

Our Stay on Earth

A Devotional for Bereans

"The Bereans...received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." (Acts 17:11)



 Berean Lamp Ministries

Volume 1: Berean Lamp Ministry Devotional Series



Cover Art: this is a representation of the glorious Body of Christ, composed of the many members of Believers rising up into the Head, Who is Christ Jesus: *“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:12), “and He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the Body of Christ, until we all attain the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself in love” (Ephesians 4:11-16).*

“To encourage one another – and all the more as you see the day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:25b)

Berean Lamp Ministries seeks to:

1. Encourage and strengthen the Body of Christ by providing the means for each of its members to share their spiritual gifts with one another, rooted in the Word of God, thereby growing into deeper union with one another and with Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).
2. Minister to non-believers; be a witness for Christ and a testimony to His Body in the world.

Berean Lamp Ministries is a place for the body of Christ to come for encouragement and spiritual sustenance in the face of our swiftly changing world that is rapidly abandoning God. We would appreciate your help in spreading the work of this ministry. Thank you, and God bless. - **Pastor Scott Moller**



Explore more devotionals, articles, sermons, and music from the Body of Christ—also sign up for the bi-monthly Newsletter and learn more about the Berean Christian Fellowship and its ministry, the Berean Lamp—by visiting us at:

www.bereanlamp.org

We would like to give thanks to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for this opportunity to share in His ministry to His saints – all glory and honor and praise be to Him who purchased us from our debt to sin by the shedding of His blood and saved us for the resurrection to Life when He conquered death and hell by His resurrection.

We would also like to thank our generous Body, who have supplied all the photographs in this devotional. Their hard work and dedication in sharing their gifts have made this ministry possible.

We pray that this work ministers to your heart and encourages you in your walk. Let's all take time to be in God's Word together.

*All devotionals written by Nathan Warner
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Left to Oneself

Below is a parallel passage to Isaiah 39, which details how King Hezekiah foolishly displayed his wealth to envoys from Babylon:

“God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart” (2 Chronicles 32:31b).

Here we see a sobering picture. So soon after his divine healing, Hezekiah’s pride prevented him from returning to the Lord, *“according to the benefit done to him”* (2 Chronicles 32:25a). This benefit, most importantly, was the restoration of his life, after he had been told by God to put his house in order because he was going to die. We saw last week how Hezekiah appealed to the Lord to save his life. God heard his prayer and healed him. It seems that Hezekiah took the command to put his house in order to heart, because for the rest of his life (as we see in this chapter) he dedicated himself to building up the strength of his kingdom. God made him prosper in this, and all the works of his hands brought him nothing but wealth, power, and accomplishment.

It is sad to reflect that so often success leads Believers into dangerous places spiritually. We are often safer in our walk with the Lord when we walk in trials and tribulations than when we have plenty and excess.

In verse 31, we see that God left Hezekiah to himself in order to test the motivations of his heart. God didn’t withstand his intent or send a prophet to warn him. Instead, He let him have his way to see what he would do.

As Believers, many times in our lives, we weary of following closely to the Lord on the unpaved foot-path of salvation. After all, it is no stage tour,

and there are no press junkets. Sometimes in our weariness of the meekness of our lives, we make choices that lead us away from God, and God doesn’t always reach out and stop us. Oftentimes, in our hearts, we know we are straying from Him, but we cloud our minds with denial, which deceives us with its promise that “ignorance is bliss.” So often, when I sin, I think, “Well, I’m not going too far from Him...He’ll still be there when I’m done exploring this mysterious byway—perhaps He won’t even notice I’ve gone and tiptoed in this on-ramp to the broad highways of the world.” I tell myself I deserve to have some concrete under my feet for a change and know how it feels to be in the world, and I wander off the narrow way.

Perhaps Hezekiah just wanted to know what it felt like to be admired and desired by his peers—the “great men” of the earth (Revelation 6:15)—to taste the self-satisfaction of praise and flattery. Perhaps he didn’t really mean to fall away, but regardless, there are serious consequences to our sin.

As Believers, we must realize we are patterned after Jesus, Who knew no pride of praise or flattery from men but was rejected and despised (Isaiah 53:3). We share His shame in this world and should glory in it because of the eternal glory promised to us in the Heavens if we bear His name before all men.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted” (Hebrews 12:1-3).

Thoughts? _____

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Desert Highways

“A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God’” (Isaiah 40:3 ESV).

This verse always struck me with a sense of awe. It is one stanza in an incredible “hymn” to the power and glory of God displayed through His promise to send His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

I remember wondering what this verse meant exactly when I would read it. How were the Jews supposed to prepare the way of the Lord and make a pathway in the desert for the Messiah? Did they think they had to literally build a “landing pad” for God—a physical way for Him to take up the throne of David? Perhaps they thought they had to go get everyone ready for His arrival with praise teams, fireworks, and palm branches. Maybe they thought they had to spread the news about His arrival. I also wondered if this verse had any pertinence to us today.

We don’t need to speculate about what this verse means, because the “voice” it refers to speaks for itself nearly 700 years after Isaiah prophesied about it. We know now that John the Baptist was this “voice” that cried this very verse into the deaf ears of the Pharisees (John 1:22-24). John told them he was preparing the way of the Lord, whom he shortly thereafter declared was Jesus of Nazareth. Matthew says, *“For this [John] is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight’”*” (Matthew 3:3).

How was John telling people to make God’s way straight? Was he instructing the Jews how to

build a royal carriage, sew a glorious robe, or prepare a red carpet? The verse just before tells us: *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 3:2). John’s mission was to call people to **repentance** in the wilderness, preparing the way for God’s plan—the good news (Gospel) of salvation through Jesus Christ. Without repentance, the promise of salvation is meaningless and cannot lead people out of the desert they have made for themselves in sin.

God often describes man’s state without Him as a desert, for the desert is a place of abandonment and death where outcasts, criminals, and orphans seek refuge in ruins and wastelands. No one wants to live in the desert. It is a place that life has deserted, because there is no life-giving water. We read in Isaiah 14:17 that Satan made the world like a desert. Certainly, this means spiritually through his deception in the Garden that led Adam to sin and brought death into the world.

Better than leading us out of the desert of our sinful nature, Jesus can transform our natures to life, for He is the Water of Life. As Jesus told the Samaritan woman, *“whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life”* (John 4:14).

How do we receive this Living Water until our lives become like watered gardens (Isaiah 58:11) spouting up from scorched places into eternal life? By repenting of our sin and believing in Jesus Christ the Son of God, for God sent Him into the world that *“whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16b). Even so. Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Man is Nothing

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever" (Isaiah 40:8 ESV).

The context for this verse is a contrast between God's awesome nature, power, and authority and the power, authority, and nature mankind believes man has. The subject is Jesus, for He is the Word (John 1:1) and the Scriptures contain His Word—the Gospel (or good news) of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1: 25).

As an introduction to the Memory Verse: *"All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass"* (Isaiah 40:7). What do we think of when we think of grass? Certainly not the might of nations! Do we look out over the world with its skyscrapers, suburbs, and power plants and see prairies billowing in the wind? Yet this is the nature of man as it stands before God and before His Word—the very thing contained in your home, if you have a Bible. Understand here what God is saying: the Word of Scripture is eternal and will outlive everything and everyone, including every thought and knowledge of man. Who do we think we are, that we glory in our creativity and our power?

We are less than nothing: *"All the nations are as nothing before Him, they are accounted by Him as less than nothing and emptiness"* (Isaiah 40:17). Is this how we as Believers view the world around us today? Is this how we see the nations of the earth with their industrial powerhouses, guided missile destroyers, shock-and-awe airpower, and weapons of mass destruction?

Most people on the planet stand in awe or dread about what man is capable of accomplishing. They rush to make allegiances with those in power, in order to live long on the earth. We live in dizzying times when the nations of the earth climb into space on rockets, communicate anytime and anywhere on the planet, level mountains for coal, and build ships 1/3 of a mile long out of pure steel to conquer the oceans and bring oil to the nations.

We look back with pride at all we've accomplished and glory in our knowledge and ingenuity. We revel in the future glory we may be able to accomplish, foolishly believing we will conquer hunger, poverty, death, and the heavens themselves.

Yet, all of this awesomeness is a drop in the bucket, dust on the scales (Isaiah 40:15) in God's eyes—even less than emptiness.

The "Word of our God," the Gospel, however, IS something—more than something. The Word of God is God's immeasurable gift to us—it contains the power of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord, if we heed its call to repentance of our sin and accept Jesus as our King. This Word will still stand when the earth is dust and the great might of man is dissolved into fire (2 Peter 3:9-13).

If we are Children of God, then we must imitate our Heavenly Father and learn to see the world as God sees the world: less than nothing with no future. We must learn to cherish our Father's Word, which is the only thing in our physical possession that will last forever. Thank the Lord we have His eternal Spirit in us, testifying in us that we are the Children of God and will live forever with Him (Romans 8:16).

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).

Thoughts? _____

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Hold Fast to Eternity

The Memory Verse for this week is from Isaiah 40: **“They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31 ESV).**

Here, Isaiah is addressing those who feel God does not see them. He is speaking to people who feel abandoned by the Lord—who are weary of waiting for God to answer their prayers. Some of them may even use this as an excuse to abandon their faith in God and seek the help of other powers.

Isaiah asks them, *“Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God?’ Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable” (Isaiah 40:27-28).*

God is concerned with Eternity and the everlasting. So often in our lives, the immediate and the “now” clouds our vision and distorts our perspective. When we are in difficulty and in pain, the present feels like eternity. It stretches out before us with trouble after trouble. Will it ever end?

Have you ever felt that way? Has it ever seemed like God does not see you? Is He blind to our difficulties and deaf to our needs? Have you ever given up your prayers to the Lord and sought aid elsewhere?

We all do at some point in our lives, whether it is for a moment or for a while. In times of turmoil,

we might turn to governments, corporations, friends, or family for answers. The Lord should be the first one we turn to when we are in distress, and not a last resort when all other avenues have failed. Are we seeing past our present circumstances, gazing off at the infinite light of our inheritance at the end of our walk, or are we standing dumb-stuck in anguish, staring down weary and faint at the mud-puddles and potholes we’ve stepped in on the road to Eternal Life?

I have been in deep anguish at some pretty trivial things, and at times I gave God an earful about them. Other times, I sought help elsewhere before I even thought of taking them to Him. But sooner or later, I am worn down to despair, wearied by the task of striving on my own. Then I remember that I am not alone in this walk. I recall the promise that He is with me and that the great struggles of life are mere mud-puddles on the road to Eternal Life. This is a battle to remember every day, because we so often find ourselves stumbling into things that take the wind right out of us. Sometimes it seems to take forever to recover our strength.

We should take the perspective of the Psalmist: *“The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:10).* We will fly away—we will mount up with eagle’s wings when we see our Lord and are ushered into Eternity. Jesus will renew our strength by His resurrection power, when He calls us up from death or up to Him in the Rapture.

Then, *“just as we have born the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the Man of heaven” (1 Corinthians 15:49),* and we shall run and not be weary, we shall walk and not faint because we are His and with Him. This great truth is already accomplished for Believers, and the destination exists in Eternity, for Jesus accomplished it for us in the Cross, saving us from our sins and death.

Thoughts? _____

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Be Not Dismayed

The Memory Verse for this week is from Isaiah 41: **“Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10 NASB).**

Isaiah is calling Believers to recognize that God is there for them in their troubles. He tells them not to turn to idols because only God can save them. We may well scoff today at the idols of the ancient world; but, in a crisis, we so often turn to television, the internet, and politicians for answers, rather than to God. How is that different?

