

The VINE & BRANCHES

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Jesus said, "For without Me, ye can do nothing."

I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

By the time you receive this newsletter, I should be well on my way to Africa for two presentations of the Weapons Of Our Warfare seminar In Tanzania. As I wrote in the last newsletter, Clement Mwaitebele, pastor of the Rungwe Mission in the district of Tukuyu, will be my host during my time in Africa. I will not be traveling alone, but will be accompanied by Steve Monahan and Evan Pyle of the USA, Jerome Lucas of England and George Straub of Switzerland. Steve, Evan and I will meet up with our European brethren in Amsterdam, and we will all fly together to Africa.

The United Republic of Tanzania is East Africa's largest country, with an area of 364,900 square miles, and a population of 35,964,00 people, 2,489,800 of whom live in the city of Dar Es Salaam. To the north are Kenya and Uganda, on the east, the Indian Ocean, on the south by Mozambique, Malawi, and Zambia, and on the west by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, and Rwanda. The country includes the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba. The highest mountain in Africa, Mt. Kilimanjaro is located near the northeastern border, near the border of Kenya.

Approximately one third of Tanzanians are Christian, a third are Muslim and the remaining third practice one of the country's numerous native religions.

We will be arriving at the airport in Dar Es Salaam. From there we will travel southwest to Kyela, where the seminar will be taught from July 15 to July 19. On Sunday, we will preach to two congregations in Kyela. From July 21 to July 26, the seminar will be taught in Tukuyu and we will also preach in Tukuyu.

Needless to say, we are all very excited about this adventure. Please join us in prayer that we have a prosperous journey by the will of God (Rom.1:10).

In the service of His Majesty, the King of kings,

Rev. Tim Sullivan





Jeremiah

By Rev. Tim Sullivan

The Word of the Lord first came to the prophet Jeremiah in the 13th year of Josiah, ruler of the southern kingdom of Judah. Historians date this year 622 BC. More than 300 years had passed since Solomon ruled over a united kingdom. A full century had elapsed since the ten tribes called Israel were carried away by the Assyrians. The northern land once populated by the sons of Jacob was now overrun by the foreigners and strangers who came to be known as the Samaritans.

And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.

(2 Kings 17:24)

The Righteous King Josiah

The initial years of Jeremiah's ministry must have been encouraging, for Josiah was a noble king (See 2 Kngs. 22-23 and 2 Chron. 34-35). In fact, in the year prior to Jeremiah's call, Josiah had begun to purge Judah of the idol worship that had become her norm.

For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he [Josiah] began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. (2 Chronicles 34:3)

In Jeremiah's 5th year of ministry (which was Josiah's 18th year as king), Josiah repaired the Temple and reinstated the Passover observances.

And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this passover kept. (2 Chronicles 35:18-19)

Josiah's kingdom was an oasis in the midst of a spiritual dearth. The word of the Lord had been long forgotten. Incredibly, Josiah learned of God's written law only after the book of the law was discovered during the Temple repairs! Josiah was overwhelmed by what he

read, and sent inquiry to a prophetess named Huldah.

And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched. (2 Kings 22:15-17)

God, however, promised mercy toward the repentant king. Huldah's prophecy continued:

But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard; Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place... (2 Kings 22:18-20a)

The years of Josiah marked the last great spiritual revival of the southern kingdom.

And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him. (2 Kings 23:25)

All was not peaceful in Josiah's day. The Assyrians and Egyptians continued to threaten the Judean borders. In an unadvised battle with the Egyptians, King Josiah lost his life.

In his days Pharaoh-nechoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and king Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him. (2 Kings 23:29)

Jeremiah's mourning for Josiah was deepened by his understanding of what lay in store for Judah. God had granted Judah a reprieve for Josiah's sake. That era was over. The Bible's report that "neither after him arose there any like him," could well be reckoned an understatement. Of the next (and last) four kings of Judah, we read:

And he [Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah] did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that

his fathers had done. (2 Kings 23:32)

And he [Eliakim, the son of Josiah, made king by Pharaoh-nechoh and renamed Jehoiakim] did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done. (2 Kings 23:37)

And he [Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim] did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done. (2 Kings 24:9)

And he [Mattaniah, son of Josiah, made king by Nebuchadnezzar and renamed Zedekiah] did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. (2 Kings 24:19)

The Sins of Judah

The greatest threat to Judah's welfare was not the enemy outside her walls. Judah's greatest threat was her own love for sin. In that way, Judah's undoing was for the same cause that God's people have fallen through-out the ages.

