singing all the time.

"They'll be dead by the time they get to the end of the block," someone says.

"But how come they got this far?"

"Where did they get the food?"

"And how can they be singing?"

There's a knock on our door. There stands a man loaded down with food. Behind him is a woman with a jug of water.

"Here, take this," they say, and head back to the trucks singing their hearts out.

Suddenly a burst of automatic fire ... the woman is hit. From out of a house across the street two women run to take her place. By the time the food trucks reach the end of the block, the army of helpers has doubled in size ... still singing.

Two armies are battling for control ... both of them are pawns of Satan the Prince of this world. A third army comes up the street without a gun

... this is the army that will conquer because it is overcoming evil with good, even at the price of death.

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world --- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 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 12:7-12

We could sit down and discuss for the rest of our lives why God, if he is all powerful, should permit any opposition from men or demons. Why does he allow this war to go on? But that wouldn't change the fact that there is a struggle in the realm of spirit, of which the political, military, economic wars

being waged at this hour, are only a dim reflection. Evil is not just the absence of good ... like cold is the absence of heat.

Evil is not just something inside our heads.

Evil exists outside of us as well as within us.

- Evil is intelligent.

- Evil is personal.

- Evil is organized.

- Evil is a kingdom.

If we survive all the wars that will ravage the earth in the coming years but allow our hearts to be conquered by evil, we've lost the real war. The real war is between good and evil ... between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan ... and every one of us has to choose which side we're going to be on.

"I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished! 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 12:49-53

These are the words of a man who never carried a sword, never raised his fist,

never gathered an army, yet he came to divide the earth ... and he did. And each of us has to decide whether we're going to surrender our lives to the kingdom of evil or surrender our lives to Jesus, and by his power conquer evil.

- We don't conquer evil by hiding in the house with the drapes drawn.
- Nor do we conquer evil by picking up a gun and going out there shooting.
- We conquer evil by joining the army of the Lamb.

Observe how the Lamb, Jesus, overcame evil: by walking right into it!

"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon; they will scourge him and kill him, and on the third day he will rise."

Luke 18:31-33

He went up to Jerusalem and laid down his life and conquered Satan. And so we overcome the kingdom of evil not by running away from it, but by walking straight toward it.

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 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."

Revelation 12:10-11

They conquered him....

1. By the blood of the Lamb.
2. By the word of their testimony.
3. By loving not their lives even unto death.

Thank God there are no shells exploding out there. But to pretend there is no war going on is to be willfully blind. The

dragon and his angels have been thrown down to the earth ... and things are out of control and there is not a man or a nation that is able to bring things under control again. Yet the simplest child of God can go out there like David before Goliath and conquer.

We are not helpless victims on a sinking ship. We are sons and daughters of the most high God. And we are given everything we need to conquer the lying spirit which has captured this earth. We conquer him,

- by the blood of the Lamb,
- by the word of our testimony,
- by defying the fear of death.

We conquer Satan by,

1. The blood of the Lamb, which brings peace into our own hearts.

In order to win the battle on the outside we first have to win the battle on the inside. You win this inner war by getting your sin covered.

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven; whose sin is covered.

Psalms 32:1

... "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

Satan only has scope within us when he has sin-ground to stand on. Call for the blood ... the ground drops away and Satan sinks.

- By the blood of the Lamb we put away the old nature.
- By the blood of the Lamb we call for the Spirit and put on the new nature.
- By the blood of the Lamb we end the war inside us by driving sin, guilt, fear of death and Satan himself out.

In mercy the Lord has instituted the meal we call Communion so that we can come together and renew our vision of his atoning death, confess our sins, repent of them and join ourselves, with thanksgiving and praise, to his broken body and his shed blood.

- Now we have peace.

- Now we can handle the battle on the outside.

We conquer Satan by,

2. The word of our testimony.

.... they sang as they went down the street feeding the hungry.

Thou art my hiding place, thou shalt preserve me from trouble;

Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.

Psalm 32:7

When the war zone around us begins to hear those songs of deliverance ... begins to hear a word of testimony, Satan will be driven back in defeat.

And what is the word of our testimony? Our testimony is that Jesus of Nazareth is the Savior of this world.

- He alone is its healer.

- He alone is its hope.

- He alone is its peace with a holy God.

- He alone is the escape from the false God of this world.

- Jesus is Lord!

Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords now ... and we need to confess this to him, to each other and to the world.

We don't conquer Satan by just being respectable and proper. We conquer Satan by a strong, clear, bold Spirit-anointed word.

Lord God! Open our mouths and give us tongues to speak your burning truth until it sets fire to the earth!

We overcome Satan by,

3. Loving not our lives even unto death.

Who of us can deny that far too long we have loved our lives to death?

- We loved our lives so much,

- we played it so safe,

- we pampered ourselves so much worrying about dying
....

we were dead.

Help us now, Lord God, to throw away the fear of death and all the fears that hang with it.

God help us to go out into the streets of the city of This World with the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony and feed the hungry, and free the captives, and conquer Satan.

If in the process we lose our lives ... praise God ... what better way to die?

Whether we like it or not,

- there is a war going on.

Whether we like it or not,

- we're in it ... on one side, or the other.

God help us to see clearly who the real enemy is and to conquer him,

by the blood of the Lamb,

by the word of our testimony,
by loving not our lives even unto death.

3

CONQUERORS

We love to talk about spiritual warfare in our Bible studies and prayer meetings. But when it comes to walking through the battle zone, as we do every day, our posture is all too often, not that of a conqueror, but of a whipped dog.

- The long face,
- The timid heart,
- The conditioned reflex which automatically avoids any path that threatens to bring us into conflict.

And yet to follow Jesus in this world is to be involved in conflict all our lives ... and to conquer. Following Jesus is more than being good and staying out of trouble. Jesus went about doing good but he was always in trouble. His whole life was a battle ... a conquest of evil.

And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I wept much that no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. Then one of the elders said to me, "Weep not; lo, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

Revelation 5:3-5

He is worthy to open the scroll and break the seals because he conquered. And those who believe in him, who follow him, are expected to conquer just as he did.

To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death.

To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it.

He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations.

He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Revelation 2 and 3

Our Lord teaches us to look at life in this world in two ways ... two ways which at first seem to conflict.

On the one hand he teaches us to look at life in this world in terms of peace.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Matthew 5:9

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Matthew 6:26

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Matthew-6:28-29

.....a picture of peace.

On the other hand, Jesus teaches us to look at life in this world in terms of war.

"When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace; but when one stronger than he assails him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoil. He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters."

Luke 11:21-23

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth;

I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

Matthew 10:34

"I have come to cast fire upon the earth..."

Luke 12:49

Yes, we do have a heavenly Father, and he does see the sparrow fall, and he does care about us and watch over us and love us. But we also happen to be living in a world which is a battlefield. Even while the sun shines and the flowers bloom and the birds sing, there is a war going on. And the life we live is going to serve the cause of one side or the other. And when the war is over our eternal destiny will be determined by which side we served.

Ever since our father and mother ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil our race has been in the battle.

"Ah, but Jesus won the battle," we say.

Yes, but the power of Jesus' death on the cross to overcome evil becomes a victory for us only if we line ourselves up with the Lamb of God, and by his power we conquer evil.

Either we conquer evil by the power of his indwelling good, or evil conquers us. At the end of the line each of us will either be perfected in the image of the Lamb of God, exactly like Jesus,

in freedom,

in glory,

in mercy and peace,

or we will be perfected in the image of Satan, exactly like Satan,

in self-idolatry, in deceit, and unquenchable bitterness of soul.

The reason so many of us are so ineffective so much of the time is either because we've been lulled into thinking that there is no war or because we've allowed ourselves to be sucked into a war which is irrelevant to the real battle, spending our strength fighting a crusade in which both sides belong to Satan anyway.

There are two things we have to get clear in our minds.

First, we have to be clear about who the enemy really is.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places
Ephesians 6:10-12

Our enemy is not the boss at work,

our husband or our wife,

the criminal element,

the bankers,

the oil companies,

the Muslims,

the "other" political party, or the government.