Isaiah tells us to turn to God when we are dismayed and anxious. How often in life we are anxious! How often we are distressed with the realities that confront us! There are, after all, so many things to make us worried, and they seem to grow every day! What is on your mind? Is it the economy, job security, home mortgages, injustice, sickness, personal failure, natural disaster, war, death? It seems we always have something on our minds that could make us worried and it grows worse as man turns his back on God, globally.

Yet, Jesus gives Believers peace in the midst of worries: *“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. You heard that I said to you, ‘I go away, and I will come to you’”* (John 14:27-28). Why does He say we shouldn’t be afraid? **Because He will come to us.** He will come to us in strength! While the fulfillment of this ultimately is the rapture and resurrection, it is also a reference to the Holy Spirit upholding us **now** until the time we are called away to Jesus. He is our peace and strength in the midst of anxiety and fear, reminding us that we will be with Him, where He is, for eternity.

We must remember this, because as the world reaches its finish in these End Times, anxiety around us will only grow. The things the world faces right now are nothing compared to what is coming upon it.

In these End Times, we will see *“signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken”* (Luke 21:25-26).

Are we supposed to share that anxiety while men around us are fainting from fear? *“When these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near”* (Luke 21:28). We are supposed to be doing the exact opposite of what the world is doing. As they become more and more dismayed, we are supposed to be encouraged. Why? Because at the climax of all the things that are coming upon the world, everyone will *“see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory”* (Luke 21:27). Jesus is coming for us! Our redemption is coming, in the resurrection and rapture.

We can already see terrible things beginning to take place around us, and we must understand that while we are in the physical anguish of spiritual childbirth now (John 16:21), it will be turned to joy at the coming of the Lord: *“Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you”* (John 16:22). Even so, Lord Jesus, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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He is Light to Nations

“I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations” (Isaiah 42:6 NASB).

Here, God is speaking about the Messiah He has promised to Israel as a new covenant to all people, reconciling men to God. The first covenant God made with Israel was through the Law of commandments and the blood of animal sacrifices—*“the former things”* that God says *“have come to pass, Now I declare new things; Before they spring forth I proclaim them to you”* (Isaiah 42:9). This new thing is establishing the Messiah as a covenant to the people, which is the second, or new, covenant through the blood of Jesus Christ, Who reconciled men to God by His blood, purchasing men from every tribe, tongue, and nation *“to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth”* (Revelation 5:9-10).

During Passover, Jesus *“took the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the **new covenant** in My blood’”* (Luke 22:19-20). Jesus is God’s righteousness to all mankind, which is sentenced to death because of sin, *“so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through **righteousness** to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Romans 5:21).

Jesus is the light to the nations, which still strive vehemently to remain in darkness and reject the righteousness of God. Isaiah prophecies about Him: *“And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob*

*back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength), He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; **I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.**’ Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and its Holy One, To the despised One, To the One abhorred by the nation, To the Servant of rulers, ‘Kings will see and arise, Princes will also bow down, Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You’”* (Isaiah 49:5-7). Jesus is the chosen Holy One of Israel Who *“was **despised** and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was **despised**, and we did not esteem Him”*

(Isaiah 53:3), yet we know that *“at the name of Jesus **every knee** will bow”* (Philippians 2:10a) when He returns in glory.

Jesus is despised by the world, because He said: *“I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life”* (John 8:12). Mankind, however, *“loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil”* (1 John 3:19b), because *“everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed”* (John 3:20). This darkness comes from *“the god of this world”* who *“has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”* (2 Corinthians 4:4). Believers, however, see and know the Light, *“for God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ”* (2 Corinthians 4:6) *“to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen”* (Hebrews 13:21b).

Thoughts? _____

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Witnesses of God

“You are My witnesses,’ declares the Lord, ‘And My servant whom I have chosen, So that you may know and believe Me And understand that I am He’” (Isaiah 43:10a NASB).

Here, God is telling Israel that He has set them apart as a nation to be His witnesses - evidence of His nature in the world. As a nation, they were to stand out among the peoples of the world as a proof of God’s nature. Their existence was to be a testimony and conviction against the sin of the world.

God takes witness very seriously. One of the Ten Commandments stated that man *“shall not bear false witness”* (Matthew 19:18b). Unfortunately, Israel repeatedly defiled themselves in sin and wickedness while bearing the name “God’s People.” This was false evidence of God’s character submitted before the nations. Through unrepentant sin, the people were taking God’s name in vain—calling themselves the People of God with no intention of obeying His will.

They were not content to live in sin themselves but evangelized their perverseness in God’s name as Jesus says: *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves”* (Matthew 23:15).

These are false witnesses because *“the one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him”* (1 John 2:4). God calls this *“an appalling and horrible thing”* when *“the prophets prophesy*

falsely, And the priests rule on their own authority; And My people love it so!” (Jeremiah 5:30-31)

As Believers, we are Christ’s witnesses on earth, for when Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, He said, *“Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things”* (Luke 46-48).

Believers stand apart from the World because God has made us *“A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”* (1 Peter 2:9). Our lives are witness to God’s nature and His glory.

How serious it is then when we see churches and ministries bearing false witness before men by twisting the Gospel to suit the culture and times we live in. They long for the praise of men rather than of God, taking God’s name upon themselves in vain for profit and power! We should be aware of these *“false teachers”* among us *“who will secretly introduce destructive heresies,”* for *“because of them the way of the truth will be maligned”* (1 Peter 2:1b-2b).

As faithful Witnesses, we must test the intent of everything we see and hear by the Word and the Holy Spirit, which convicts the world *“concerning sin and righteousness and judgment”* (John 16:8b). Our witness is to imitate our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Who is the Word of God and Whose testimony about God’s nature convicts the world, for if He *“had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin”* (John 15:22). Even so. Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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For God’s Sake

“I, even I, am the One who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, And I will not remember your sins” (Isaiah 43:25 NASB).

Ego— a person’s sense of self-esteem or self-importance (Google Dictionary). We like to think we’re important. We like to think we’re special. Our childhood fantasies have us as the bravest or most beautiful, the admired, beloved, and cherished—appreciated by all. We all like to be the center of some sort of attention, and we like to think we are important enough to warrant people’s notice. And while some people actually believe the world revolves around them, most at least *wish* it did. Self-importance is a tough problem for humanity and even Believers.

As Believers, we have a tendency to think God sent His Son to die for OUR sakes. We think that salvation is all about US. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16a),” after all, didn’t He? We must be pretty important and valuable then, right?

On the contrary, it is for HIS OWN SAKE that He loves us, not because of anything we have merited. It is not because of how obedient we are, what we have accomplished in life, or how noble we are that He sent His only Son into the world to take its sin upon Himself.

Salvation (even the saving of our lives) is about God’s glory—as a testament to His righteousness and mercy: “Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7). It isn’t about our glory. We didn’t automatically deserve God’s acceptance when we confessed our sins and repented of them. His

acceptance of us, saving our lives, is a gift for His name’s sake—for His glory: “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for **My sake** and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:35). Jesus is clearly saying here that salvation is about Him, not us, and John confirms this when he says, “I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you **for His name’s sake**” (1 John 2:12).

This can be hard for us self-important creatures to swallow, but we aren’t anything special. We aren’t the proverbial kitten that gets a home because of how charming and cute we are. We need to let go our self-important bearing and realize with awe and wonder that we are the adopted children of God *despite* everything we are. In our ugliness, He loves us for His own sake. And what a love it is!

But what is the purpose of this salvation, if it is for His sake and not ours? “For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (2 Corinthians 4:11). It is through death to the world that the life of Jesus is manifest in our bodies, ultimately to be revealed in the resurrection of the dead. Currently, we suffer, not to atone for our sins but as vessels manifesting God’s glory. Jesus is manifest to the world through His salvation working in our lives against the grain of all that the world sees as sense: “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Philippians 1:29). The world cannot understand this about us, but in the knowledge of eternity, this is the greatest blessing anyone could have in life here in the world. Let us then live this life for His name’s sake—to His glory and Honor. Even so. Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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God With Us

“Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which translated means, ‘God with us.’” (Matthew 1:23 NASB)

The verse above from the Gospel according to Matthew is a quote from prophecy out of Isaiah 7:14 and is a foundational proof that Jesus is the Messiah and that Jesus is God.

Taking the verse above, what does it mean to have God *with* us? In a general sense, we know God *“made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist”* (Acts 17:26-28a). God is *with* all men, for without Him, we would not live. Is that the extent of it? Certainly not.

This verse speaks about more than that. It speaks to the promise God made to Israel of a Messiah—the physical manifestation of God in human flesh. As the Messiah, God would be “with” men, among them, entering human history. This is exactly what happened when Jesus was born into time and space as a man and as God through the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary. Does it end there? Does Immanuel mean “God WAS with us?” Was God’s presence in Jesus only for those living at this time? No.

To understand the full weight of what Jesus’ name in prophecy means, we must understand better what it means to be a Believer in Jesus Christ. Jesus did not come simply to be WITH Israel, nor simply to be WITH those living at this

time. He came so that through His death, atonement, and resurrection, He could be with men and women of all races, ages, times, and places who believe on Him and follow Him. He came to be GOD WITH US—God with you and God with me!

The ending chapters in the Gospel of John record this beautiful truth. Here, Jesus repeatedly tells His disciples in different ways that He is always with Believers even though He was leaving the world. He said, *“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”* Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, *“Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?”* Jesus answered and said to him, *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him”* (John 14:16-23). God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will come to anyone and make Their abode with him or her if they only *“repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself”* (Acts 2:38b-39). Even so. Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Seeing the Unseen

“Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’” (John 20:29 ESV)

Here Jesus declared to his disciple, Thomas, a sacred blessing on all who believe He is God without the assurance or confidence that comes by physical sight. It is a blessing for all of us who have come to know Jesus in faith.

Thomas finally understood in this moment when he exclaimed, *“my Lord and my God!”* (John 20:28b) that *“No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, He has made Him known”* (John 1:18), yet Thomas didn’t arrive here by faith. He believed that Jesus was God’s physical manifestation to humanity because he saw Him. Yet, physically, Jesus was in the flesh for only three decades of human history. After His ascension, Jesus was no more available to the physical senses of mankind. He is “seen” now only by faith, which *“comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ”* (Romans 10:17). **“We walk by faith, not by sight”** (2 Corinthians 5:7). It is by believing the Gospel that faith “sees,” because faith is a spiritual “sight” brought by assurance and conviction: *“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”* (Hebrews 11:1), for the things that are seen physically distract us from spiritual reality and promises of God.

The Kingdom of Heaven is only “seen” by the spiritually alive, it is not visible to the spiritually dead. Only if you are “re-born” through faith can you see the realities of God through assurance and confidence in His promises: *“Jesus answered and*

said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God’” (John 3:3), for, *“I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; For the heart of this people has become dull, With their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes, Otherwise they would see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I would heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear”* (Matthew 13:13-16). This insight is the difference between the world’s physical sight, which blinds men to reality, and the spiritual sight of Heaven that brings life when we are born again through faith in the Word of Jesus Christ, revealed to us by His Holy Spirit. We are truly privileged with a sacred blessing to have not seen with our physical eyes and yet to SEE through faith!