The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear **rule by their means**, and my people love to have it so [emphasis added]: and what will ye do in the end thereof? (Jeremiah 5:31)

Jeremiah's greatest antagonists were the false prophets who told the people the lies they wanted to hear. Feeding the already abounding ego of the men of Judah, they told them that because they were a chosen people and Jerusalem housed the Temple of God, they were untouchable.

Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these. (Jeremiah 7:4)

Judah was a wealthy nation, but not all prosperity is of the Lord. Her wealth was ill gained.

As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich. They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge. Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? (Jeremiah 5:27-29)

"Shall I not visit for these things?" God's righteous judgment is one of the great themes of the book of Jeremiah.

How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods: when I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses. They were as fed horses in the morn-

ing: every one neighed after his neighbour's wife. Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? (Jeremiah 5:7-9)

God hoped his "divorce" of the northern tribes of Israel would serve as a warning to Judah. Instead, she hardened her heart even more.

And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also. And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD. (Jeremiah 3:8-10)

The kingdom of Israel was the kingdom of Jeroboam and Ahab. The kingdom of Judah was the line of David. God's greater expectation—and disappointment—was with Judah.

And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah. (Jeremiah 3:11)

The kindness of God, though freely given, is not without responsibility.

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:48b)

So hardened was the heart of Judah that God told Jeremiah not to waste his time praying for them.

Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee. (Jeremiah 7:16)

This was not to be interpreted as Jeremiah's lack as an intercessor.

Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth. (Jeremiah 15:1)

God knew that a man would sooner change the color of his skin, or a leopard remove his spots, than Judah would turn from evil.

Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil. (Jeremiah 13:23)

The Vision of the Two Baskets of Figs

Following the death of Josiah, Jehoahaz his son became king. He reigned for only three months before be-

ing deposed by the king of Egypt.

And Pharaoh-nechoh made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the room of Josiah his father, and turned his name to Jehoiakim, and took Jehoahaz away: and he came to Egypt, and died there. (2 Kings 23:34)

In the first year of Jehoiakim, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah foretelling the rise of the Babylonian Empire. God said that He had “given all these lands unto the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant” (Jer. 27:6). All nations that resisted the king of Babylon would be punished, “with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand” (v.8). But concerning those who would submit to his yoke and serve him, “those will I let remain still in their own land, saith the LORD; and they shall till it, and dwell therein” (v.11).

An integral part of this prophecy was a warning to the people to beware of false prophets.

Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: For they prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land; and that I should drive you out, and ye should perish. (Jeremiah 27:9-10)

In 612 BC, soon after this prophecy was given, the army of Babylon captured Ninevah, the capital of Assyria. Nebuchadnezzar then turned his sights to the conquest of Judah. In 605 BC, in the first of three major assaults, Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem. Four young Hebrew boys named Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were among the first captives taken to Babylon.

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim’s reign, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying:

Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day. (Jeremiah 36:2)

The high priest Jehudi brought the roll to the king.

And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he [Jehoiakim] cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. (Jeremiah 36:23)

God instructed Jeremiah to write a second roll.

Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned. And thou shalt say to Jehoiakim the king of Judah, Thus saith the LORD;

Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast? Therefore thus saith the LORD of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. (Jeremiah 36:28-29)

Jehoiakim ignored Jeremiah and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. He died an ignoble death, and his son Jehoiachin became the new king.

In 597 BC, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem a second time. Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon along with “all the treasures of the house of the LORD...and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths”(2 Kngs. 24:13-14). The prophet Ezekiel was among these captives.

The Vision of the Two Baskets of Figs

Soon after Nebuchadnezzar’s second assault on Jerusalem, God showed Jeremiah a vision of two baskets of figs.