Our enemy is not flesh and blood at all, but spirit ...

a deceiving spirit who has no doubt manipulated the boss, our mate, the criminals, the bankers, the oil companies, the T.V. networks.

But he has also manipulated us too many times into serving him in his all-out war of rebellion against the living God.

We have worshipped his idols of money, power, pride. We have trembled at his threats that we might become failures, or starve to death, or be looked upon as fools. We've lusted after the satisfaction he dangled in front of us like fish going for a worm on a hook. We've wasted years of our lives crusading against enemies he inspired us to hate ... who aren't our enemies at all.

We are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the satanic kingdom and the spirit of delusion, mercilessness, unforgiveness, pride, hatred, by which the satanic kingdom rules.

God help us to quit fighting those who are not our enemy and to recognize who our adversary really is.

"Simon, Simon, behold Satan demanded to have all of you that he might sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren...."

Luke 22:31-32

Instead of being sifted as wheat by Satan, you're going to conquer Satan, Peter."

Second, we have to understand that by the power of our Lord we can conquer Satan in this world.

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 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..."

Revelation 12:10-11

"They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony."

We conquer the Accuser inwardly by the blood of the Lamb...

- his grip on our mind,
- his hold on our conscience,
- his control over us through fear of death.

All this is conquered by the blood of the Lamb. There is power in the blood when we put our confidence in that blood. When we put our confidence in the blood of his cross, in a mystery it purifies our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. It sets us free from the fear of death.

- The blood of the Lamb makes us bold to stand before the throne of the Father absolutely confident that he hears us and receives us.

We conquer the Accuser inwardly by the blood of the Lamb.

We conquer the Accuser outwardly by the word of our testimony ... loving not our lives even unto death.

The word of our testimony is simply that we tell the world, without shame and without fear, that Jesus is Lord. And we do it not only with our mouths but with our actions. When we welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, we're telling them that Jesus, not Satan, is Lord. When we spend time with the discouraged and give them hope ... when we stand side-by-side with the oppressed, sharing their shame --- we're telling them that Jesus, not Satan, is Lord.

By our testimony that Jesus is Lord we set people free from their bondage to Satan. **We expose his lies. We bind his hands.**

We conquer Satan.

We open a path through the battlefield so that others can find their way to God.

When Jesus says, "***Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,***" peaceful as those words may sound, he is in fact preparing us for battle. For when we are poor in spirit, God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. And by that strength flooding and filling our poverty we go forth to conquer.

To be poor in spirit is not to be slinking through this world like a whipped dog. To be poor in spirit is to follow the Lamb who by being poor in spirit conquered Satan.

For each one of us as individuals and for all of us as a body it's either conquer Satan or be conquered by him.

God help us to conquer the one and only enemy we have by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony, loving not our lives even unto death.

POWER

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted, he has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Isaiah 61: 1

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, *anointing me with power to do these things. I do not do them out of myself, but under the anointing of the Spirit.*

We are all aware that to get anything done in this world you have to have power. Without power you are soon left behind, sitting high and dry, while the world goes on its merry way, leaving you to starve to death, or to die of loneliness.

The world offers its own kinds of power: the power of money, the power of public opinion, political power, the power of guns. The world knows nothing about the power of God, where it comes from, what it does.

For twenty centuries, whenever professing Christians have lacked God's power in their lives, they have turned to one or another of these four sources of this world's power for support.

We've done it ourselves. How many times have we turned to money for confidence? Or people's good opinion? We've tried to establish the 'right connections'. Some of us have even succumbed to the temptation to arm ourselves with guns.

It's true that we need power to survive, power to accomplish our kingdom purpose. But kingdom power is power of a different order.

Jesus had power.

He was meek, lowly of heart, but when Jesus came out of the wilderness temptation, and began to teach in the synagogues of Galilee, the thing that set him apart from every other teacher in Israel was his power to heal and to free captive souls from the principalities of darkness.

When Jesus spoke, his word had power. When he stretched out his hand to touch the sick, there was power to heal.

It was not the power of money. It was not the power of public opinion. It was not the power of having the right connections. Nor was it the power of swords and spears and guns. Yet, wherever he went doors opened and chains broke.

*And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report concerning him went out to all the surrounding country.
Luke 4:14*

What was this power of the Spirit?

*He came to Nazareth where he had been brought up and he went to the synagogue as was his custom on the Sabbath, 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 the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
Luke 4:16-19*

The anointing of the Spirit that was on Jesus was without measure. But it's important to see that this power did not just "zap" him in a capricious manner. The Lord Jesus would be the first to tell us that this power was not his, but the Father's.

It was imparted to him by the Father because he is in total submission to the Father's will.

When Nicodemus came to him by night and said, "**Rabbi, we know you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these works which you do unless God is with him,**" he was saying, "I see God's power. I don't understand who you are, but I know that you possess a power which the rest of us lack."

Notice that Jesus did not say to Nicodemus, "Nicodemus, after all, I'm the Son of God. I've got an inside track. I've got something you're never going to have."

No, Jesus said: "**Nicodemus, you must be born again.**" For example, "When you are born again, Nicodemus, you will understand where this power is coming from and you will have it too!"

When did this power descend upon Jesus?

It began at his baptism. When Jesus came out of the water the Spirit descended on him. He was now the Anointed One, the Messiah.

Why at his baptism? Because his baptism was an offering of himself to the Father. His baptism was the beginning of an awesome worship. His baptism was a death to his own will, the beginning of his crucified life, culminating at the cross.

He then was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. There his power was increased and refined. Because in the wilderness, Jesus denied himself in favor of his Father's pleasure. It was a further death—an offering of himself as a sacrifice to the Father's will. From that point on his ministry was drenched in power, and the source of this power was the offering up of himself, which continued daily, until Calvary.

You can only understand Isaiah 61: 1 "**His Spirit is upon me because he has anointed me...**" if you see it in the light of

Isaiah 53: ***"He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him and by his stripes we are healed."***

The power comes upon Jesus because he offers himself up. From the moment Jesus offered himself to his Father at his baptism, until the moment he finally gave up the ghost and died on Good Friday, his entire life was worship—an offering. He fixed his eye on the goal at the end of the road, where he offered everything up to the Father on the cross.

Jesus never wavered. His eye was single. He saluted no man on the road. He did not allow himself to get distracted. And he shook the dust from his feet whenever anybody tried to get him off the track, whether it was his mother, or the apostle Peter, or the scheming Pharisees. Jesus just kept moving forward.

They brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments on it and he sat upon it. And many spread their garments on the road. And others spread leafy branches, which they cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed cried out, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed be the kingdom of our Father David that is coming. Hosanna in the highest."

Mark 11:7-9

It looks like he's got it made. He's got them eating out of the palm of his hand. If he wants it, he can have financial power.

If he wants to he can now exploit public opinion. With those crowds behind him, he's got political clout. He can broker this power and take over Israel like Castro took over Cuba. This is his opportunity.

But he ignores this "opportunity." He doesn't reach out for money. He doesn't push to take advantage of his "ratings." He doesn't become a politician, or a general.

He spurns it all for the only anointing that really counts – the anointing that brings real power. The anointing that's going to

take him to a cross –the anointing that is going to lead him to offer himself up in an act of consuming worship to his Father on our behalf.

This was the power of Jesus' entire ministry. This is why he could bring good news to the poor, freedom to the captives, sight to the blind, deliverance to the oppressed. This is why he inspired hope in the hopeless.

I was thinking last Sunday afternoon, while we were at an ordination service for Bill Elster at their little storefront church ... what do they have? They have a handful of people, some folding chairs and a card table. They don't even have a piano. How are they going to have true worship without a piano? Actually they'll have everything they need, **if** they offer themselves up. They will bring good news to the poor, freedom to the captives, sight to the blind.