Unfortunately, many modern Christians seem wearied by this blessing. They seem tired of the multi-millennial wait to see Jesus. They want ready-made results that are tangible. Jesus warned us this would happen when he said, *“The days will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. They will say to you, ‘Look there! Look here!’ Do not go away, and do not run after them”* (Luke 17:22-23). What a dangerous distraction our physical eyes can be! Therefore, let us walk patiently in faith *“fixing our eyes on Jesus”* (Hebrews 12:2a), remembering always that *“we have fixed our hope on the living God”* (1 Timothy 4:10b). Remember always that *“faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass”* (1 Thessalonians 5:24). Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Where He Is

"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3 NASB).

How can we take in the immensity of this beautiful Scripture? What a favor and blessing it is to know that Jesus is preparing a place for me and for you where His home is. What an amazing promise to be drawn into the loving care of God to dwell with Him!

Most Believers have *"died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them"* (Hebrews 11:13-16).

Jesus knew that to become a disciple meant being cast out and orphaned by the world. Abraham illustrated this. He wandered the earth in Faith as an alien and exile because he wasn't looking for a place to call home in the world—he was *"looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God"* (Hebrews 11:10).

To belong to the world, you have to be parented by it, accepting its authority to shape and mold you to fit into its foundations. Here we see men born of blood, the will of the flesh, and the will of man—all bearing titles, pedigrees, and distinctions that open up doors in the world and give them roles

with an inheritance of establishments and residences. Just so, the devil offered Jesus *"all the kingdoms of the world and their glory"* if He would worship him (Matthew 4:8-9). Jesus did not accept satan's authority, for He was God's Son, and as Believers, we also do not recognize the authority of the world because God has welcomed us into His family, giving us the *"right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God"* (John 1:12b-13). God is our Parent, shaping and molding us for His Kingdom's foundation in eternity. This makes us orphans to the world but heirs of God.

While being an orphan in the world causes us a good deal of discomfort now, Jesus consoles us—*"do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you"* (John 14:1-2).

We don't have to labor, barter, or buy our blessed right to live with Jesus and call His Name ours, *"for by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God"* (Ephesians 2:8). It is a free gift to all who believe, and while we may feel like exiles, strangers, aliens, or orphans right now, Jesus tells us, *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you"* (John 14:18). He is faithful, for even in this moment, we have His Holy Spirit Who *"testifies with our spirit that we are children of God"* (Romans 8:16) and that Jesus is coming again to claim us for Himself to *"receive the unfading crown of glory"* (1 Peter 5:4b) and an *"inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you"* (1 Peter 1:4). *"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus"* (Revelation 22:20).

Thoughts? _____

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The Day of the Lord—P1

“The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes” (Joel 2:31 NASB).

The Day of the Lord in Scripture can sometimes be confused with the Rapture. The Rapture refers to when *“the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord”* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). The Rapture is our *“blessed hope”* (Titus 2:13). It comes before the **Day of the Lord** and has no signs to predict it, *“for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect”* (Luke 12:40). *“For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will”* (Matthew 24:44). This is how Jesus comes to take His Church out of the world and withdraw the Holy Spirit from restraining the wickedness in the world (2 Thessalonians 2:7). What follows is called the Tribulation in Scripture—a time when evil is unrestrained on the earth, *“for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect (Israel, which is left behind) those days will be cut short”* (Matthew 24:21). This is when the *“lawless one (Antichrist/Beast) will be revealed...whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with*

all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:8a-10). During this time, many terrible things befall the world as judgments for its wickedness, and Israel suffers greatly (see the Book of Revelation). These judgments are signs leading up to the Day of the Lord, which is preceded by amazing astronomical occurrences: *“But immediately after the tribulation of those days **THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL** from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the **SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY** with power and great glory”* (Matthew 24:28-30).

This is the Day of the Lord, when Jesus returns with His Church to set up His government in Jerusalem. Despite having signs of its coming, this day will still come upon the deceived world *“like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up”* (2 Peter 3:10). *“So it will happen in **that day**, That the LORD will punish the host of heaven on high, And the kings of the earth on earth. They will be gathered together Like prisoners in the dungeon, And will be confined in prison; And after many days they will be punished. **Then the moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed**, For the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, And His glory will be before His elders”* (Isaiah 24:21-23). *“And the beast (lawless one) was seized, and...thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone”* (Revelation 19:20a, 20b). In Part 2, we’ll look in depth at the Millennial Reign of Christ and what follows.

Thoughts? _____

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The Day of the Lord—P2

“Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory.” (Luke 21:27)

In the last devotional, we concluded with Christ’s second coming, marking the end of the Tribulation and the beginning of Christ’s one-thousand year rule on earth, which we call the Millennium. As you recall, the Beast and False Prophet are cast into the Lake of Fire, then an angel lays *“hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed”* (Revelation 20:2-3a). This period of one-thousand years is when *“the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne”* (Matthew 19:28b). Sometimes we confuse Christ’s rule here with the creation of the New Heaven and the Earth, when God makes all things new and dwells with man, but that is still to come. The Millennium is a forced peace on the post-Tribulation earth, where Jesus’ rule will be in righteousness upon an unrighteous earth, for *“from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron”* (Revelation 19:15a). He *“will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, And His glory will be before His elders”* (Isaiah 24:23b), while His disciples *“shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”* (Matthew 19:28b). And *“The law will go forth from Zion And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And*

they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war” (Isaiah 2:3b-4).

At this time, *“the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus [during the Tribulation] and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand...came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years”* (Revelation 20:4b). John refers to this as the first resurrection. The second resurrection will occur after this time, which we will see in the next Devotional.

Unlike all the former kingdoms and governments of the world, when Jesus rules the earth as King during the thousand years, He *“will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear; But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, And faithfulness the belt about His waist. And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze, Their young will lie down together, And the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper’s den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea”* (Isaiah 11:3b-9). What a blessed time that will be! Yet man will still be deceived.

In the next devotional, we’ll look at satan’s final deception, the Great White Throne of Judgment, and the New Heaven and Earth.

Thoughts? _____

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The Day of the Lord—P3

“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne” (Matthew 25:31 NASB).

We left the last Devotional near the end of Christ’s thousand year reign, judging the nations of the earth. Now, *“when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth...to gather them together for the war [against Jesus]”* (Revelation 20:7-8a). They gather together and surround Jerusalem, but fire comes down from Heaven and God destroys them all *“and the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever”* (Revelation 20:9-10). Immediately after this, John *“saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds”* (Revelation 20:11-13).

This is what Jesus referred to *“when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the*

nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’” The righteous then ask when they ever helped Jesus. *“The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’”* Then He will also say to those on His left, *‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’”* The accursed then ask when they ever denied Him. *“Then He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life”* (Matthew 25:31-46).

“Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14-15). This is the final judgment, the complete end of all sin, for as we will see in next week’s Devotional, God fulfills His promise to His people when He makes *“new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells”* (2 Peter 3:13b). May we all look forward to that Day!

Thoughts? _____

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The Day of the Lord—P4

“No longer will you have the sun for light by day, Nor for brightness will the moon give you light; But you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And your God for your glory” (Isaiah 60:19 NASB).

After the Final Judgment brings an end to all sin, God ushers in His new creation, promised to Believers since the beginning of time. Isaiah was given this promise when God told him, *“behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing And her people for gladness”* (Isaiah 65:17-18). Nearly 800 years later, the Apostle John was shown the same promise but in greater detail. He says, *“I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them’”* (Revelation 21:1-3). This is what God told Ezekiel would happen when He said, *“Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever”* (Ezekiel 43:7a). During this time, all Believers will be with God and He Himself *“will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things*

have passed away” (Revelation 21:4). In our broken world, here is a promise to hold dear! John looked on New Jerusalem and said he *“saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life”* (Revelation 21:22-27).

In this New Jerusalem, John was shown *“a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever”* (Revelation 22:1-5). This is **the end** of the old earth and the world’s sad story of sin, horror, and brutality, but it is the beginning of our eternal lives, purchased from sin and death by the blood of Jesus, to BE where HE IS. May we all straighten up when He declares: *“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end”* (Revelation 22:12-13).

Thoughts? _____

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Israel's Salvation

“It will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured. And all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it” (Zachariah 12:3 NASB).

God often uses the image of a stone to speak about His Son, Jesus, and to describe His will as immovable and strong. Here in Zachariah, we see that God intends to make Israel “immovable” on the Day of the Lord. Although Israel rejected Jesus, they are still a part of God’s plan and a testimony and a witness to His power, until the nation’s ultimate salvation at the hands of Jesus Christ Himself.

This truth has not stopped the Jews from abandoning God time and time again to sin beyond the sins of all the nations around them. As He says through Isaiah: *“I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people”* (Isaiah 65:2a). God allowed this rebellion to prove His faithfulness to Israel despite their unfaithfulness to Him.

At no time was this more true than when the Jews denied His only begotten Son, their own Messiah, Jesus Christ, who they brutally murdered, though He came to save them from their sins. Because they turned against God’s Rock of salvation, Israel stumbled as a nation and God scattered *“them among the peoples”* (Zachariah 10:9b) at the hands of the Romans, fulfilling what Isaiah and the Prophets said—to those who believed in Jesus, *“He shall become a sanctuary; But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem”* (Isaiah 8:14).

Jesus told the Jews He was *“the stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone...Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it”* (Matthew 21:42-43). God’s Kingdom is given to anyone who believes in Jesus. *“Why? Because [the Jews] did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, just as it is written, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed’”* (Romans 9:32-33), because God is faithful, and because God is faithful, He also will not abandoned Israel. Israel fell through their rejection of Jesus and they will continue to reject Jesus until just before the Day of the Lord when all the nations of the earth come to destroy Israel and in their desperation, the Jews will realize Jesus is the Messiah and will call out upon His name, just as Jesus told them: *“from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’”* (Matthew 23:39), *“and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory”* (Matthew 24:30). At this moment, God says, *“I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn”* (Zachariah 12:10).

When Jesus comes to save Israel, they will know Him. Today, they do not know that He is their salvation and their Rock, but it is God’s will that the nation of Israel WILL call upon Jesus, believe in Him, and receive His salvation, even as we have done as Believers.

Thoughts? _____

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A Fruitful Inheritance

**“O Lord, my strength and my stronghold,
And my refuge in the day of distress, To You the
nations will come From the ends of the earth
and say, ‘Our fathers have inherited nothing but
falsehood, Futility and things of no profit.’”
(Jeremiah 16:19 NASB)**

As we have seen in previous devotionals, all the nations of the earth come to be ruled by Jesus after He returns on the Day of the Lord to set up His Kingdom in Jerusalem. On that day, all the nations will concede that everything they have is utter falsehood and futility.

King Solomon, the wisest man of history, faced this reality and conceded that all life was a *“life time of futility”* (Ecclesiastes 7:15), *“For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die! So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind. Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me”* (Ecclesiastes 2:16-18). This is true because *“the creation was subjected to futility”* (Romans 8:20a) by the Fall and the entrance of sin into the world.

And yet, the world strives against this futility with humanist efforts, for they believe that they will conquer the “futility” of the nature they have been subject to. Scientists, leaders, and dreamers believe that humanity will overcome through further outpourings of the “Human Spirit.” They refuse to acknowledge that sin is the unassailable

cause of their futile existence. David saw this when he asked, *“Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!’”* (Psalm 2:1-3) And so man seeks to get out from under his sin through his own means (magic, sorcery, science, technology) and the righteous judgment of a Holy God. They deny in themselves that *“the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now”* (Romans 8:19-22).