Then said the LORD unto me, What seest thou, Jeremiah? And I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the evil, very evil, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart. (Jeremiah 24:3-7)

The other basket contained bad figs.

And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the LORD, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt: And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them. And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers. (Jeremiah 24:8-10)

Herein lies an incredible example of the forbearance of God. Furthermore, here is a great lesson in trust. Concerning those taken captive, God said, "I have sent [them] out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good." How the people must have wondered at this prophecy! We shall soon discover how wonderful this promise was!

The Last King of Judah

Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah the new king of Judah, "But neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land, did hearken unto the words of the LORD, which he spake by the prophet Jeremiah" (Jer. 37:2). At the urging of his counselors, Zedekiah imprisoned Jeremiah for his prophecies.

In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army against Jerusalem, and they besieged it. (Jeremiah 39:1)

All the while, in the land of the Chaldeans, God had been showing His prophet Ezekiel great visions concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In a vision, Ezekiel was taken behind the walls of the Temple in Jerusalem to see Judah's hidden abominations (Ezek. 8:5-18). He saw in a vision as the Shekinah glory of God departed from the Temple of God at Jerusalem, an event that, like God's forsaking of Jesus on the Cross, was needful before the House could fall. He was shown a vision of the resurrection of fallen Israel, as dead bones made alive.

By the mouth of Ezekiel, the Lord had said concerning this king, "I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there" (Ezek. 12:13). The enigma of this prophecy was resolved when Nebuchadnezzar "put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with chains, to carry him to Babylon" (Jer. 39:1:7).

The Vision of the Two Baskets of Figs fulfilled

The third wave of Nebuchadnezzar's assault on Jerusalem lasted three years. Finally her walls fell and the House of God was burned to the ground. The book of Lamentations records Jeremiah's anguish at the fall of the City of David. Everything God's prophets had foretold had come to pass. Still, the heart of the people was hardened.

Man's capacity for arrogance is a wonderment to see. After the fall of Jerusalem, many fled to Egypt for safety. Jeremiah pleaded with them to repent of their wickedness and submit to the will of God. Their response to God's prophet is horrifying.

Then all the men *which knew that their wives had burned incense unto other gods* [emphasis added], and all the women that stood by, a great multitude, even all the people that dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying, As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. (Jeremiah 44:15-17)

Look what they attributed the end of their fortuitous days to!

But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine. (Jeremiah 44:18)

God had asked Jeremiah, "Shall I not visit for these things?" Such a visitation would not be pleasant.

Behold, I will watch over them for evil, and not for good: and all the men of Judah that are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine, until there be an end of them. Yet a small number that escape the sword shall return out of the land of Egypt into the land of Judah, and all the remnant of Judah, that are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall know whose words shall stand, mine, or theirs. (Jeremiah 44:27-29)

God gave them a sign to look for.

And this shall be a sign unto you, saith the LORD, that I will punish you in this place, that ye may know that my words shall surely stand against you for evil: Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will give Pharaoh-hophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies, and into the hand of them that seek his life; as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, his enemy, and that sought his life.

(Jeremiah 44:29)

According to the Jewish historian Josephus, this sign was fulfilled "on the fifth year after the destruction of Jerusalem, which was the twenty-third of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar." The king of Babylon "made an expedition against Celesyria; and when he had possessed himself of it, he made war against the Ammonites and Moabites; and when he had brought all these nations under subjection, he fell upon Egypt, in order to overthrow it; and he slew the king that then reigned and set up another; and he took those Jews that were there captives,

and led them away to Babylon” (quoted from The Antiquities of the Jews, Book 10, Chapter 11).

But what about God’s promise to the those who submitted themselves to the yoke of the king of Babylon? The answer is marvelous to consider. Only two years after being taken to Babylon, Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s mysterious dream. In reward, Daniel was made “ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon”(Dan. 2:48). When Daniel’s three friends miraculously survived a burning fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar decreed “that every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort” (Dan. 3:29). And in the chapter of the Bible written by Nebuchadnezzar himself, he proclaimed, “Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase”(Dan. 4:37).