The same thing is true of us. Our crowd is bigger, we've been at it longer, but our power is the same. It's the only power that's valid. We will have an impact on this neighborhood and on this city and on the suburbs and wherever God wants it – if we offer ourselves up as our Lord offered himself.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy place taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood thus securing eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and the ashes of a heifer sanctifies of the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without blemish to God purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Hebrews 9:11

This is not theoretical power, but very very practical power. Power that can transform people who are slaves of guilt, victims of dead works, finding no peace – into sons and daughters of the Kingdom. People who are alive with joy, gladness, wisdom, and freedom, as they serve the Living God.

Yes, this power is in the blood... "**how much more should the blood of Christ...**" There is power in the blood, indeed, but be careful not to make the blood of the Lord Jesus into a fetish.

His blood has power because he offers himself up. He offered himself at his baptism. He offered himself at his temptation. And on Palm Sunday as he rides the donkey down into the city like a king, which he is, he is on his way to the final sacrifice.

When that offering of himself gets hold of us, when it gets control of us, we are changed by it. When our hearts see the sacrifice and understand it, we are delivered from dead works to serve the Living God. We are transformed from slaves to sons and daughters of the Kingdom. We are caught up in worship of the Father as Jesus leads us into the Father's presence. We are lifted by him into a foretaste of glory, and soon, we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice.

And in this offering of ourselves we enter the Lord's power.

"I appeal to you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, without spot to God which is your spiritual worship."

Rom 12:1

"Offer yourselves up," he says to us. Every day. All the time.

Just like Jesus.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may prove (demonstrate, show, manifest) what is the good acceptable and perfect will of God."

Romans 12:2

The world says, "Indulge yourself. Pamper yourself. Coddle yourself. Gratify yourself. Conserve yourself. Take care of

yourself."

The Spirit of the Lord says, "Offer yourself. Offer yourself. Offer yourself."

"Lo, I come to do your will, O, Lord. In the volume of the book it is written of me," says Jesus, and we say it with him.

We're coming to do his will. And to do his will means that we simply give ourselves, all the way, to him. All the time. This is not a single momentary act but a daily practice.

The offering of ourselves means that we commit ourselves to live the life that Jesus describes in Matthew 5, 6, and 7 – The Sermon on The Mount. The Sermon on the Mount becomes deadly legalism if we just try to make ourselves do it. But the Sermon on the Mount, when it is lived as worship, when it becomes an offering, it brings with it tremendous power.

"If you bring your gift to the altar (and the gift is yourself) and there remember your brother has something against you, go! Leave your gift there and go and get reconciled."
Matthew 5:23-24

Suppose we're worshipping, and it suddenly becomes evident to me that I'm not treating my wife right or my husband right, I've been walking around and spouting Bible quotes, while treating my spouse like a dog –or my fellow worker...or my employee...or my employer...or my neighbor...or my third cousin...

As I worship, I become aware of this. So I leave my gift and I go get reconciled – I make up my mind I'm going to be reconciled to this person. I'm going to start making it up to them – my wife or my husband –I'm going to treat them with honor as the Lord has made clear to me. Now we offer ourselves up and our worship becomes glorious.

As we are offering ourselves to the Lord we become aware that our eye is going off to the side. We are looking upon that man or that woman with lust or envy or devising a way to exploit that person for our own ends. Now we take our right eye and pull it out. We put it under the blood. We confess it, so our eye is single. Now we can worship.

We've been singing hymns in our worship, hymns that contain tremendous truths – with tongues which in the past seven days have gossiped, exaggerated, murmured, complained. And now, we're saying, "Thank you, Jesus!" Yet, as we worship, it becomes evident that this tongue has to clean up its act. So we repent of our evil tongue, and as we cleanse our tongue before the Lord it again becomes possible to offer ourselves up to him.

Perhaps as we worship, we become aware that our attitudes toward the people who have wronged us is destroying us. We're bitter about this group, or that group, this race, or that nationality, General Motors, the Republican Party, Democratic Party, our union, or whoever we're angry with. With the Spirit's help, we begin to pray for the person, or the group that inspires our wrath. Now we pray God's blessing upon them. Suddenly we are set free to offer ourselves up to God in thanksgiving and praise.

Perhaps we become aware that our faith is actually less in God and more in mammon. So we repent. We know that we can't serve God and money too. We're going to recommit ourselves – we're going to offer ourselves to the kingdom, trusting that God will provide whatever money we need.

The source of our power is the offering of a clean, committed, holy life to God. If we do this, his power becomes ours. It's a daily offering of the life.

When a fellowship offers itself to God in this way, that fellowship is anointed with unspeakable power. The Spirit of the Lord is calling our churches to present themselves to God

as a living sacrifice—to truly take up the cross and follow the Lamb with outpoured lives.

Arise, shine, for your light has come for the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

Isaiah 60:1

To arise and shine in response to his light is to present ourselves in worship to him. To rise up in the flame that comes down from heaven, and to give glory to God as the flame consumes us.

As we worship with our lives, we will have power. Power that will move mountains, power that will break chains, power that will raise the dead, power that will heal the sick, power that will bring people from darkness to light and from Satan's bondage into God's glorious freedom.

HIS POWER

The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his thigh.

(Genesis 32:31)

We all know the theory: that we're crucified with Christ; dead to sin,

to the world, and to our own powers; that the only life we have is his life. But when God comes along and makes this truth actual, when he lets something happen that spoils us for the world, ruins us, cripples us and keeps us weak, we sink into despair.

You don't just reckon yourself dead to sin and to this world, you experience that death.

After wrestling all night with the angel of the Lord, Jacob got his blessing. As the day broke across the sky, he was no longer Jacob, but Israel, he who strives with God. But Israel limped away from that night of striving with God a cripple for life. The power of God that had now come to him was contained in a vessel that was made permanently weak.

When you ask God to give you power, you'd better understand what you're asking for. The only way that power of God will be safe in you, so that you won't go off half-cocked and run around trying to be Mandrake the Magician, is for *that power of God to be linked to something in your life that keeps you weak. For God to answer your prayer and give you his power, it means that he is going to have to work through some weakness in you, or he is going to have to wound you, as he wounded Jacob, and make you weak.*

And to keep me from being too exalted by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too exalted. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Most gladly therefore will I glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

2 Corinthians 12:7-9

Paul didn't just accept his weaknesses, he gloried in them. Because he knew that his weaknesses were the receptacle of God's power. Paul never gloried in his accomplishments. Paul never gloried in his gifts or his strong points or even in his victories. Paul gloried in two things only:

1. The Cross of Jesus by which the world was crucified to him and he to the world.

2. His weaknesses, through which the power of the Cross found a channel in his life.

If our ministries are going to have the power we need in order to do the job that needs to be done in the time that's left, we are going to have to learn what to be glorying in and what not to. Most of us understand the doctrine beautifully in our heads. But in our actual living we are glorying in the wrong things. We barely get moving in the power of God before our hearts start glorying, boasting about how many people we're reaching, how many souls we're saving, how many battles we're winning, how right we are, how much life we have and how dead everyone else is. And while we're busy glorying in all this, those springs of life in us dry up.

We keep right on glorying in these things as though they were still happening, but they aren't. Still going on about how wonderful it was last month, last year, two years ago. But inwardly we know very well that now we're dry as dust, and we don't know what to do.

Go back to that wound God gave you when he poured out his life upon you, and glory in that. Look at that limp in your walk in this world that you've had ever since you wrestled with the angel of the Lord, and glory in that. Glory in the fact that God ruined the world and its delights for you, and ruined you for the world by the power of the Cross of Jesus.

We can see this in others. We shake our heads over the evangelist who once preached about Jesus to the country folk in revival tents, spoke with the authority of God and wielded that authority. Now the man is trying to M.C. a Christian variety show on national television. Cheap, slick, hollow religion in place of the life he once had. That man was spoiled for the world and the world for him years ago. He has a limp, but instead of glorying in that limp that the power of Christ might rest upon him, he's trying to hide it. He's getting richer every week, but the power of God is gone from him.