This futility finds its end only in Jesus Christ. He alone has become eternal and permanent and fruitful. When we believe on His name, we become Children of God and are given *“an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you”* (1 Peter 1:4). So, while we are still subject to the vain futility that is this earthly life, we have a fruitful inheritance to be bestowed on us when we are born into eternity in the Resurrection and Rapture through the power of Jesus’ blood that covers our sin, cleanses us, and makes us Holy before God. He, and only He, takes away the **cause** of our vain state of futility, so that we become *“fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us”* (Romans 8:18) - *“an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God”* (Ephesians 5:5b).

Thoughts? _____

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Saved from Wrath

“For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:9 NASB).

There is a Day of Wrath coming upon the world—a righteous judgment against the unrighteousness of man, the wickedness of nations, and the evil that abides in man’s heart because of his sin. This wrath of God will not touch Believers, for John says, *“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”* (John 3:36). This eternal life is the fulfillment of our salvation through Jesus Christ, if we accept His offer—that He would take our place (condemned to death) if we confess that we are sinners and repent, so that we can become His, if we believe in Him and put our faith and trust in Him and obey Him as our Lord. For *“God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life”* (Romans 5:8-10).

Without His righteousness covering us, we are destined for death and the wrath of a Holy God culminating in separation from Him, for *“because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God”* (Romans 2:4).

The world refuses to believe this. They are

holding onto a millennia of lies, futility, and vanity in the hope that this will save them. They look to the awe-inspiring power they have achieved through science and technology, overflowing wealth, shocking force, and outpourings of knowledge as a “prophecy” of their ultimate triumph. It is a false prophecy, for they completely ignore God’s Word which says, *“riches do not profit in the day of wrath, **But righteousness delivers from death**”* (Proverbs 11:4), and they do not understand prophecy which foretells, *“the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; For the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’”* (Revelation 6:16-17) For *“neither their silver nor their gold Will be able to deliver them On the day of the Lord’s wrath; And all the earth will be devoured In the fire of His jealousy, For He will make a complete end, Indeed a terrifying one, Of all the inhabitants of the earth”* (Zephaniah 1:18) and *“they will fling their silver into the streets and their gold will become an abhorrent thing; their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord. They cannot satisfy their appetite nor can they fill their stomachs, for their iniquity has become an occasion of stumbling”* (Ezekiel 7:19). As the writer of Hebrews says, *“It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Hebrews 10:31) as a sinner.

This is not our destiny, for we will be delivered through belief and obedience in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He will take us out of a world destined for wrath, because we are not destined for wrath, but for salvation in the Household of God (Ephesians 2:19). Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Our Stay on Earth

“If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth” (1 Peter 1:17 NASB).

The world wants us to believe that we came from it, and we are not leaving it. We are told that we came from nothing, and we are returning to nothing, so the point of life in an honest assessment is nothing.

Scripture, however, says the exact opposite. God’s revelation of the true nature of reality is available to us in His Word, which tells us that we came **into** the world as refugees (or tenants), and we are **leaving** the world with one of two permanent citizenships. *“For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope”* (1 Chronicles 29:15). David was right to say there is no hope in the world, because from the planet’s perspective, we are born, we live a time, and we die. That is it. When we come into this world, we are given a place in it regardless of our inclinations. Where we are born determines our citizenship. Many of us automatically become citizens in one of earth’s many nations. This citizenship is not permanent, because it ends when we die. Because of this, worldly citizenship is actually more akin to tenancy with the world as a great big apartment complex, if you’ll entertain the metaphor. Some of us find ourselves in affordable housing, while others enter plush, luxury penthouses. As we live, we are given opportunities to gain better accommodations in the world, often by investing our energies deeper into the world’s priorities. We all attempt to survive in it and make

our way in it. We strive to make a better life for ourselves and our families. For many, this becomes their sole purpose, their reality—to create an enduring place of comfort in the world—a stable residence for family, business, legacy, and empire.

As Believers, however, we openly confess we are strangers and exiles on the earth (Hebrews 11:13). We are to remain keenly aware of our identity as tenants on this planet, acknowledging it as short-term lodging for the duration of our lives. Earth is not our home.

While here, people may claim to be Germans, Americans, or Chinese, and they can be very patriotic and very proud of their citizenships, but no matter how nationalistic they are, they are really only citizens of Heaven or citizens of hell. All world nationalities boil down to these two residencies, regardless of whether we are Kings, Prime Ministers, CEOs, or restaurant dishwashers—we are all migrants here, passing through, waiting to receive our apportioned, permanent residences. What determines this final citizenship? Is it hours of paperwork or ethical acts? Is it our usefulness, our importance? Perhaps a VIP ticket? No. The one thing that determines our residence is simply our encounter here on earth with *“Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God”* (1 Corinthians 1:25) in the Gospel (Good News). While tenants here in worldly slums or marble mansions, we observe Christ’s call: *“follow me!”* (John 1:43) Do we obey the call, confess and repent, and accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, receiving for our inherited eternal citizenship in Heaven, or do we disobey His call and inherit a permanent citizenship with the unclean outcasts, outside the walls of the Heavenly City (Revelation 22:15)?

As Believers, *“our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 3:20). Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Following His Suffering

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps” (1 Peter 2:21 ESV).

It is a pretty self-evident statement that most of us want to live a normal life, with all the promise that “normal” entails. “Normal” means leading “fulfilling” lives with purpose that offer security, peace, a nice family, a nice home, and a good job.

Some of us want an “extraordinary” life. We want to be important, looked up to, and held in esteem. They want to be a part of something important and of great purpose.

One thing is for certain, however—no one is rooting for a “less-than-ordinary” life. Who wants to be *“despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face”* (Isaiah 53:3a)? Who looks forward to a fellowship in sufferings?

This was Jesus’ life on earth—a life that you and I *“should follow in His steps”* (1 Peter 2:21b). This suffering was not for suffering’s sake, however. It had a purpose: *“As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will al-lot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors”* (Isaiah 53:11-12a). Suffering in our lives has a purpose too.

Suffering in the body in a Believer’s life takes many forms. God often uses suffering in our lives to chisel and conform us *“to the image of His Son”* (Romans 8:29a), for our flesh cannot abide suffering because it seeks only opportunities for

relief, satisfaction, and pleasure. But if we feed it what it wants, we train ourselves to fall easily into temptations to sin because *“the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, be-cause the mind set on the flesh is hostile to-ward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so”* (Romans 8:6-7) for the *“flesh sets its de-sire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one an- other, so that you may not do the things that you please”* (Galatians 5:17).

Suffering interrupts a “normal” life, whether momentarily (flu), chronically (headaches), or permanently (serious injury). Walking through suffering can force us to face our flesh’s hostility, resentment, and bitterness against God’s will, which is to “mortify” our flesh and make us like His Son, for *“since Christ has suffered death in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, be-cause he who has suffered death in the flesh has ceased from sin”* (1 Peter 4:1). But suffering in life as a Believer does not mean we are miserable, *“for just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ”* (2 Corinthians 1:5), for it is our desire to *“be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead”* (Philippians 3:9-11). *“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God”* (2 Timothy 1:8). Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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When I Am Afraid

“In God, whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?” (Psalm 56:4 NASB)

What can man do to me? Well, I can think of a few things, can't you? Most of them are very unsavory to say the least.

What if we could say with David that *“man has trampled upon me; Fighting all day long he oppresses me. My foes have trampled upon me all day long, For they are many who fight proudly against me....All day long they distort my words; All their thoughts are against me for evil. They attack, they lurk, They watch my steps, As they have waited to take my life”* (Psalm 56:1b-2&5-6). Wouldn't you be afraid if this was how your life was going? David had been fighting and running for his life since he was a young man with threats and dangers and fears at every turn.

Yet David could say to the Lord, *“When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You”* (Psalm 56:3). David knew that FEAR is a form of faith because it is “to expect or worry about something bad or unpleasant” - Merriam Webster Dictionary (Note: not the reverence and awe that is used to describe a Believer's attitude towards God). Fear is trust or confidence in something bad—the assurance and expectation of harm. It is opposite Biblical faith, which is *“the assurance of things hoped for”* (Hebrews 11:1a) for good to us from God.

Fear is a powerful motivator in the world. It is the #1 ingredient responsible for causing “good people” to go along with very “bad things,” and it works something like this: if I want someone to do something, I need to give them an incentive. If I'm feeling charitable, I might offer them a financial incentive. If I forgot my wallet at home, I might try

to intimidate or threaten them or their families—a bankable alternative. Fear has been used since the Fall to control people's actions, and the world feeds us with stories of how terrible it can be if we don't obey its wishes.

David had more reason than most to fear man, even his own children and friends—yet he says, *“what can mere man do to me?”* not because he was more intelligent, powerful, or cunning than these men, but because he was looking into eternity, and he knew that whatever happened to him here, God had justified Him there: *“You have taken account of my wanderings; Put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book? Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call; **This I know, that God is for me.** In God, whose word I praise, In the LORD, whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me? Your vows are binding upon me, O God; I will render thank offerings to You. For You have delivered my soul from death, Indeed my feet from stumbling, So that I may walk before God In the light of the living”* (Psalm 56:8-13). David knew that he should not fear the fury of the world, for *“yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; And you will look carefully for his place and he will not be there. But the humble will inherit the land And will delight themselves in abundant prosperity”* (Psalm 37:10-11) under the rule of Jesus Christ. We should look ahead with David to the *“inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you”* (1 Peter 1:4), received by FAITH in God, not FEAR of man, *“for you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'”* (Romans 8:15) Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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An End to the Agony of Death

“Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Ha-des” (Revelation 1:17b-18).

Jesus WAS dead, but Jesus IS alive. He died for our sins. He was resurrected for our salvation. We know that in Jesus *“all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form”* (Colossians 2:9). Jesus is fully God and fully man. This is important if we are to understand what His death and resurrection means to us. You and I are human beings in these fleshly bodies. Because we have a *“share in flesh and blood, [God] Himself [as Jesus] likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives”* (Hebrews 2:14-15). *“Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”* (Philippians 2:8), *“for Christ...died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit”* (1 Peter 3:18). Jesus did not remain dead. He was resurrected – He came back to life because *“God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power”* (Acts 2:24). Jesus was resurrected and His Body freed of the corruption brought to the body in death by sin. We see *“that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him”* (Romans 6:9).

Jesus died to reconcile us to God – any of us

who will accept His substitution of Himself in our place on “death row.” He took our place because there was no hope for us to save our-selves from our sins. Each of us is guilty of sin and therefore an heir of death, since through the first man, Adam, *“sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned”* (Romans 5:12). We are enslaved to death, setting ourselves against God – even as enemies. Yet *“if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life”* (Romans 5:10). His Life! By this, God’s purpose *“has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”* (2 Timothy 1:10).

Immortality. Eternal Life. Life after death. This is God’s purpose and His desire for each man and woman in the world. But it only can be achieved by reconciliation to Him. This reconciliation is available to anyone who repents of sin and believes that Jesus Christ is Lord. Unfortunately, the Good News is seen as *“foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God”* (1 Corinthians 1:18). Especially today, the Gospel is seen as foolishness, but it is the power of God revealed to all mankind. On this Easter, when we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, entrust yourself to Jesus and be saved by the power of God. Jesus says to you and to me, *“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the be-gin-ning and the end”* (Revelation 22:12-13). Amen.

Thoughts? _____



Whose Judgment Seat?

“You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat” (Romans 14:10).

In the Garden, our task was to implement God’s will on His creation. In this fallen world, we humans implement OUR will on creation. This is the result of the Fall where the Serpent told Adam and Eve that eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil would cause their eyes to be “*opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*” (Genesis 3:5b). This isn’t truly knowing what is good and evil, but rather what we WANT to be good and what we WANT to be evil. When man ate of this Tree, he became “like God” in the sense that he took on the task of judgment for himself.