For all who rebelled against God, Babylon was their worst nightmare. But for those who obeyed, there was no safer haven on earth.

The last chapter of 2 Chronicles and the first chapter of Ezra record the proclamation of Cyrus, king of Persia, “that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished” (2 Chron. 36:22). The emperor declared that “the LORD God of heaven...hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up”(vs.23). As promised, God’s people returned to their land.

The story of Jeremiah is of a man whose love for God outweighed all self-interest. His courage and passion continue to speak to God’s people centuries after his death. Yes, he thought about turning his back on his calling.

Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay. (Jeremiah 20:9)

Lord, make Your Word to burn in us as it burned in Jeremiah. Teach us to give ourselves wholly to you, to trust only in You and not in the plans and schemes of our own devices. You alone change the times and seasons. You remove kings and set up kings. You give wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding. Though the darkness of the hour fall upon us, let Your light be unto us as a beacon in the night. Amen.



Priorities

by Rev. Evan Pyle
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

It happened so suddenly. My daughter and I were sitting in the den with my wife Nancy at the counter, having a bite to eat. Then Nancy was choking, making violent wheezing sounds that told me this was very serious. I immediately began performing the Heimlich maneuver on her. I could hear Christine urgently praying in the Spirit behind me. It didn’t seem as if my actions were helping and my mind raced with actions to take. Call “911”, have Christine run to the neighbors, three of whom are nurses. We only had a few precious minutes remaining or all was lost. But just as suddenly the crisis was over and Nancy was catching her breath.

As the adrenaline wore off and the obligations of the day took over, I became increasingly aware of how deeply this episode shook me. I found myself looking at my priorities with a critical eye. What am I doing? Why am I doing what I’m doing? What will this matter in the big picture? In the end we will all meet the Lord face to face. Am I really living my life in preparation for that day? More questions crowded into my consciousness. What kind of husband and father have I been? Have I prepared adequately for my family should I be taken from them? Do they really know my love? Will I have left a legacy of faith in God to carry them through a lifetime? I must admit, some of the answers were as troubling as the questions.

What about you? Are you moving through each day simply propelled by the obligations at hand? Do you, like me, often find yourself simply pursuing life’s little pleasures with little thought given to the bigger picture? Or is there a higher purpose, a higher goal that motivates you and colors your motivations and actions? Even Spirit-led, tongue-talking Christians can lose their way.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

In the immediate wake of our little crisis, the first thing that flooded in on me is the love I have for Nancy and my family, and my concern that I am actually giving them that holy love from above. The qualities of love are easily identified.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

The people of the world will know we are Christians by the love we have one for another. They may be able to identify our denominational affiliation through our dress or our speech. But it is through our love that they know we belong to Jesus and are His disciples.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13:35)

If we are led of the Spirit we will bear the fruit of the Spirit. Why? So people can look at us and be amazed at all the wonderful qualities in our life? No, we bear fruit so we can be these qualities for others. Fruit is a tangible thing that nourishes others and provides seed that causes more to come into the Kingdom. Just think about each of the following fruit and how they are provision for others in need.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22,23)

Yesterday's events reminded me yet again how fragile and fleeting this life is for all of us. The Bible often refers to this life like a vapor that appears and is gone just as quickly, or as a tender grass that shoots up after a rain but is quickly withered in the heat of the day. Naturally, my thoughts turned to life eternal, of meeting the Lord face to face and giving account to Him. Everybody on earth will have this meeting. How will it go?

So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. (Romans 14:12)

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God. (1 Corinthians 4:5)

I believe that having praise of God in the end goes far beyond just doing the right things at the right times. More to the point, are we walking in the unique plan God has

for each one of us? God knows you intimately, and when He called it was with a unique calling that only you can fulfill. If I were hired to clean your windows and cleaned other windows instead, you wouldn't be very pleased with me, would you? The body of Christ needs each member walking in their unique calling to make the whole body function as it should.

Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. (1 Corinthians 7:20)

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, (Ephesians 1:18)

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, (2 Timothy 1:9)

Let us walk in that holy calling today, not tomorrow. Is your calling unclear to you? Start walking and it will unfold as you carry out what is before you. The Body of Christ needs you.



Do You Love Me (Part 2)

by Rev. Dimitris Pelidis
Thassos, Greece

Undoubtedly the most critical question in our relationship with God is whether we will surrender our lives to Him. Jesus Christ poured out His life for us and in a display of this sacrifice, He assumed the position of the lowliest servant, carrying out the humblest of all jobs. He washed His disciples feet. It is interesting to observe Peter's sharp reaction to the Lord's utter humility.

Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. (John 13:6-8)

How typical of Peter and of humanity at large to spurn at Christ's loving service. Yet, we have nothing to do with Christ unless we first accept His atoning blood. Peter just could not accept that the Lord, whose glory he had glimpsed on the Mount of Transfiguration, would die the

death of the cross. He couldn't see that the road to glory passes through the valley of death, and that exaltation follows humiliation. He felt embarrassed to have his dusty feet and sins exposed to the Master. Eventually however, the thought of separation from the Lord broke through his defenses, and convinced him to yield to the Lord's cleansing.

Later that night when Jesus affectionately bid his disciples farewell, Peter strongly objected saying,

Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice. (John 13:37-38)

We know that Jesus' warning proved true and that Peter denied the Lord. Why did he quail? He was still bound by the fear of death. Satan himself, daring to tempt God over Job, said, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, he will give for his life"(Job 2:4). The enemy knows how we fear for our lives and uses that to weaken our testimony.

So where does a man get the courage to defy death and follow Christ till the end? How did Peter overcome his timidity? Was it when he entered Jesus' tomb and found it empty? No, because we still see him behind closed doors for fear of the Jews (Jn. 20:19). Was it through seeing the resurrected Christ? Only momentarily. As long as Jesus was with him, he had courage. However, when He left his side, he again shrank in cowardice. If seeing the resurrected Christ made the difference, then why did Peter return to the old fishing trade instead of engaging in the business of fishing men into the kingdom of God?

Just before the Lord's ascension we find Peter at sea with the others, struggling to catch fish but to no effect. Does this remind you of a previous scene? The Lord found them exactly as He first met them.

Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. (John 21:5-6)

In fact they caught as many as 153 fish, and still the net didn't break. There is more to this than meets the eye. Remember that when Jesus first met Peter, He told him to cast his nets but in that instance the net broke. Peter too broke under the pressure of the events leading up to the Lord's crucifixion. Something tremendous took place thereafter that would enable Peter not to break under pressure but triumph in his ministry. However, the

Lord Jesus had one last question for Peter.

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. (John 21:15)

The Lord reiterated the same question twice and received the same reply, followed by the same charge. Clearly, the Lord was calling Peter to a higher level of love than he'd even lived before. How could Peter being so human respond to such divine love? And if the love of God is to keep His commandments, how could Peter live up to Christ's high expectations of him and fulfill his pastoral ministry to feed God's sheep?

The answer lies in what Jesus promised his disciples before he departed from them.

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth...shall be in you. (John 14:16-17)

They were to receive another encourager who would be with them forever. When they had Jesus bodily they could draw on his power as long as he was beside them. Whenever he departed, their power would wane. From now on they would have Christ's spirit sown within them. Only then would they be able to love God's way because they would have the fortitude of His love constantly within their hearts "because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5).

On the day of Pentecost, the love of God was shed abroad in Peter's heart. The great inner transformation occurred and Peter became the man that God had called him to be. Before Pentecost, he cowardly denied the Lord. Now being filled with the Holy Spirit, he courageously declared Christ's resurrection to the face of the Lord's executors. Later, when he was commanded not to speak in Christ's name, he boldly replied, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard," and that "we ought to obey God rather than men." Even when the disciples were beaten, they rejoiced that "they were counted worthy to suffer for his name" (Acts 4:20,5:29,41).