But the same thing is happening to many of us. We parade our strengths in front of each other. We pretend to be so strong, so good, so sure, and so wise. And how angry we get when people don't recognize how wonderful we are, when we ought to be glorying in the fact that we're cripples, speckled birds, out-of-joint with the world, that the power of Christ may rest upon us.

Our Lord got his wounded thigh before he ever preached a sermon. When Jesus was baptized, he identified with the weakness and the sin of the whole human race. Then he was driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He conquered the devil, but he came out of that wilderness spoiled for the world. He refused to make that deal with the prince of the world that is necessary in order to get along smoothly. When Jesus came out of the wilderness he was already stamped with the marks of Isaiah 53.

He hath no form or comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

Isaiah 53

In terms of the world, he is already ugly, a man to be despised and rejected. Therefore the power of his Father rested upon him. And all through his ministry the Son of God never gloried in anything concerning himself but his weakness...

"I of myself can do nothing."

"...in myself I have no strength, no wisdom, nothing. It all comes from my Father who dwells in me."

So the blind received their sight, the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, and the deaf heard. The dead were raised and the poor had the good news preached to themAnd Satan's neck was broken when Jesus expired in weakness on that cross.

What can we expect but bungling failure, even if the world thinks we're a smashing success, if we're unwilling to follow our Master on this lowly road ... if our spirits scream to each other, "Look at me, I am somebody!" ... "Shut up, you fool and listen to me talk!" ... "My humility beats yours hands down!"

If you want to glory in something, glory in the Cross of Jesus and what it has done to you.

As far as God is concerned, the Cross has saved you from sin, death and the power of the devil.

But as far as the world is concerned, the Cross has ruined you. Ruined you. Never forget that.

The Cross has not unlocked the door to success. It has not made you at home in this world. It has not saved your business from bankruptcy. If the Cross of Jesus has really touched your life, it has put you out of joint with this world and you ought to be praising God that it has. It has

wounded your thigh and you ought to be praising God every time you limp.

Far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me

and I to the world.

Galatians 6:14

Thank God that the Cross of Jesus makes this world garbage for you. All the glittering, alluring things, all those hopes and dreams, those lusts, that vanity, become one huge pile of refuse, now that the Cross of the Son of God has touched you. And you wonder how you wasted so many years chasing after nothing.

Thank God that the Cross has made you garbage as far as the world is concerned. If you ever looked appealing to the world, you don't now. You bear the marks in you of Him who is despised and rejected of men. You're an offense to the world just as he is. So now you can get on with what really matters: doing the will of the Master. Proclaiming that Jesus is Lord and he's coming soon, without forever looking over your shoulder to see whether the world likes what you're doing.

And if you want to glory in anything else besides that Cross, glory in your weaknesses. Not your strengths, your weaknesses. Those weaknesses are the only place where the power of Christ is coming through in your life.

Most gladly therefore, will I glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities, for when I am weak then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

God teach us this!

When somebody insults you, are you still flying to your own defense, pouring venom out of your mouth to cut him down. You can do it. You may be skilled at coming back at these fools who insult you and ripping them to shreds. But by whose power?

When someone insults you, says some hurting thing that really shakes you, instead of scorching your enemy with fire from your mouth, leave it. That insult that weakened you and shook you is just what you needed.

It broke you and humbled you enough so that the Son of God can now safely put his power into you. Thank God for that insult that struck you dumb for three days. It's just what you needed. Now you're down to size. Now the Spirit of God can really start moving through you.

Hardships, persecutions and calamities do the same thing. They make us weak enough so that we can really be strong in God.

If you want to pray a prayer that will do you some good, pray, "Lord make me weak and keep me weak so that I know that I have no power but yours."

But don't pray it unless you mean it because he will do it.

The churches are forever on the lookout for important people, forever trying to win the world's big names, people of influence, and, of course, the people with lots of money. Every time another "important" soul is won, there's a big "to do". Like it's something really special if we get a Metropolitan Opera singer or an All-Star fullback, or a Wall Street banker. That's going to make people sit up and take notice.... of what?

But the Spirit of God is on the lookout for little people, broken people, weak people, undone people. And if that cowboy or that ball player is really going to enter the Kingdom, he is going to learn to be "little people" and stay that way.

For it is only the little people, the broken, weak and undone people who ever carry the mighty power of the eternal Son of God in them. And if they want to keep carrying that power they'd better stay little, broken, and weak in this world.

"My grace is sufficient for you."

"My power is made perfect in weakness."

Do you believe that?

Are you willing to let **his grace be sufficient** for you?

Are you willing to let **his power be made perfect in your weakness?**

Then tell him. And it will be done. And you will learn with Paul, gladly to glory in your weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon you.

6

THE BLESSED FORGOTTEN

Read Luke 15

When we keep saying that the Spirit of God is doing a new thing in this city these days, when we talk about this city being visited by God, it's important that we understand what it means for God to visit a city. We're not talking about lightning, thunder, and earthquake.

God can come with power to our city – speak to it, touch it with His hand, and yet, be completely unnoticed by the vast majority.

Because, when God visits a city in the Spirit of His Son,

- He does it in a very peculiar way.
- He comes to the people in that city everyone else forgets.
- He spends most of His time with the very ones who are regarded as of little worth.

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

Luke 4:18a

Who cares about the poor?

A lot of people say they do, but who really cares?

What does it matter what happens to the poor?

- Yet Jesus goes first to them!

"He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind. To set at liberty those who are

oppressed." Luke 4:18b

And He does it in a very undramatic, un-revolutionary way. You don't get headlines by going to folks in convalescent homes, and spending time with people who live in the side-streets. Yet, when Jesus comes to town He concentrates on these forgotten ones.

John the Baptist couldn't believe it when the reports came to him that all Jesus ever did was fool around with these nobodies. John had set things up for a coup and Jesus was blowing it.

"Are you the one who is to come, or do we look for another?"

"Go and tell John again the things which you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

Matthew 11

"Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind."

Luke 14:21

And now, in Luke 15, comes the last straw.

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to Jesus to hear Him. And the Pharisees and the Scribes,

- who were deeply religious men,

- who, all their lives, had been praying and looking for the Kingdom of God,

are convinced by this that Jesus can't be of any real importance because He receives sinners and eats with them.

So Jesus spends the rest of the 15th chapter of Luke cluing them in, showing them what the Kingdom of God is really all

about.

The Kingdom of God is here for the precise purpose of finding the lost, saving the sinner, remembering the forgotten.

"There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

The Cross of Jesus doesn't mean a thing to anybody except those who know that they're sinners.

Sinners can understand what Jesus was doing up there.

Sinners can appreciate why He shed His blood.

- They have at least some idea of the burden that weighed down on Him as He took sin upon Himself.

- They have some hint of the awful, God-forsaken, loneliness Jesus suffered as the Holy Father turned away from the sin Jesus carried to the death.

Who else can understand these things but the ones whose consciences are still alive enough to be troubled?

Who else is ripe for the comfort of that blood but those who have come to know that there is no other comfort in this world. None!

Hear my cry, O God. Attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, When my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.
Psalms 61:1-2

The thing that Jesus is now doing in this city, and will be doing in the coming days, is exactly as He describes it in Luke 15, and exactly as He lived it in Israel of old.

Jesus is moving through the streets of this city, in the bodies of His people, looking for the very ones whom the world has forgotten. And, if we are going to be a genuine part of what

Jesus Christ is doing, we're going to be taking that low road with Him, we're going to be searching out the forgotten ones of this town.

No doubt this is why so many of us have been taken through a season when we knew what it was like to be forgotten.

Perhaps nobody guessed what we were going through, nobody cared any way.

It seemed as though nobody needed us, nobody loved us. Sometimes, it almost seemed as though God Himself forgot about us.

If there is anyone reading this who is going through one of those lonely deserts, the Lord wants to give you evidence that you aren't walking out there alone, that the loneliness you have felt is coming to an end.

- He will comfort you today!

- He will impart to you some vision of the good things that are in store for you even on this side of His return.