And boy, have we ever! Few are the men and women who acknowledge God as judge of what is right and what is wrong in their lives and in the world. Everywhere, men think they can sit down in God’s judgment seat, but they are nothing more than imposters. This is why our judgment of a fellow Believer’s intent is so serious to God. We are seated in His place, passing judgments that are His alone to make.

As Believers, we are called to acknowledge the “judgment seat” as God’s and obey God’s judgment rather than the judgment of men. This means we are not to be judging Believers or non-believers in things where God’s judgment in His Scripture is not clear. So often though, this is where we get hung up the most. Many Believers can be very harsh and judgmental about things like alcohol, smoking, pre-trib/post-trib rapture, formal

wear, pork, KJV-only, and baptism. These things divide church bodies and destroy relationships despite the command that “*no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ*” (Colossians 2:16-17).

However, we must share God’s judgment as His Word and Holy Spirit direct us—we are instructed to preach the Gospel (Mark 16:15), test the spirits (1 John 4:1), and judge over issues in the Church where God’s Word is clear (1 Corinthians 6:1). This is what Elders are instructed to be—conduits for His judgment, “*according to the will of God*” (1 Peter 5:2b), “*for not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son*” (John 5:22) and He is our Head (Ephesians 5:23). Jesus alone is “*able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart*” (Hebrews 4:12).

In any dispute we must give it over to the Lord. We must have the perspective of David who said, “*The LORD therefore be judge and decide between you and me*” (1 Samuel 24:15a), because He will. Far better that we listen and obey Christ’s commands now than when we stand before His Judgment Seat. The command from God is that “*all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you*” (1 Peter 5:5-7). “*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others*” (Philippians 2:3-4). This is a high calling—may it be our aim. Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Recompense for Deeds

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

We cannot earn salvation or eternal life, but we are told in Scripture that *“if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved”* (Romans 10:9). Those who are saved will be taken to be with the Lord in the Resurrection and the Rapture, where *“each one of us will give an account of himself to God”* (Romans 14:12) and *“each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are”* (1 Corinthians 3:13-17). We see that the recompense for bad deeds is suffering loss of all that we have built through those deeds—our work is “destroyed,” but we are saved.

While this future judgment should cause us to be more focused, single-minded, *“steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 15:58), it should not evoke fear in us, for *“we have come to know and have*

believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.” (1 John 4:16-18).

For those who love God, what will be the recompense for good deeds? Scripture speaks of “rewards” and “crowns.” We don’t know what all the rewards will be, *“but love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High”* (Luke 6:35a).

Some rewards are mentioned as crowns, suggesting rulership with Christ, for *“if we endure, we will also reign with Him”* (2 Timothy 2:12a). We see the Elders in Heaven around God, casting their crowns down in worship of Him (Revelation 4:10). The crowns that are mentioned are life, righteousness, exaltation, and glory. Paul even mentions to the Philippians and Thessalonians that they are his crown (Philippians 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:19).

We don’t have a lot of detail about rewards, but we know that *“without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him”* (Hebrews 11:6). *“We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth”* (Revelation 11:17-18). Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Treasure in Heaven

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal” (Matthew 6:19).

We have all had treasures in our lives—things we stored away in safe places and delighted in. When I was a child my greatest treasures had to do with my family heritage—a sword from my Scottish ancestors, a heraldic brooch, the names I bore connecting me to a past of dignity, royalty, adventure, and romance. I spent a lot of time storing up the things that connected me to that past, and I took great pride in everything I possessed, be it knowledge in my mind or objects in my room. Whether people acknowledged it or not, these things were my “glory” and “honor.”

It wasn’t until I was a little older and spending more time in God’s Word that I realized my “treasure” and my inheritance held no value in the Kingdom of Heaven. To be a Believer in Jesus Christ is to be an heir in His family, to hold fast to His lineage, and to treasure His Kingdom. We die to our first birth and are born again into a new family— *“to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved”* (Ephesians 1:5b-6). God has given Believers *“the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God”* (John 1:13). As children of God, we are no longer associated with our human bloodlines, we die to the circumstances of our human birth, and we cast off the schemes, plans,

inheritances, and vendettas of our ancestors. We are a new people who will sing with the Elders in Heaven to Jesus, *“You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth”* (Revelation 5:9b-10). As Believers, we are now members of God’s family, we are born into Christ’s bloodline, we have a new circumstance to our birth, and we have a new plan and inheritance to be focused on.

That inheritance means we have treasure stored up in Christ. Our treasures now are the things of God, and we are to *“walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God”*

(Colossians 1:10). We give up our connections to the world and our focus on the inheritance of the world. Instead, we focus on our inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven that *“is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field”* (Matthew 13:44), parting with his worldly treasure for his Heavenly one. How easily a wealthy man who is starving would gladly give away his wealth and heritage for food—think of Esau. Oh, to be like Job and be able to say, *“I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food”* (Job 23:12b) - an eternal treasure vs. the fading, temporary treasures of worldly inheritance.

As Children of God, we are *“to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for [ourselves] the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that [we] may take hold of that which is life indeed”* (1 Timothy 6:18-19), knowing that Jesus is *“the stability of your times, A wealth of salvation, wisdom and knowledge; The fear of the Lord is his treasure”* (Isaiah 33:6b).

Thoughts? _____

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Treasure What Is Good

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21).

Treasure is defined by the Merriam Webster Dictionary as “something of value that is hidden or kept in a safe place.” Whatever treasure means to you, it is your great security. Your treasure is what makes you feel confident in the world. Is it Jesus, \$300 million in the bank, an impregnable castle, or a special make-up that makes you look younger? With your treasure, you are at ease and confident. Without it, you are unsettled and in distress.

When I was young, I dreamed of finding a treasure chest of gold. I knew that if I found it, I’d be rich and never have to work again! I’d be free of all the worries in life—food, shelter, and comfort. I wouldn’t have to get up in the morning and work all day because I’d be secure and at ease in the promise of my treasure. Millions of adults still live for this dream.

In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, He addressed the promise and security of worldly treasure when He advised the crowd, *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal”* (Matthew 6:19-20).

Jesus was saying that the treasures of earth can be taken from us—we can be robbed one way or another of its security. Not only that, they WILL be taken from us, for just as *“we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either”* (1 Timothy 6:5b-7). He was warning us that we can only be truly confident and

at ease in the treasure of Heaven, which is the Gospel of Christ.

Is Jesus speaking out against wealth here? Is it wrong for us to have money? No. There are many Believers who have material possessions, and it is not wrong for us to make money or have wealth. However, it is wrong for us to make TREASURE of that money or substance. Because if we treasure the things of this world, then our heart will be secure in the world, and we will be confident in its promise.

“The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil” (Matthew 12:35). If we treasure things of the world, then our heart will “dwell” on evil. When we speak and act, we are bringing out evil—putting the potential of our treasure to effect. To put another way, we are withdrawing from our “bank account” and making payment. You can only pay with what you have in your account. If all you have in the vault is Dollars, then you cannot withdraw and pay with Yuan.

All the wealth and treasure of the world is futility and decay, for we cannot take it with us when we die, and none of it can pass into eternity. When we treasure the world, we are buying its rust and selling its moths. When we speak, we speak its decay and death. When we act, we act in *“immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these”* (Galatians 5:19b-21a).

When we treasure the things of Heaven, we “bring out” the light and life of Christ and His Gospel to the world. When we act, we act in *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”* (Galatians 5:22b-23a).

As Believers, our treasure is truly valuable, kept safe for us in Heaven. Let us draw out of our good treasure what is good—the Gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Social Gospel?

“And He said to him, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND’” (Matthew 22:37).

Here Jesus was asked what the most important commandment was that God gave man to obey. He replied that it was to love God with everything that you are. How profound and yet how elusive this command can be in our lives. Jesus called this the *“great and foremost commandment”* (Matthew 22:38). After He had established this, He said, *“The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF’”* (Matthew 22:39). It is important to notice the order of these commandments. Order here really matters because how you take these two commandments is at the heart of two very different views of what the Church is and what it is supposed to be doing in the world today.

You see, if you take the second commandment first—if you make this your mission statement in life, you may have a tendency to focus on meeting the physical needs of your neighbors over their spiritual needs—supplying water from your tap to quench a dry throat instead of Jesus’ living water that quenches the spiritual thirst for eternal life. This is not to say that as Believers we should not help our neighbors with their physical needs—we are commanded to! But we must be aware of the focus of our lives, for if the second command is your first, you will have a tendency to tolerate sin and seek peace over truth. Instead of the persecution, division, and conflict that Jesus said

Believers would experience in the world’s society for standing for His Truth, you will create synthesis by bringing opposing ideas together in compromise—tolerating evil for the sake of unity, common goals, and expedience to make the world “a better place.” In your heart, you may even be a humanist, and why not, since your focus is man, not God? This is the social gospel of the modern, “emerging” church.

It is not new. In the early 20th Century, emphasizing the second commandment over the first was called the “Social Gospel” because churches began applying Scripture to human needs over spiritual ones—applying the Gospel as a social service to reform the world, making it a “better place” to live in. Christianity became as much a political and social force as a spiritual one. Some believed Christianity would grow through revival until the world would be won for Christ, at which time Jesus would return. This mentality is also connected to Dominion teaching—recovering the “dominion” we were given over creation in the Garden. It is practiced by bringing world institutions into the church and the church into the institutions—binding business, government, and church together to “reform” society and take the world “back for Christ”—making strategic partnerships with businesses, governments, and non-believers to make the church a force to be reckoned with in the world’s geopolitical landscape. The problem with this view is the world is not redeemable through human means, and it will perish in its sin. God does not need us to conquer or reform anything for Him. Conquering is HIS Son’s business, not ours, and Jesus will conquer all on the Day of the Lord, when He returns as a conquering King to “reform” it in righteous judgment.

Our mission then is not to reform the world for God but to *“go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned”* (Mark 16:15-16). Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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“I” Must Decrease

“He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

This was John the Baptist’s answer to his disciples who were concerned that Jesus was “appropriating” their ministry. From their perspective, it felt like Jesus was “stealing” the stage from John, and He was eclipsing them. When people came into the region, they didn’t see or hear John—they saw and heard Jesus. This bothered John’s disciples, because they wanted people to know them, just as the world’s prophets today preach that life is about “you.” We live in an extremely narcissistic age with catchphrases and mottos like, “Believe in yourself!” “Live your dream!” “Yes, we can!” “Trust yourself!” “Dream big!” “You are awesome!” “You can do anything!” Would you be discouraged if you were told, “NO YOU CAN’T, but so-in-so can”?

Would it bother you if you were being “upstaged”? It certainly bothers the world, but it didn’t bother John. John’s response was, “You’re absolutely right! - people are seeing Jesus instead of me, and that is exactly how it must be!”

What about us? Are our lives about us or about Jesus? When people listen to us, are they hearing Jesus, or are they hearing us? If we are Believers, Jesus must increase in us, and “we” must decrease “in us” until we are no longer the center of attention as a charismatic “somebody” or a magnetic “personality.”

What does this mean? Well, when we think about our lives, do we think, “I will __,” “I am __,” “I need to __,” or some other phrase where the emphasis is on the “I” of our life? Do we talk mostly about ourselves to other people, or do we

talk about the Lord? Are we acting in our lives for our own “I” desires, or are we acting for Jesus?

As a Believer, the emphasis on “I” must daily be decreasing, and the emphasis on Jesus must be increasing, until we are filled with His fullness. This is a part of our sanctification—*“until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the **fullness of Christ**”* (Ephesians 4:13).