Before Pentecost, Peter was behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. After Pentecost, he was put in prison for turning the world upside down by boldly proclaiming the resurrected Christ. God released him from all his prisons and empowered him for ministry. Peter proceeded from strength to strength because he "had not received the spirit of fear; but of power and of love, and of a

sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7). He loved Christ in the highest way. He fed the flock of God and fulfilled His ministry. He became a great example of one who loves Christ by keeping the charge made to him. Later, he charged the elders of the church with the same.

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. (1 Peter 5:2-4)

When the chief Shepherd appears and asks us, “DID YOU LOVE ME?” what will our answer be? Will our works prove our love to Him, or will they testify against us? Are we afraid for our lives? Jesus is our LIFE, ETERNAL LIFE. Do we feel inadequate to accomplish our God given duty? Christ through the indwelling power of the holy spirit will enable us to “fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power” (2 Thess. 1:11). Let's love Him like Peter did!



Lessons From A Leper (Part 2) “See Thou Tell No Man”

by Steve Monahan
Ponchatoola, Louisiana USA

In the 5th chapter of the Gospel of Luke, 4 verses tell the story of a leper who approached and was subsequently cleansed by the Lord Jesus. Part One of this message consisted of a discussion of verses 12 and 13.

And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy: who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And he put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him. (Luke 5:12-13)

We understand that the leper represents me or you, and that his disease represents the practiced sin which holds a person distant from God, thus hindering him from receiving the spiritual nourishment that Christ's Body and Blood are to us who call upon His name. The conclusion is that anyone who approaches the Lord in earnest sincerity desiring cleansing, will surely receive.

It would be wonderful if we could let the whole issue rest right there, but anyone who truly seeks to walk godly in Christ Jesus knows that it just isn't that easy. There are more verses in this context which must be considered

And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. (Luke 5:14-15)

At first glance, this seems to be a wonderful end to the story, but a look at the end of the same account in another Gospel record reveals a problem.

But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter. (Mark 1:45)

Now let's think about this. Instead of obeying the Lord's personal commandment to him, this man took it upon himself to tell as many people as he could about what had been done. The result was that large numbers of people became involved, a pastor's dream, but look where it happened; in the DESERT. Wouldn't it have been so much better if Jesus could have gotten into town where people lived their lives? I say yes! Furthermore, I believe that in places where Christians are free to speak and do as they please, the same scenario is being repeated on a vast scale. Men are receiving Christ and then, ignoring His commandment to put first things first, are rushing off into “ministry.” Buildings are erected and crowds come desiring to receive something of the Lord, but so often the places are spiritual deserts. Everyone is talking about Jesus and God's grace, but societies and cultures are not really being penetrated: instead, subcultures are being formed. The leper's intentions may have been good, but the Lord did not need his help. He required the man's obedience!

Strange as it may seem to the evangelically minded, the Lord told him not to tell anybody, but rather to go show and offer. The specific ordinance to which Jesus referred appears in Leviticus, chapter 14.

And the priest shall go forth out of the camp; and the priest shall look, and, behold, if the plague of leprosy be healed in the leper; Then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two birds alive and clean, and cedar wood, and scarlet, and hyssop: And the priest shall command that one of the birds be

killed in an earthen vessel over running water: As for the living bird, he shall take it, and the cedar wood, and the scarlet, and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water: And he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall let the living bird loose into the open field.

(Leviticus 14:3-7)

Here it may be observed that the priest, having examined the man and finding him clean, performed a ceremony signifying internal cleansing by blood...

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:14)

...and external cleansing by water...

That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, (Ephesians 5:26)

...as well as the restoration of his strength, the return of normal color, and the removal of the odor of the illness. Note that the priest did not himself actually do any cleansing, but merely acknowledged and commemorated. The whole exercise looks forward to Christ who would restore the souls of men who have been weakened, stained, and made by sin to stink in the nostrils of God. It is Christ who frees men to rise as freed birds, to the high calling of our Father. But is there something the cleansed leper must do?