But the value of those lonely days (and once you've tasted them you never forget them) is that you at least have some inkling of what it's like for those people who are far more forgotten by this world than we have ever been. What it's like for these people who are really out of it.

- We're not talking about some elaborate program of social justice.

- We're not talking about a war on poverty, welfare reform, women's rights.

- We're talking about one person at a time.

- We're talking about that one lost sheep, that one lost coin, that prodigal.

- We're talking about Lazarus sitting by your gate.

- We're talking about Mary Magdalene with seven devils waiting in the shadows for someone to come and give her some hope before she throws herself in the river.

- We're talking about the man who lives among the tombs.

These are the ones who get special attention from our God. Oh, it doesn't look like they're getting special attention.

- Lazarus looked like a forgotten man until he got to the other side of death.

- The man who lives among the tombs sure looks God-forsaken until Jesus comes.

But always, sooner or later, Jesus does come and He comes to them through us. Or, if we won't remember these forgotten ones, He'll raise up somebody else.

If we concentrate on these forgotten ones, the other people will find their way to us automatically.

Jesus didn't go out looking for Nicodemus.

Nicodemus came looking for Him.

The rich young ruler came to Jesus.

When the followers of Jesus faithfully bring in the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind, when they diligently seek that one lost sheep and that one lost coin, that prodigal son, the Nicodemuses, the rich young rulers, and the Josephs of Arimathea will somehow be drawn. They will find their way to the light.

Forget about trying to influence your important friend! You've told him and told him! Leave him for a while and go find that lonely little old man,

go get that dirty eccentric,

go bring that repulsive woman,

go out and get that bore.

Next thing you know, your hard-headed friend will be asking questions too.

When we go out on the streets most people rush by on their way to the latest bargain. Some people insult us, some even threaten us.

But every once-in-a-while a person stops who is just so glad to have somebody to talk to, or who has such a burden he doesn't know what to do. These are the ones we're sent to.

For reasons of His own, God has included us in this last harvest. It's a glorious harvest, a miraculous and wonderful harvest from Heaven's point of view. But don't expect it to be dramatic from the world's viewpoint. It won't be.

- We're going to be harvesting the dregs.
- We're going to be going behind, gleaning the souls that Satan and his army, in their sick pride, considered worthless.
- We're going to be going after that second cousin who spent the last ten years of his life in an institution.
- We're going to be running across those fellow misfits from our old high school class.
- We're going to get acquainted with the neighborhood nag.
- We're going to drink coffee with the most disagreeable man on the block.

And, we're going to bring them to the one place where these people are really welcome: The Kingdom of God. You think this assembly is funny looking now? Wait until you see it in a few months! And, as the banquet table fills up with sinners, with the misfits of this world,

- music from Heaven will be heard among us,
- songs coming from voices that are not human,
- shouts of praise that will roar like the thunder of the sea,

- the sound of harpers playing on harps, and they will sing a new song as Babylon crumbles down and the earth is reaped in judgment.

"Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents...."

And that one sinner will repent if we will go out and find him and bring him home.

CLAIM YOUR INHERITANCE

Read Luke 15:11-32

It was a pity that this younger brother took the share of the inheritance that was coming to him and wasted it. But it's more pitiful to see what the older brother does with his inheritance: nothing. He has it but he doesn't do anything with it.

The younger brother went out and blew it.

The older brother stayed home and sat on it.

That whole farm where the older brother lived and where he worked everyday like a slave, was his. ***"All that I have is yours"***, said the father. But you'd never know it.

"Lo, these many years I have served you and I never disobeyed your command", says the older son. And how!served his father like a slave. He had less freedom, less joy, than any of the hired servants.

"You never gave me a kid that I might make merry with my friends."

"Gave you a kid? Son, how many times have I told you the flock is yours.

All that I have is yours."

What good does it do to be born of God,

to be an adopted son of God,

to be anointed with the Spirit of God if you still keep walking around like a slave and an outcast? That's exactly the shape so

many of us are in. We're like that older brother. You'd never know that we're sons of God – all the riches of Heaven at our disposal – and we sit and sulk and lament our poverty.

No wonder Paul prays for the believers in Ephesus that they might have the eyes of their hearts enlightened.

That you may know what is the hope to which he has called you. What are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe.

Ephesians 1:18,19

Know what your **hope** is and

what your **riches** are and

what your **power** is so you won't be sitting on these blessings like the older brother of the prodigal ... **so you'll live that hope and use those riches and exercise that power to the glory of God.**

And how many people reading this who have tasted the inheritance God has given them as sons and who have experienced the Spirit of God's Son crying "Abba! Father!" in their hearts and yet they're back in slavery?

Fear,

defeat,

discouragement,

self-pity,

envy,

anger, rule their hearts, while they keep going around in circles on their little religious railroad track like the train under the Christmas tree.

Listen again to God's word:

When we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe. But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law to redeem those who were under the Law that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God, you are no longer a slave but a son. And if a son, then an heir.

Galatians 4:3-7

The farm is yours. All the riches of God are at your disposal. All the power of God rests upon you. So, start living like an heir of God.

1. Live as a son or daughter by breaking clear of all bondage.

Be bound to nothing but the Father's love and the Father's will.

Before you were adopted as a son/daughter of God through the blood of the Lamb, you couldn't help being bound to the elemental spirits of the universe. You were plagued by the same fears, and the same covetousness and hang-ups that have bound men since the day Adam was driven out of the garden.

But now by the power of the Cross of Jesus you're free! You belong to God not to mammon,

not to things,

not to the kingdom of lust,

not to dope,

not to booze,

not to sex,

not to that crowd of old friends, but to God. And because you belong to God you have the power to exercise dominion over,

every spirit,

every thought,

every temptation that's trying to bring you back into bondage.

Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder, the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under foot.

Psalm 91:13

Those gates of brass have to break. Those bars of iron must yield because God through his Only Begotten has made you a son, has in Jesus put all things under your feet, has made you more than a conqueror through him who loves you.

If there's a cloud hanging over your head today – command it to leave.

If there's a chain on your hands and feet – break out of it in the name of the King.

If there's a chimpanzee on your back – throw it off and stand up straight.

God has made you a son/daughter!

2. Live as a son by calling on the Father's name. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying, "Abba! Father!"

Notice the prodigal all through the parable keeps using that word "Father".

"Father, give me the share of the property that falls to me.

How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough to spare. I will arise and go to my father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you'".

Father, father, father.

But the older brother never once uses the word. He doesn't say "Father" – he just says, "You".

"Lo, these many years I have served you and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a kid that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours (notice he doesn't say "my brother", he says "this son of yours") came who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf."

The man made himself a stranger in his father's house. A stranger to his father – a stranger to his brother. The father didn't do this to him, he did it to himself.

Now God put the Spirit of his Son into your heart to teach you to say "Father" so say it... "Father!"

You're a son or a daughter of the most wonderful father there ever could be. There is no more beautiful word in the language when it is used toward him. "Father!"

"Father, you're so good!"

"Father, thank you for this bread in my hands!"

"Father, praise be to your name!"

There's no end to it. And every time you call on his name he answers in unspeakable love.

You couldn't say that word – there was no such thing as a human being calling God, "Father", until Jesus shed his blood and brought us into the Father's house. So make the most of it now – call on that blessed name. Keep it on your lips and in your heart day and night.

Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name....

How much more shall the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit...

Father, Father, Father.

3. Work the Father's farm, not as a slave but as a son.

The riches of God are at your disposal – not the riches of this world. The riches of God which are gold refined by fire: wisdom, revelation, knowledge, counsel from God – beside these riches, the riches of earth are just so many rusty nails.

All you need to do is lift up your heart to the Father and ask and you get wisdom.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives to all men generously and without reproaching and it will be given him."

James 1:5

You don't know how you're going to cope with a certain situation. You don't know what you're going to do about a certain problem. Draw on the riches of God. Call upon the Father for that refined gold and he'll give it to you!

And the power of God is yours too. Not just for your deliverance from bondage, but for your ministry to others – to deliver others, to bring in that harvest.

"Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven."

Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven."

Matthew 16:19b

"Behold I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy."

Luke 10:19

"Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."

Ephesians 6:10

We may have to pound on the enemy's door for a while before it falls, but it will fall.

We may get bruised and bloody, but we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

So, we don't give up,

we don't get discouraged,

we don't become lukewarm. We go forth in his power and win victories that belong to the sons of God. We bring men from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

Perhaps you're saying, "But I'm not worthy to be a son, after all I've done. I'm satisfied to be a hired servant."

When the prodigal came home he knew that he didn't deserve to be a son and he had planned to ask his father to treat him as one of the hired servants. But before the young man could get the words out, ***"Treat me as one of your hired servants"***, the father interrupted him,

"Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet! This is my son come home!"

"Father, I don't deserve to be anything but a hired servant", you say. But God has made you a son through the blood of the Lamb.

"You are my son. You are my daughter!"

He puts a robe on you, a ring on your hand, shoes on your feet. Your bondage is over.

"Go out and work those harvest fields as princes and princesses of Heaven.

Lo, I anoint you with the same Spirit by which I raised my Only Begotten from the dead.

My wisdom shall be your riches; my joy shall be your strength. And in the name and Spirit of my son Jesus, you will go and bring forth fruit that will abide forever."

**NOT BY MIGHT,
NOR BY POWER,
BUT BY MY SPIRIT**

And the angel who talked with me came again, and waked me, like a man that is wakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps which are on the top of it. And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." And I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" Then the angel who talked with me answered me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." Then he said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts. What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'" Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me saying, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel."

Zechariah 4:1-10a

A ragtag remnant of people had returned from seventy years of captivity in Babylon. The beautiful city of

Jerusalem was a weed covered, rocky ruin. The temple was a pile of aging rubble.

The people were discouraged; and Zerubbabel, who would be king if the Persians had allowed them to have a king, was terribly discouraged. Along comes the prophet Zechariah who says,

"You have now come to the place where God can do something with you. You are now low enough that you will have to rely on God because you can see that you have no strength of your own."

Then he said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit", says the Lord of hosts.

"Not by human might, not by human power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord of hosts.

Somehow this word from Zechariah set fire to their hearts. The Spirit of God inspired Zerubbabel and moved the people. Soon the temple was rebuilt and the city was revived. And how was it done? "Not by human might. Not by human power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord of hosts.

Centuries later, along came Jesus, who turned this vision into reality. He was the fulfillment, the true lampstand with the two olive trees, (the law and the prophets) feeding it with the oil of the Spirit. He did nothing from his own strength ... spoke not one word out of his own mind. Everything he said, everything he did came from the Spirit of his Father.

The Spirit came to Jesus at his baptism, drove him into the wilderness to be tempted, led him forth into Israel

to preach and heal, guided him to the cross, raised him from the dead.

"I do nothing out of myself. The Father who dwells in me, he does the work."

Now the purpose of Jesus' coming,

dying on the cross,
rising from the grave,

was to make it possible for us to be filled, led,
empowered by the Spirit of the living God, just as he
was.

"John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit."

But to receive the Spirit and to live by the power of the Spirit of God, we have to come to the place where we are willing to draw our life from nothing else but the Spirit of God.

"Not by human might, not by human power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord of hosts.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 2:1-4

The Holy Spirit fell upon those first believers when they arrived at the place where they despaired of their own might, their own power, and trusted the promise of Jesus that the Holy Spirit would be their everything.

And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him';....." Luke 11:5-6

..."I have nothing to set before him. No might,
no power,
no ingenuity,
no money...

I'm empty."

"...and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything'? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him whatever he needs. And I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Luke 11:7-13

People never really ask for the Holy Spirit, never really seek, never really pound on the door, as long as they think they can take care of the situation out of their own resources. As long as we have three Ritz crackers and some peanut butter, we won't ask for bread. That's been our problem, and the problem of the North American Evangelical Church, including the charismatic movement.

"I can take care of things. I am rich. I have prospered. I have need of nothing."

So even while we sing songs about the Holy Spirit ...
some times even while we prophesy and speak in
tongues we're busy drawing from our own strength,
our own resources,
our own might,
our own power. And God says to us,

"Not by your might. Nor by your power, but by my Spirit."

Sooner or later, in his mercy, God opens our eyes to our true condition. He lets us run with

- our own might,
- our own power,
- our own ingenuity,
- our own wealth. Then in mercy he asks us,

"What have you accomplished? How many souls have you set on fire? How many prisoners have you set free? How many eyes have you opened?"

You can't bear heavenly fruit on an earthly tree. You can't create heavenly life with fleshly breath Not by your might, nor by your power ... but by my Spirit."

But when we come to the Father the way our Lord teaches us to come to him ... destitute ... in utter need...

"Our might is empty Lord God.
Our power is useless, Oh God!"

...when we turn away from all our fleshly props and crutches and cry out to God for the one gift we so desperately need,

"Oh God, a friend of mine has come on a journey and I have nothing to set before him ... We're swamped with needs we can't handle! Give us your Spirit!"

... then we have a Pentecost ... then the Spirit comes.

The word of the Lord to us is one of awesome encouragement:

"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

In other words, there is an outpouring of God's Spirit waiting to visit us which will make us effective as Jesus' witnesses as we have never been. And by this outpouring of God's Spirit we, like Zerubbabel, will build the temple of God and restore Zion.

The Pentecost we need, the outpouring of God's Spirit we long for is closer than our breath. It can begin anytime. It will begin when we confess to God, to ourselves, to each other, that our cupboards are bare.

"A friend of mine has arrived on a journey and I have nothing to set before him.

I do not have the might.

I do not have the power.

I do not have the answers.

I do not have the strength.

I need your Spirit ... all of your Spirit...

and only your Spirit!"

When that is the clear, consistent prayer of our hearts, the Holy Spirit of God will make himself known to us as he made himself known to Peter, to Mary Magdalene, to all the witnesses of the resurrection.

The Holy Spirit will make himself known to us in three ways:

1. He will open our eyes to see Jesus more clearly than we have ever seen Jesus.
2. He will loose our tongues to proclaim Jesus as we have never been able to proclaim him.
3. He will direct our feet out of our own ways into the ways of Jesus ... so that when the world looks at us it will see our Master.

1. The Holy Spirit will open our eyes to see Jesus.

How does anyone see Jesus?

"Not by your might. Nor by your power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord of hosts.

"He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and show it to you."

- By the Spirit of God, we read scriptures ... Old Testament and New Testament ... and we see Jesus.
- By the Spirit of God, we go into our room and shut the door and pray ... and we see Jesus.
- By the Spirit of God, we gather in the assembly, call on his name ... and we see Jesus.
- By the Spirit of God, we eat the bread and drink the wine ... and we see Jesus.

2. The Holy Spirit will loose our tongues to proclaim Jesus.

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses." And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in other languages as the Spirit gave them utterance.

And what did these bystanders from all over the world hear? These Parthians and Medes and Elamites? They heard in their own languages the mighty works of God performed by Jesus. They heard about Jesus ... they were called to repentance before the cross of Jesus. They came and were baptized in the name of Jesus.

Nobody can talk about Jesus to this world and be believed unless that person is under the authority of the Holy Spirit. But now, under the Spirit, our barren, burned out tongues come to life and as they proclaim Jesus to the world, hearts are ignited, souls are set on fire, people come to repentance and faith in him.

3. **The Holy Spirit will direct our feet out of our own ways into the way of Jesus, so that when the world looks at us it will see our Master.**

"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 5:14-16.....

power to walk in his way,
power to walk in love,
power to walk in purity,
power to walk in truth
power to walk in the way of Jesus.

It will show up in the way we deal with the people we live with ... the way we handle money ... the way we speak ... the way we conduct ourselves in the neighborhood ... on the job ...as we travel.

"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake ... he leadeth me in the paths of

righteousness for his name's sake...."