In this way, we emulate Jesus, for although He *“existed in the form of God, [He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, **but emptied Himself**, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name”* (Philippians 2:6-9). Paul tells us here to have this same attitude (v5) - we are to **EMPTY OURSELVES**. This is all contrary to the world’s false prophets who say life is all about “you” - self-promotion and self-importance is essential to a successful life.

Jesus only promoted His Heavenly Father: *“the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner”* (John 5:19) - in like manner, *“if anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds”* (Matthew 16:24-27). Even so, Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Courtroom Testimony

“But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

Many Believers today think that if we speak about the Gospel, we must have the understanding necessary to defend it with the persuasive reasoning of a defense attorney.

This belief often hampers Believers in general from sharing the Gospel because they are afraid they are not properly trained to defend it, and they feel they may do more harm than good if they try. It is as if we feel we are in a debate class and our job is to sway the audience with persuasive arguments that tear through the arguments of our opponent and if the crowd rejects us, we have failed. Such pressure keeps many of us away from the task.

The devil is cunning through arguments that appeal to the mind and the appetites of the body, so we feel that to do the Gospel justice, we need to be cunning too. We think we have to raise up persuasive men of the mind who can go toe-to-toe in a public debate with the great thinkers the world raises against us.

But this assertion illustrates a deeply flawed understanding of every Believer’s responsibility to the Gospel—we are all under compulsion to share it as a testimony, not as a proof. The debate halls of the world are not where the victors are judged, but the court halls of Heaven. Just as a witness in a courtroom, we are not trying to persuade the jury, but we are relaying the truth of the situation, “so help you God.” Our earthly audience may still disregard our testimony, but that does not mean we

have failed in any way—in fact, we know the world WILL reject our testimony, just as it rejected Christ’s testimony. We need to understand that we are not in debate class. We are not at some political or social rally trying to convince people our cause is just or right. We are WITNESSES. Like the Holy Spirit, all Believers are to witness (or testify) about Jesus Christ, even if we are not all given the gift of evangelism (Ephesians 4:11). Evangelism IS the gift of reasoning with and persuading men about the merits of the Gospel. Paul was an evangelist when he “*entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God*” (Acts 19:8). Please note, however, that this is not reasoning or persuasion of men, but comes from the Holy Spirit: “*do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit*” (Mark 13:11).

Even if you don’t have the gift of evangelist, you are God’s witness at all times as Jesus told the disciples, “*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth*” (Acts 1:8).

Witnessing is not tasked with persuading men, but rather sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ in our personal testimony (and the testimony of the Saints) through the simplicity and purity of our devotion to Christ. Every Believer’s mission in life is to be a witness, presenting the Gospel to the unbelieving people in our midst. The Holy Spirit does the work of persuasion, whether by preparing the hearts of the hearing or by employing His gift of Evangelism in a Believer to persuade unbelievers: “*He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him*” (John 3:36). Even so. Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Christian Maturity Through Battle

“For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh” (2 Corinthians 10:3).

Paul often used the picture of a soldier as an illustration of the very real war Believers are in spiritually. While not perfect, this metaphor has profound implications for understanding how Christian maturity develops. For the sake of this illustration, let’s divide Christian maturity into 3 military classes: a new Recruit, an Officer Cadet or Private, and a War Veteran.

The immature Believer—recently saved or untested correlates to the new Recruit. If you’ve ever been around them, Recruits are often eager, and impatient to see action and apply what they “know” or what they’ve learned in “basic training.” They can project bravado and are often vocal about the “shortcomings” of others, which they see as a sign of weakness and inability. They may even believe their combat tactics, field training, and knowledge of “The Art of War,” mean they will come out of the fight unscathed.

Similarly, an immature Believer often has very strong viewpoints and can be judgmental of other Believers and how they are walking for the Lord. They don’t have a lot of grace for their brothers and sister in Faith. Just like a Recruit who hasn’t yet seen battle, this attitude often changes when they move on from training and become Privates on the ground in their first tour of duty. Here, the bullets begin to fly as they are dropped into a firefight in Vietnam or the shells begin to fall when their landing-craft doors open at Normandy Beach. Here, they watch helplessly as all their tactics and

knowledge mean nothing to the stray bullet, “friendly fire,” or landmine. Strong men fall and weak men survive. War isn’t what they thought it would be like and fear and shock take over as the blood begins to pour.

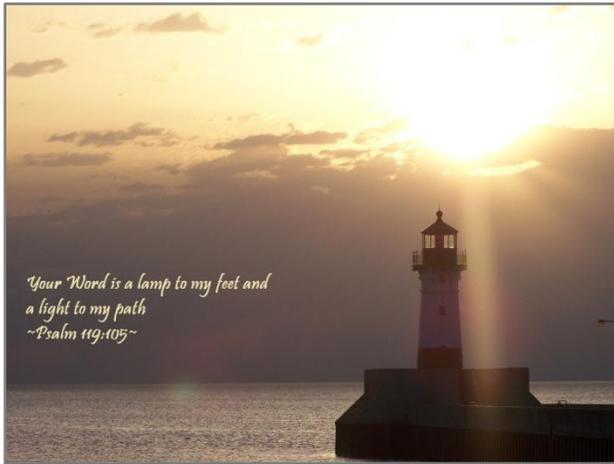
The Believer at this stage experiences their first suffering for Christ and may be overwhelmed by their trials. The “prosperity” gospel of health, wealth, and success is demolished in the face of persecution or physical pain. “God, why is this happening to me?”, “I followed the rules, why am I not winning?”, or “What did I do wrong?” are among the questions we often cry out at this stage as we begin to doubt our training and question God’s authority. We are in a state of crisis.

A soldier remains in this state of crisis until they accept the situation and proceed to obey their orders even if they don’t understand the “why.” Some Believers remain a long time in crisis—discontent, restless, flailing from one teaching to the next, searching for answers and a way out or a way forward other than the one they have been given: to obey the command of Jesus Christ to take up their cross and follow Him through the fire. Those that push forward in obedience now understand what Paul meant when he said, “*Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus*” (2 Timothy 2:3) - unlike deserters who disregard their orders in order to “save themselves.”

Those that overcome are like a humble War Veteran. How often do you see a boastful or proud Veteran? Through obedience, they’ve come to know victory isn’t just about them, and they push forward in their work, intent on fulfilling their duty and completing their mission. They understand they have a role to play that may be different from others, so they support those other roles and strengthen weakness to make the whole unit strong. Similarly, mature Believers humbly obey Christ and support and encourage fellow believers selflessly. May we too be good soldiers, willing to serve and suffer for Christ—He is worth all! Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Lighthouse

“For God, Who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Without light, no endeavor is safe because we cannot see the dangers that surround us. I was walking a trail beneath a cliff overlooking Lake Superior recently when I stumbled upon three dead deer. I tried to figure out what had killed them and then it struck me. They had been grazing above on the cliff during the night and in the dark did not know where the ledge was. One plummeted over the side—the next one, oblivious to what had happened, followed after it, and so on. What a terrible thing to happen! They did not know what danger they were in because they had no light.

On the Great Lakes, men built lighthouses to save ships from falling prey to the unforgiving coast. Before these lights were made, sailors gambled daily with their lives because at any moment they might come to an end in utter ruin. With the aid of lighthouses, sailors could see the light piercing the darkness and would know their danger and be able to avoid death for *“all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, ‘Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you’”* (Ephesians 5:13-14). As Believers, we *“were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light”* (Ephesians 5:8), for we have become His Light in the world, too, warning others about the dangers of their sin.

The devil hates the Light because it warns people about their sin nature and shows the traps he has laid in his spiritual night. The world system, however, likes this darkness because it knows how to navigate it—gaining advantage and power by “helping” people who are in its darkness. Think how car-salesmen, lawyers, and insurance companies keep you in the dark about their “system,” fees, and fine print while offering to “enlighten” you. They can navigate this darkness because it is of their making—they see by their light (or knowledge) while they keep you in the dark about that light. This is satan’s system, which even enters the Church through false teachers, and *“no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness”* (2 Corinthians 11:14-15a). These are like “wreckers” who used false lights, imitating lighthouses, to lure ships to ruin in order to spoil their cargoes. This is the only gain from satan’s light—to enrich his servants from the ruin of those tricked by it. He cannot save his servants by his light and they will perish in his darkness.

Unlike the false lights of the world, Jesus is the True Light *“which, coming into the world, enlightens every man”* (John 1:9b). Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, shines upon all mankind to show us the perilous danger we were in as sinners. Many people do not like what they see about themselves in God’s Light and would prefer to live in darkness rather than see their sinful reflection, even if that means they risk utter ruin in hell. They do not understand that the world’s flattering lights lure them only to death. God’s purpose in enlightening us through Jesus is not to make us feel bad about ourselves but to show us our danger in sin and offer us a path free of that danger in His Light—a road that leads to Eternal life through the Salvation of Jesus Christ, for *“in Him was life, and the life was the Light of men”* (John 1:4). Even so. Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Turning a Blind Eye

“But if your eye is bad [evil], your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (Matthew 6:23)

Our eye is our focus (center of interest or activity). We fix our eyes on what we treasure. Jesus says, *“where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:21). To not see the light is to be in darkness. Scripture describes this as blindness—the consequence of not living in obedience to God: *“The LORD will smite you with madness and with blindness and with bewilderment of heart; and you will grope at noon, as the blind man gropes in darkness, and you will not prosper in your ways; but you shall only be oppressed and robbed continually, with none to save you”* (Deuteronomy 28:28-29).

Darkness makes everything a hazard to us. At night, your safe and comfy home is instantly turned into a homicidal monster. How many of us have stubbed our toes, banged our head, or fallen down the stairs in the dark? Yet for us, this is supposed to be the safest place on the planet! This is life without God. Many people stay put in darkness for fear, because they know that if they get up and try to move in the dark, they could fall off a cliff. Some people, however, claim they know how to find their way in the dark, even though in truth they cannot see. This is what Jesus is referring to when He says darkness is very great if the “light” by which you claim to see is actually still darkness. The world says it can see in its “light,” but it cannot, for it is dazzling itself in satan’s false light (2 Corinthians 11:14), which, like an Anglerfish,

only lures to death.

Jesus told the Pharisees that He came into the world *“so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.”* Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, *“We are not blind too, are we?”* Jesus said to them, *“If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, “We see,” your sin remains”*

(John 9:39-41). Jesus is saying that if you claim to see by any light other than Him, you are in a far worse state than those who know they are in darkness and are waiting for the light to appear. This is the state of the world—they pinch their eyes closed in the bright light of noon so they won’t see the danger of their sin. They would rather turn “a blind eye” to God’s Light (knowledge of Jesus) and grope forward like blind men, because they don’t like what they see about themselves: their grim accountability to God. They then keep others in the dark with them by saying, “Follow us, we see the way out of here.” Yet, God has said, *“Cursed is he who misleads a blind person on the road”* (Deuteronomy 27:18).

God helps those who recognize they stand in the darkness of their sin and acknowledge their blindness, for *“the Lord opens the eyes of the blind; The Lord raises up those who are bowed down”* (Psalm 146:8a). *“He has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”* (1 Peter 2:9), for He *“abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”* (2 Timothy 1:10). We must keep our eyes healthy and sincere by focusing them on the Gospel, for *“the eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear [healthy or sincere], your whole body will be full of light”* (Matthew 6:22). We are filled with Light when we are *“fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Hebrews 12:2). Praise the Lord! Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Outlaw

“Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12).