And he that is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, and shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water, that he may be clean: and after that he shall come into the camp, and shall tarry abroad out of his tent seven days. But it shall be on the seventh day that he shall shave all his hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair he shall shave off: and he shall wash his clothes, also he shall wash his flesh in water, and he shall be clean. (vs.8 and 9)

My dear fellow lepers: Jesus has washed us spiritually/ceremonially. Now, we must wash practically, time and again, leaving nothing about ourselves wherewith we might be reinfected. The commandment to shave every hair off the body suggests to us that this may require some radical action on our part; perhaps a lifestyle change, or even an alteration of diet. Would you stop seeking certain forms of entertainment, find new friends, or even adjust your sleeping habits? The question here is not what's displeasing to God, but what opens your conscience to defilement, and will you allow the Lord to lead you away from it?

Genesis 19 tells us that Lot was not exactly enthusias-

tic about leaving Sodom, where there was "fullness of bread and abundance of idleness" (Ezek.16:46), even though he was "vexed with the filthy conversation if the wicked" (2 Pet. 2:7). But when the angel took his hand and led him out, he went. He left many things that were comforting to his flesh, because it became clear that to remain in comfort would result in destruction. The point I'm making is not that every pleasant thing must go from your life; the point is this:

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: (2 Peter 1:10a)

The context in which this verse is set speaks of adding such things as virtue, temperance, godliness to your faith. Things which hinder you from doing this, which in and of themselves are not sins, but do make openings in your soul whereby you are beset by sin, need to be done away with.

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul; (1 Peter 1:11)

It is in these things that you "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"(Phil.2:12). It's a practice which must be engaged in continually, for as it was for the cleansed leper, one washing and shave is not enough to certify and establish your cleansing; but let's not forget that through it all the Lord is near and ever ready to help at every turn. You are clean, tarrying abroad out of your tent, which is to say living your daily life, IN THE CAMP. You are His NOW!

If you will live this way, keeping priorities in order in your own soul, you will experience no compulsion to seek salvation through good works, advertising the gospel, or in some other way trying to further the Lord's ministry in your own power. You will instead find rest; allowing Jesus to build His church, and having the solid assurance that He will grant you abundant opportunities to speak, to do, to participate freely and joyously in the work that He is doing.

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One Soldier Speaks

**The Power of Prayer,
Praise and Worship**

By Jay Pearson
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Have you ever stopped to consider what some really common phrases are saying? I find myself saying things that, when I stop to think about it, I don't really mean at all. They sometimes sound so wonderful, religious and full of truth or even dynamic. Words are sometimes quickly covered and the assumptions are predetermined by our ears.

I was in a new Christian book store the other day and, wow, there are a lot of books that mention the "power of praise" in the title, or at least in the subtitle or short descriptions. Next to them are even more about the "power of prayer." How about this one? "The Power of Worship." These titles far outnumbered the titles concerning the power of God.

I'm kind of weird, I guess, especially with commonly used phrases I hear and see. I ran home, jumped on my computer and in my concordance typed in "Power of Prayer." Guess how many times it is used in the Bible? How about "Power of Praise" and "Power of Worship"? Twenty times each maybe? Three times each? It may surprise you to know that "Power of Prayer" was used zero times, "Power of Praise" zero times and "Power of Worship" zero times.

The power is not in Praise, Prayer or Worship. The power is in GOD. Without Him our prayers are useless. They are not weak, they are useless, even though they may or may not conjure up a good feeling. Without God we can do nothing, without Jesus Christ we can do nothing.

God loves our prayers, praise and worship. God requests, commands and requires them if you are to be more than a conqueror in Christ Jesus. Any effort we produce of ourselves is not even slightly visible next to the power of God who formed, made and created us.

Yes let's praise Him right now. Let us Worship Him and Glorify His name. Let us pray a prayer of thanksgiving. When we praise, worship and pray through His power, energized by His love, the results are powerful. They are powerful because God fills them with power.

Exercising spiritual power is not producing, but using that which is already in existence. Again I say the power is of God. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Praise God and love the Lord, Holy is His name. Polish up your armor and go out and kick the assumptions out of some phrases. One soldier expressing an opinion today and I hope to see you down the trail. I love you and thank God, in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, for you all. Keep your eyes and ears open to Him who gave them.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. (Ephesians 6:10)

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