And the angel who talked with me came again, and waked me, like a man that is wakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps which are on top of it. And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." And I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my Lord?" Then the angel who talked with me answered me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my Lord." Then he said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the lord of hosts."

The word of the Lord to Zerubbabel ... the word of the Lord to us is,

"Not by your might. Not by your power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord of hosts."

"By my Spirit you will tell the earth that Jesus is Lord ... you will set fire to human hearts ... by my Spirit and only by my Spirit, beginning the minute you're willing to believe this and live it."

WISE AS SERPENTS

... so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine,, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.... Ephesians 4:14-15

Repeatedly our Lord calls us to repent and become as little children – with our hearts. To free ourselves of the pride, the vanity, the self-importance which blinds us to the reality of God.

But while Jesus calls us to have the heart of a child, nowhere does he ever counsel us to have the mind of a child.

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."
Matthew 10:16

Innocent as doves, with hearts that are childlike and tender toward God ... but at the same time wise as serpents.

- The heart of a child.
- The mind of a serpent.

Somehow we seem to have gotten it backwards and we end up all too often with the heart of a serpent and the mind of a child.

The childlike mind, which allows others to do its thinking for it, is actually being cultivated in much of Christendom today.

- The child-mind is equated with faith and virtue.

- Whereas minds that think and test and weigh are often accused of lawlessness and rebellion.

It's frightening how many teachings we have in our heads which we consider to be ours and which we think we have thought through. Whereas someone else has presented them as gospel and we've swallowed them.

Many of these teachings, so neat and pat, are built on sand. And when the storm comes they all crumble – and every life standing on them will fall.

From the beginning of time the battle for possession of the human heart has involved the mind. Satan's appeal to Eve in the Garden was to her mind.

- He reasons with her.

- He gives her things to think about.

- He holds out the promise of instant wisdom:

"All you have to do is swallow this marvelous fruit."

But in reaching out to take the fruit which is supposed to make her wise, Eve fails to use the mind of wisdom she already has. She swallows a "truth" without thinking it through. Doubtless she passes on this great new teaching to her husband as she hands him some of the fruit. And he too swallows it without thinking.

"Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."

If David had been wise as a serpent he would have remained innocent in regard to Bathsheba. He would have guarded his mind against fantasy that day when he looked down from his rooftop and saw something that set his mind going.

Our Lord's temptation in the wilderness was a thing of the mind. Every appeal Satan made to Jesus was made through his mind. And with his mind Jesus stopped each temptation cold.

He choked off the mind-thought before it could get started. He was wise as a serpent.

It was not a mechanical quoting of scriptures that was the battle, but the flowing of scriptures through a mind that was concentrated on the Father's face and on doing the Father's will.

Not only did Jesus use his mind in cutting his way through the confusion of temptation, he commands us to use our minds as well.

"Be wise as serpents."

"Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees."

Nowhere does Jesus say, "Submit your mind to Peter and he'll keep you on track." Jesus makes each of us responsible,

- to think,
- to watch,
- to stay awake.

To answer this call to be wise as serpents most of us are going to have to do some stirring and some repenting ... for in many cases our minds have been out of it for a long time.

1. There is the gullible mind ... which lets others do the thinking.

The gullible mind is not so concerned with what is presented as with how it's presented. If the teaching is given with force and clarity, especially if the teaching purports to be an answer to a heartfelt longing, it is received with joy.

- "Seven steps to a successful marriage."
- "Two secrets of jet-age prayer."

- "How to get the desires of your heart from God."
- "The Bible Basis of prosperity."
- "How to praise your way out of trouble."

The gullible mind never bothers to distinguish between truth and half-truth and so becomes putty in the hand of every false prophet with a smooth message and an appealing style.

2. Then there's the infantile mind ... which lets circumstances rule it.

When things are going well it clearly sees the goodness of God.

When things are going badly it sulks and withdraws and buries itself in other things.

The infantile mind is tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine ... it bobs up and down on the waves of fortune. It never thinks in terms of God and his will, his kingdom, his compassion. It thinks only in terms of how things are going for me.

"Do they like me?"

"Are they treating me right?"

"What's going to happen to me?"

"What about my future?"

"How's my ministry going?"

3. Then there's the lazy mind ... which allows itself to be engulfed in clutter.

"I'll think about that later. I don't feel up to thinking about that tonight."

"The Bible – yes, I know it's good, but I prefer reading spiritual books they're so much easier to understand."

4. Then there's the hysterical mind ... which alternates between panic and exhaustion.

It's forever jumping to conclusions ... like a fire truck ... always roaring toward a new fire until there's no strength left, and the mind collapses and can't seem to concentrate on anything. Then suddenly it's awake and screaming toward another emergency.

So, how are we going to bring these troubled minds of ours to the place where they are consistently wise as serpents?

Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:2

The renewal of the mind is a daily thing. You don't get wise as a serpent and stay that way like the woman who gets her PhD and stays a PhD for the rest of her life.

You become wise as a serpent daily by renewing the mind daily. Just as surely as the heart has to be surrendered daily and the body presented as a living sacrifice daily, the mind has to be renewed daily.

And the renewing of the mind has nothing to do with our I.Q. Followers of Jesus with low I.Q.'s often manifest far more wisdom than their genius brothers and sisters.

A renewed mind comes from a fresh vision of God.

Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich, and white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.

Revelation 3:18

... may see what?

- see the Lord!

May we enter once more into a vision of the living God.
When our vision of God blurs, our minds become dull.

***One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after;
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my
life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his
temple. Psalm 27:4***

A vision of God comes to those who pursue it.

***Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.
Matthew 5:8***

The pure in heart seek, knock, desire God above all things.
They want to know him above all things, at any cost ... just to
know him.

A renewed mind comes from a realistic vision of our place
in God.

***For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you
not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think,
but to think with sober judgment, each according to the
measure of faith which God has assigned him.***

Romans 12:3

We have a place in God prepared for us by God himself and
God has given us a measure of faith so that we can take that
place as his son or daughter.

When I see the meaning and purpose of my life as coming
from my place in God, I am no longer a sucker for every
new vanity doctrine that promises to fulfill me, or every
heavy discipleship teaching that plays on my guilt. My life is
hid with Christ in God.

That's my center,

my source,

my everything.

A renewed mind comes from a realistic view of our place in the world.

"Behold I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves."

In this world we're not heroes, we're not celebrities, – we're sheep, surrounded by wolves ... including wolves in sheep's clothing ...

- religious wolves,
- phonies,
- false prophets.

This is the world into which we are sent and in this world of wolves we're satisfied to be sheep.

A renewed mind comes from a fresh vision of our call.

"Behold I send you out...."

We're here because we've been sent ... there is a call resting on us. So, our lives are not our own, our minds are responsible to stay alert, to think, to cut our way through temptations so that we fulfill our call to proclaim God's kingdom.

... so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles.

Ephesians 4:14

No longer children, but wise as serpents. A branch that abides in the Vine cannot be blown away by the wind. And abiding in the Vine is not only a matter of the heart, but of the mind.

- If you allow someone else to do your thinking for you, you're abiding in them instead of the Lord.

To stay in the Vine ... Jesus ... you have to think, you have to know who you belong to, and you have to know what He's sent you to do.

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."

CRASHING THE GATES OF DEATH

***"I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut asunder the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name."
Isaiah 45:2-3***

This prophecy was first addressed to Cyrus, a Gentile king who was called the Lord's anointed. It came down through the years and attached itself very clearly to the true Anointed of God, the Messiah, and through him applies to the church.

"I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut asunder the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places."

In other words; "I will give you the power to break through the gates of death."

From Matthew 16:

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

And I tell you, you are Peter, (the rock) and on this rock (this confession you just made) I will build my church, and the gates of death shall not prevail against it.

"I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut asunder the bars of iron.

The gates (the powers) of death shall not prevail against you."