In the Last Days, lawlessness will increase. Lawlessness is anarchy. Anarchy is a state of chaos because authority is not acknowledged. If authority is not recognized, who is in charge of determining what is right and wrong? In Israel, lawlessness meant *“every man did what was right in his own eyes”* (Judges 17:6b).

When someone does not recognize authority, they are usurping authority for themselves. This means they decide “right” and “wrong,” because they make themselves “judge.” When you don’t recognize the authority of the law, you are automatically an outlaw to it. An outlaw is defined in Noah Webster’s 1828 Dictionary as “a person excluded from the benefit of the law, or deprived of its protection” and automatically warranted death by the judge.

The purpose of a nation’s laws should be to protect the citizens and benefit their lives. How? The law promises accountability and justice. It enters a covenant with citizens to avenge harms done to them, make wrongs right, and punish those who cause harm. The law promises accountability for an outlaw’s actions. While human law is flawed, just law must be based on God’s perfect Law for society to function. Just human law keeps man’s sin to others restrained by promising accountability for harm. This promise of accountability calms fears, fostering an atmosphere of trust that encourages respect and love in society. If everyone agrees to abide by the law, you are more at ease—you can trust your neighbors to act

justly, and your love for your country, state, town, and neighbors grows.

It is difficult, however, for people to feel love for one another if lawlessness increases, because the protection of the law decreases and fear floods society. When neighbors or leaders do whatever they want to you regardless of your welfare, your love for them diminishes, because you cannot trust that they will provide you with justice and help if you need it.

Man’s law always returns to lawlessness, but God’s Law is perfect and unchanging. It is the only legitimate Law, and all good law stems from it. God is eternal, just, and holy, and He is every man’s ultimate Judge. Only God has the final right to judge all mankind, no matter what country, nationality, code, or law they live by, regardless of whether they acknowledge His authority or not. Because of the Fall, every human being is an outlaw to God’s Law, for *“everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness”* (1 John 3:4). Sin is to not acknowledge God’s authority, thus sinners are outside God’s benefit and protection, and they suffer death. God’s Son, Jesus, died in the place of sinners, taking their death sentence on Himself, so that if they turn from their sin and follow Him, they might be reconciled to God and live—made lawful and restored to His eternal benefits.

As all mankind was once lawless in God’s eyes, we can see God’s love does not grow cold as lawlessness increases, *“for God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). No matter how lawless mankind becomes, *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever”* (Hebrews 13:8). As Believers, our love also should not grow cold for sinners as their lawlessness increases. Let’s share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in love with outlaws, testifying against their lawlessness, praying that they would turn to Jesus and be saved from everlasting death. **Amen.**

Thoughts? _____

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An Endlessly Exalted Nation

“Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a disgrace to any people” (Proverbs 14:34).

We are all born citizens of nations. Citizenship is a contract. We are called by our nation’s name and given benefits and protections under its laws if we offer our aid to defend its interests with our finances, our labor, and our lives. But where do nations come from?

Paul told the Greeks that God *“made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation”* (Acts 17:26). God created nations, and He is in control. But why did He make them? So that *“they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him”* (Acts 17:27a). We can see here that the nations were part of God’s plan to draw people to seek Him but that those times have passed, since *“having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that **all people everywhere** should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead”* (Acts 17:30-31). So, God has declared equally to all people everywhere of every nation that they must repent and believe in Jesus regardless of who they are, where they come from, or where they have pledged allegiance, so that *“in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him”* (Acts 10:35). What does this mean? God is making a new nation from people taken out of every nation on earth— *“a chosen race, a royal priesthood, **a holy nation**, a people for God’s own possession”* (1 Peter 2:9).

This Holy nation will be ruled by Jesus Christ, and He will rule all nations under His righteous global government for all eternity. This Holy nation will be elevated far above all others, a grace (favor) to all people. We who are welcome to Him know we belong to His nation even before it is established, for *“our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 3:20).

Now, we’ve established that only Christ’s nation will be righteous before God because it will be SINLESS. The entire human race inherited sin equally from the Fall, and from that sin, all are equally disgraced (out of favor) with God, no matter your political party, ethnicity, language, or tradition, unless we receive *“the grace that is in Christ Jesus”* (2 Timothy 2:1) and citizenship in His Kingdom.

How do the nations react to this promised future nation that will rule them? Jesus told a parable how (although He had the right to rule), when He left earth the first time, *“His citizens hated Him and sent a delegation after Him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to reign over us’”* (Luke 19:14), so *“THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST”* (Acts 4:26). The nations of the world reject the promise of Christ’s elevated, righteous, and graceful nation, choosing instead to try elevating themselves in their disgraced state now. But no investment of knowledge, power, or wealth can buoy a people disgraced in sin. Only righteousness exalts a nation, and only a nation ruled by Jesus Christ can be truly righteous.

The world does not want Christ’s rule, but He is *“the ruler of the kings of the earth”* (Revelation 1:5b), and *“He shall rule them with a rod of iron”* (Revelation 2:27a), for *“He has abolished all rule and all authority and power”* (1 Corinthians 15:24b). AMEN.

Thoughts? _____

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Fasting in the Slums

“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1).

I want to tell you a fictional story about a girl named Amy. Amy lives in a slum filled with poverty, drugs, prostitution, and daily violence. She has no hope of ever getting out. She knows she will live there all her life and be used and abused by it. She knows it will kill her, inside and out. One day, a prince from another country tours the slum. To her infinite surprise, the prince tells her that he came there for her, he loves her, and wants to marry her. He tells her they will be married and she will leave the slum forever with him. Though she is in rags now, he will cloth her with his family’s royal garments. Amy will enter the Palace as royalty, and they will live together on the most beautiful estate in the kingdom. First, however, he must be crowned king, prepare an estate, and plan the wedding. It may be six months or years before they can be married.

When the prince leaves, where do you think the girl’s mind is set? Does she soon forget the promise he made? Does she spend her time learning the ways of the slum and experiencing what it offers, OR are her thoughts about the life she will have when he returns for her and takes her away? Yes, she must live in the slum for a while, but she is LIVING for the day she will be taken out of the slum by her prince. She is dead to its ways and has no interest in them.

When the drug peddlers down the street slander her prince and say he will never rule them, she

stands up for him and defends him. When the prostitutes make fun of her for waiting for him, and they tell her he couldn’t possibly love her, she holds onto his promise to her. Just as she is dead to the life they are living, she sees those around her as dead to the kind of life she will be living. They cannot enter it with her, and they will die in the slum that they love so much.

Just like Amy’s prince, Jesus told us, *“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also”* (John 14:1-3). Jesus said of Himself that *“when the bridegroom [Christ] is taken away,”* the Church *“will fast in those days”* (Luke 5:35). We fast from the joys and pleasures the world wants us to participate in because we do not hunger for them. We seek the things above where Jesus is. We are dead to the world’s splendor because we set our minds *“on the things above, not on the things that are on earth”* (Colossians 3:2) and *“the members of [our] earthly body [are] dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry”* (Colossians 3:5), for *“you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God”* (Colossians 3:3) and we wait until *“Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory”* (Colossians 3:4). Just as Amy looked at the life she was living in the slum as a short time to be endured until she could leave it and begin her real life, so we too are to set our minds on the Life that is in Jesus and the promise of living with Him forever. We long to hear the angels cry, *“Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to [Jesus], for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready”* (Revelation 19:7). Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Resist the Devil

“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

How are we supposed to resist the devil? Are we supposed to stand up to him day to day, approaching him boldly with confidence to rebuke his attacks against us because God has our back? There are many teachers out there today that put a lot of emphasis on us in spiritual warfare. They say we must fend off the devil, for the battle belongs to us.

And Paul does tell us to *“put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”* (Ephesians 6:11-12).

Sounds like we’re struggling against the devil and his powers, doesn’t it? Actually, no. This armor of God consists of Truth, Righteousness, the Gospel, Faith, Salvation, and the Word of God (Ephesians 6:14-17). Most (or all) of these are things God does for us. God’s Truth keeps us upright. God’s Righteousness, Salvation, and our Faith protect us from the devil’s attacks. The Gospel makes our walk through all terrain possible, and the Word of God convicts and discerns *“the thoughts and intents of the heart”* (Hebrews 4:12b).

Some people would say this armor is entirely God’s work for us—others would agree that nearly all of it is. Either way, this armor is effective only when we fix our eyes on *“Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,”*

(Hebrews 12:2a), because He is ultimately the source of these things in our lives. We become weak and our armor ineffective when we look to what we can do on our own, for we are to *“be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might”* (Ephesians 6:10), not our own strength. We need to be like young David, who told the Philistines, *“the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD’s and He will give you into our hands”* (1 Samuel 17:47). Yes, the battle is the Lord’s! Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God fights the battles for His people. Even the archangel, Michael told the devil, *“The Lord rebuke you!”* (Jude 1:9b). Michael did not say, “I rebuke you!” Here, the greatest of angels submitted the situation to God because he knew the battle is the Lord’s.

You see, the devil can gain ground in our lives if he can convince us to fight him. He’s like a bully who is provoking us to come out and give him our best shot. He knows he can defeat us when we are looking at him instead of Jesus. But Jesus did not want us to fight on His behalf—He told the disciples that *“when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say”* (Luke 12:11-13). We are to be vessels for His Spirit, and if we submit ourselves to God, He fights the battle for us! This is our toughest struggle—to submit ourselves to God and keep our eyes fixed on Him, so that, just as Moses declared to the Israelites, *“The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent”* (Exodus 14:15), *“for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you”* (Deuteronomy 20:4). This doesn’t mean we always get the outcome we think is best, and this has frustrated many of us at times. We, like some of the Israelites don’t always see what God does as victory, but it is! For everything He does is for His eternal glory, which He shares with us in eternity. Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Trust That Is Not Disappointed

“It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man” (Psalm 118:8 NKJV).

Trust defines life on Earth. To trust means you put faith in something—believe something that cannot be proven. Probably more than any other time in human history, the modern man claims to live his life without faith. These same people say they trust only what they can know, claiming to live their lives by facts and certainties, but in actuality their entire lives are built on faith—faith in things other than God.

Mankind cannot live without faith. For example, if you see, hear, or read something, you either BELIEVE it is true or not. Even if you check with an “expert” or society’s consensus, you are taking their word on faith, because you do not know if they made a mistake, are telling you the truth, or even know the answer. Mistakes, frauds, criminals, and conspiracies, make havoc of “certainty.” Sin plagues facts.

So, why do we trust who we trust? When we were children, we had no experience and didn’t know society’s consensus. We didn’t know a grape from a hand-grenade. As adults, we trust what we trust through repeatability, society’s assurance, and ignorance. We trust a car mechanic’s work, our pilot’s education, that the cook at a restaurant washed his hands, and that our babysitter is safe. Even a burglar breaks into a house in faith. Everyone has some measure of faith in their health, abilities, and strengths for success, and yet these things can fail us at any moment as they do in old age. If we’re really honest with ourselves, we know we take everything around us on FAITH.

Everyday, people put their lives in the hands of

others, and everyday, people die because the things they put their faith in fail them. Why? *“Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the Lord” (Jeremiah 17:5), for “the fear of man brings a snare” (Proverbs 29:25a).* God is saying people who trust in the flesh are already doomed because the flesh and all it does is doomed by sin. Mankind and mankind’s solutions are flawed through the effects of sin, so trusting in man always snares people because the things mankind puts his faith in will collapse suddenly in an instant (Isaiah 30:12b-13)—a reliable car becomes a death trap, a pilot makes a terrible mistake, a child dies in someone’s care. Only at these moments do people realize their trust was unwarranted, but it is often too late. Ignorance is bliss until calamity strikes.