When we think of the church as an institution, or as a building, or as an organization which we maintain, we will always end up looking at a church which is standing still, having all it can do to hold out against the ravages of time and death. In fact at times it finds itself getting heavier and bigger so it can make it through the difficult lean times but it will never move. But when we begin to get a vision of our Lord's church which he builds then we are looking at something which moves. It breaks in pieces the doors of bronze and cuts asunder the bars of iron. Then we are looking at that stone which is in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The stone which was cut without hands, rolled and smashed to pieces the feet of that giant image of gold and silver and bronze and iron and clay which represented the kingdoms of the world, and broke it into a fine powder. Then that stone began to grow and became a mountain until it filled the whole earth.

But somebody says, "Yeah, but how do you tell the difference between the church, the human institution, the work of man, and the church, the body of Christ, the living body of Christ, the true kingdom of God." The test is really very simple. If it sits there and worries about its own expansion and survival it's the church of man. If it breaks through the gates of death and sets the captives free, it's the church of God.

"On this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. "

Hades, the region of the dead, is described by our Lord as a realm which exists on the other side of the grave. When the

rich man died, who never showed any mercy to Lazarus, that beggar at his gate, – he landed in Hades, the region of the dead. But even though Hades exists on the other side of the grave, the gates of Hades, the gates of death, open out on this world. In fact those gates of death are taking ground, they're advancing, and taking territory in this world, so that it is possible to be locked in behind the gates of death long before this body dies. People who are walking around in this world who are not alive with the life of God, who are incapable at this moment of hearing the voice of God or seeing the hand of God at work are, in fact, locked in behind the gates of death. They are already captives. The human condition of life-long bondage to the fear of death is itself a form of death. It's a living death spent behind those gates.

"The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live,"

says Jesus. He's talking about the walking dead, who eat, and sleep, and marry and give in marriage, get things, and lose things, but it's all going on behind the gates of death.

Every one reading these words knows from experience what it's like to be behind those gates. We have known what it's like to wake up in the morning and wish we could go back to sleep and never wake up again.

We know what it's like to be consumed with anger, or to be so lonely we wish we were dead. Or to think we're happy but to wake up one day and discover it was all an illusion.

Now to be made alive in Jesus is to be brought out from behind those gates. To be set free. To come out of limbo and to be able to wake up in the morning praising God. To be alive in God, to know God, love God, hear God's voice, know his presence, fit into his purpose.

When we come out from behind the gates of death we immediately find ourselves part of that stone cut out of a

mountain without hands, the kingdom of God, the church. And that's why the church's one purpose for existence in this world is to keep crashing back through those gates of death and set other captives free.

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God." Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you but my father who is in heaven, and I tell you, you are Peter the Rock and on this rock, (this thing you just said) I will build my church and the gates of death shall not prevail against it."

We need to ask ourselves as individuals, and as a body, whether we are part of that church, which he builds on the confession that he is the Christ, that has one purpose ... to break through the gates of death and set the captives free. Or whether we are, in fact, only part of another dead, human institution that itself is trapped behind those gates of death and is totally incapable of giving life or freedom to anyone.

God give us the courage to ask honestly what is this thing I'm part of? What is this fellowship I'm working in? Is it truly the Lord's Body, fulfilling his purpose? And if we should discover that it's really man's church rather than the Body of the Lord Jesus, may God give us courage to follow the Master out from behind those gates of death to become what he wants us to be!

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God."

If it's his church it is built on this confession and on nothing else. And if we are fitting into that part of it, then the one rock bottom reality for us is that Jesus is Lord. We are not a club for nice people. We are not an agency put here to stabilize the community. We are a people raised up to confess to God and to each other and to the world that Jesus is Lord.

"You are the Christ, the son of the living God. Your blood atones for our sins. Your death opens heaven for us. Your resurrection lifts us into the heavenlies. Your presence is our joy. And our life in this world is the doing of your will which is mercy."

Wherever he is at work at this moment on the earth, anywhere at all building his church, we will find this rock as the foundation on which it is being built, the confession that he is the Christ. The bold, strong, clear, unashamed, powerful confession that he is Lord and he is building his church here. And if we are fitting into it we will not be able to keep that confession off our lips. Even if we look like fanatics and even if we sound like fools.

And as we confess to God, and to each other, and to the world that Jesus is Lord, he will confirm that truth. He will manifest his lordship among us and out there in the world in everything we do.

And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jona for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, the rock, and on this rock, (your confession) I will build my church".

If it's a church, it's being built not by hands of flesh, not by minds of flesh, but by God's revealing Spirit. And that Spirit continually reveals who Jesus is.

"Blessed are you Simon, Son of John, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you. You didn't figure it out, and nobody showed it to you. My father by his Spirit revealed it." And the only way you and I will know day-by-day and hour-by-hour who Jesus is, is by that same Spirit. If the Spirit doesn't reveal, we don't know. But he does reveal. And as he reveals may God give us eyes to apprehend the vision.

I will never forget this man who was reading theology until it was coming out of his ears because he was hungry for God.

He was astute, he was honest, and he wanted to know but he wasn't finding anything. And he looked up this church in a telephone book. And as a total stranger, he came, sat down and said, "I want to ask you, if you can do it, to do one thing for me; prove to me that Jesus is God the Son." I said, "I can't but Jesus will. If you will open your heart and if you will make yourself available, and if you mean business, he will make that clear to you." He said, "OK what do I have to do? I'll do anything." And it could be in a million ways, but for him it was a matter of taking time, every day, to go into his room, shut the door, and pray to Jesus ... and to do that day after day for fifty days or a hundred days. "Lord, if you are there, show me. I want to know. I'll follow you." Within forty-eight hours this man knew that Jesus is Lord. He knew in the same way that Peter knew that Jesus is Lord, in the same way we know that Jesus is Lord.

He makes us alive and keeps us alive in his body by continuously revealing to us who he is. He builds his church at this moment all over the earth by opening the eyes of those who are hungry for truth and willing to face reality of who he is.

And as we go forth with that confession on our lips he confirms it and he opens the eyes of the blind and he brings them into his body making them alive by his Spirit.

"And I tell you, you are Peter, (the rock) and on this rock (your confession) I will build my church, and the gates of death shall not prevail against it."

If it's his church it's crashing the gates of death. And we have to admit that we haven't even begun to crash the gates of death the way we should or the way we will. But if it is really our desire to be obedient and to let him build us into his church, our one purpose for existence, our reason for being here individually and corporately, is to crash the gates of death and set the captives free.

So how do we do it?

Jesus is reading from Isaiah in the synagogue at the beginning of his ministry. He's up there and he opens the book to the place where it is 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 for the captives and recovering of sight to the blind. To set at liberty those who are oppressed."***

... to go into the region of death – the territory of death – and to take ground.

... to move among people who are already obsessed with anger, oppressed with fears, bogged down with guilt, lowly to the point of heartbreak, so greedy they can't see anything but what they want to get, or whatever kind of idolatry afflicts their life – to go in among such people and bring them news that will set them free – to set those captives free and raise the dead to life.

When we deliver somebody who is totally down with despair and give that person hope, we have crashed the gates of death. When somebody who is bound by an addiction of any kind, and many of us have known one kind or another in our own lives, when that person is set free by the name of the Lord, we crash the gates of death. When we bring the lonely to the fellowship of God, we crash the gates of death. When we heal the sick, when we bring them to the table of the Lord, his banquet hall, we crash those gates. The issue is not, are such things possible? Of course they're possible. This is our one reason for existence.

The issue is, are we willing to give up trying to build the church the way we want to do it, and present ourselves as a living sacrifice to him – and let him build? If we are willing to be built by him into his church on the confession that he is Lord by his revealing Spirit we will have his authority and those gates of death will yield at our command. And we will have good news for the poor. His word on our lips will release

the captives, open the eyes of the blind and set the captives free.

God didn't bring us into his church in order that we might huddle together and try to be safe from this dangerous world behind the walls of a building or the structures of our own organization.

He brought us into his church, washed us in the blood of his son, anointed us with his Spirit, imparted to us his nature, so that we might go out and set the captives free.

That we might crash the gates of death and release those prisoners.

God help us to get out there and do it.