Everyday, people trust in people and things to keep them from death. They listen to warnings and trust experts on safety, yet they do not trust the Words of God about the deadly peril of sin and the eternal cost in hell if they do not repent. They do not trust God’s own Son, Who is the only expert on sin, death, and life, having taken all sin upon Himself, having died, and having risen again. *“Without faith [in God] it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him”*

(Hebrews 11:6), yet people would rather believe man and entrust their lives to strangers. We will always be disappointed in man, for his flaws will fail us, but as for Jesus, *“the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed’” (Romans 10:11), for Jesus is “without sin” (Hebrews 4:15); thus, “he who trusts in the Lord will be exalted” (Proverbs 29:25b) “in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Titus 2:1).* While people trust their lives to men and man’s keys to problems, let’s trust our lives to Jesus, Who actually has the keys of hell and death (Revelation 1:18). Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Cast Upon God from Birth

“But for all this, you did not trust the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 1:32).

As humans, we are concerned for our welfare and the welfare of what we love. We spend a lot of time pondering decisions in life. We do this because we like to think we “make our way” in the world, and it’s up to us to accomplish our lives, yet our very lives exist through no effort of our own.

We often forget that not that long ago, we couldn’t even make our way across the crib, let alone through the world. You and I came into this world as vulnerable infants, incapable of making anything but work for our parents. It is hard for us to think of ourselves this way today, since we have accomplished a “life” for ourselves. It insults many people’s pride and self-worth to acknowledge they were once so helpless, so ignorant. Yet, we had no choice at birth of our circumstances, health, wealth, or relationships, and could not exercise caution or calculation. Great leaders and generals try to forget that they once couldn’t crawl from danger or squirm to safety, just as great thinkers never reflect that they once couldn’t even understand the difference between the two. These great men did not overcome their helplessness—they did not decide to “grow up,” but were carried along unconsciously in God’s natural process of physical maturity.

Regardless of who we are now, we were once completely at the mercy of people we did not know and circumstances we did not understand. Why do we think differently as adults? People somehow think that since they can “think for themselves” and “look out” for their own interests, they no longer need to rely on God. Yet, in the great backdrop of

life, man-kind is as helpless in adulthood as in infancy because of sin. We need reminding of our helplessness, just as God reminded Israel that He carried them “*just as a man carries his son, in all the way which you have walked until you came to this place*” (Deuteronomy 1:31b). We must realize we are not in control of our lives, just as King David remembered that he was made to trust as an infant: “*You are He who brought me forth from the womb; You made me trust when upon my mother’s breasts. Upon You I was cast from birth; You have been my God from my mother’s womb*” (Psalm 22:9-10). God made us to trust. Do we trust God?

As he grew up, David could have claimed the responsibility to protect himself and look out for his interests. He could have easily taken credit for his rise from shepherd to king, but he rightly saw that the same grace of God that he was cast upon as a child was what still kept him safe as king. He knew that just as a baby has no idea what is safe and what is dangerous, God was looking after things he couldn’t understand. David remembered that as an infant he could not protect his body from harm nor defend his reputation, and he realized that his life as an adult was no different: “*O LORD, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty; Nor do I involve myself in great matters, Or in things too difficult for me. Surely I have com-posed and quieted my soul; Like a weaned child rests against his mother, My soul is like a weaned child within me*” (Psalm 131:1-2).

People like to think that they are in control of their lives, forever leaving behind them the helplessness and trust of infancy. But in reality, we are all still infants before God, dependent on Him for everything, most importantly the salvation of Jesus Christ. We need to acknowledge our helplessness before Him for, “*whoever then humbles himself [before God] as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 18:4). Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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When the World Shakes

“Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:28).

It is hard sometimes to look around us at our circumstances in this crumbling and decaying world and remain unshaken. On some level, we all rely on the world’s institutions and when they are shaken, as they inevitably are, we feel the tremors in our own lives. Make a list of the things you rely on the world for—food, gasoline, electricity, city water, police protection, the justice system, free trade. When these things are shaken, we can feel shaken too because we are connected to them. Is there anyway for us to avoid these connections, so we can avoid the tremors in our lives? Not really. It is the nature of living in a fallen world—we cannot escape the corruption of sin here on earth, and we are carried through its cycles of peace and war, plenty and disaster.

People trust that the world will provide solutions and institutions they can rely on to solve the problems resulting from sin, despite the fact that not one institution mankind has ever built has endured. Each has been shaken, and every single one has collapsed, to be replaced by something new or different. Mankind would like to call this “progress,” but history witnesses the genocide, collapse, conquest, and layoffs that result in pain, misery, uncertainty, and distress for millions of people. Kingdoms, countries, and companies fall. Take for example the world’s oldest continually operating family business, Kongo Gumi, which was forced to shut its doors in 2007 after 1,400 years of

building Japanese temples because of effects from the 1992 recession. No human institution has withstood the test of time. This is all due to sin—the effects of our sin-nature and personal sin. Death, disease, and disaster shake the continuity of human institutions and personal sin results in betrayal, murder, and all forms of wickedness that shake the very fabric of society. The shaking of entire nations are just the tremors of things yet to come as Isaiah saw in a vision that the earth was *“broken asunder, The earth is split through, The earth is shaken violently. The earth reels to and fro like a drunkard And it totters like a shack, For its transgression is heavy upon it, And it will fall, never to rise again”* (Isaiah 24:19-20), *“so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain”* (Hebrews 12:27b) —Christ’s Kingdom.

When the world shakes around Believers, we know it is only for a brief while, for we have been given a place, a future in a Kingdom that can never be shaken, and a King that can never be brought down. This is how we can understand David when he says the righteous man *“will never be shaken; The righteous will be remembered forever”* (Psalm 112:6). Promises and guarantees on earth fall through and people are forgotten, but not in God’s Kingdom—He does not forget us, and His Word is His bond. So, while the world is shaken at times by the horrors of sin and men counseled by the devil, we are not moved, because Jesus is our rock. He is our foundation stretching out to us from the calm of Eternity to get us through the spiritual and physical upheavals all around us until He draws us safely home to the eternal life and peace of His unshakable reign.

When we feel the tremors that befall earth, may we pray, ***“My soul waits in silence for God only; From Him is my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken”*** (Psalm 62:1-2). Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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False Reports

“You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness” (Exodus 23:1).

Never before in human history have there been so many false reports given about God. Today, religions and cults are skyrocketing, offering conflicting testimony about the nature of God and even the nature of Jesus.

Some people step boldly away from Scripture with their false testimony. They are like people who argue marriage can include two men or a cat or a beloved bridge—their false testimony is so obvious that they are easy to distinguish from Truth. Such are the Jehovah’s Witness, Mormonism, Islam, Christian Science, Unitarianism, etc. These “pretenders” are easily recognizable to anyone who reads the Bible or has sat under Biblical teaching.

Malicious witnesses don’t always offer such preposterous testimony, however. Rather than draw attention to themselves with outrageous claims, they distort subtle details from within the Church, so they might even cause truthful witnesses to doubt their own testimony. For example, one may say, “Jesus says every Believer will prosper in health and wealth if they give His Church money — ‘give and it will be given to you’ (Luke 6:38),” while Christ’s testimony is that Believers often suffer loss for His name’s sake, to be glorified at His Second Coming (Matthew 19:29; Luke 21:12). These false witnesses are much more difficult to expose because their false testimony takes energy to unravel. Maybe we just “misunderstood” them. Maybe it’s just a “different point of view.” A few Believers see the lie, but

most heedlessly take it all for the truth. The devil is skilled at “tweaking” truth just enough to cause harm, but not enough that it is easy to spot.

As Believers, we encounter false testimony all the time and may even accept it as true without knowing it. In a world filled with false witnesses, what witnesses can we trust? THE WORD OF GOD—Moses commanded the Israelites to “*take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you*” (Deuteronomy 31:26). In the New Testament, Jesus told the Jews, “*you search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me*” (John 5:39). The Word of God is a faithful witness about the nature of God and the nature of Jesus. It is a witness against mankind’s sinful state (the Law and Prophets) and a witness of God’s salvation to mankind from that fallen state (the Gospel). We need to know it. THE HOLY SPIRIT is also a faithful witness: “*When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me*” (John 15:26), “*for He will take what is Mine and will disclose it to you*” (John 16:14). BELIEVERS inspired by the Holy Spirit are also God’s witnesses: “*And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him*” (Acts 5:32), “*and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth*” (Acts 1:8).

GOD HIMSELF will rise up as a witness: “*Therefore wait for Me,’ declares the Lord, ‘For the day when I rise up as a witness...For all the earth will be devoured By the fire of My zeal’*” (Zephaniah 3:8). In that Day, Jesus will judge the entire earth by His testimony, and He will justify His faithful witnesses who lost so much for their testimony, while false reports will perish. May we be His faithful witnesses till that day. Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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Why Do You Hide Yourself?

“Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?” (Psalm 10:1).

Have you ever prayed this prayer? Every Believer does at least once in their lives, and for some it is a recurrent plea. Sometimes it seems like God ignores the trouble that we’re in. Job, enduring many days of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual agony, wished death had hid *“trouble from my eyes. Why did I not die at birth, Come forth from the womb and expire?”* (Job 3:3a, 11) Jeremiah cried, *“Why did I ever come forth from the womb To look on trouble and sorrow, So that my days have been spent in shame?”* (Jeremiah 20:18) Sometimes we wish we had never lived to see the trouble that befalls us. If it had been up to us, we would have chosen death rather than the trials that we go through—a relief from pain, challenge, or oppression. But the choice is not up to us, *“and nights of trouble are appointed me”* (Job 7:3) by God.

Because we know God can put an end to our distress, we often feel like the last thing we want to do is open His Word and praise Him: *“In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; In the night my hand was stretched out without weariness; My soul refused to be comforted. When I remember God, then I am disturbed...I am so troubled that I cannot speak...Will the Lord reject forever? And will He never be favorable again? Has His lovingkindness ceased forever? Has His promise come to an end forever? Has God forgotten to be gracious, Or has He in anger withdrawn His compassion?”* (Psalm 77:2-4; 7-9). Sometimes, when our thoughts turn

to God, all we can think of is our resentment, frustration, and anger over what He “has allowed.” We feel “rejected,” “denied,” “failing love,” “forgotten promises,” “forgotten grace,” and “withdrawn compassion.” Then we remember with David, *“You who have shown me many troubles and distresses will revive me again, and will bring me up again from the depths of the earth”*

(Psalm 71:20). *“The righteous cry, and the Lord hears And delivers them out of all their troubles”* (Psalm 34:17), for *“the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in time of trouble”* (Psalm 37:39). God WILL deliver us, but our deliverance, doesn’t come at our choosing. Sometimes, it doesn’t even come in this lifetime, but *“after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you”* (1 Peter 5:10), so *“rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed”* (1 Peter 4:13). Believers know that our lives are lived, not for our own happiness and joy, but for God’s glory. Sometimes it is hard for us to let go of our lives—our desires, hopes, and dreams, but we must offer them as *“right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD”* (Psalm 4:5).

We must adopt the eternal gaze of God, for we have identified with Jesus Christ. As His servants, we also should expect to be men and women *“of sorrows and acquainted with grief”* (Isaiah 53:3a) here on Earth, yet just as He *“has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens”* (Hebrews 8:1), we know God has prepared a place for us in eternity with Him where no troubles can follow, *“so we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison”* (2 Corinthians 4:16-17). Even so. Amen.

Thoughts? _____

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“May we remember to offer acceptable worship to God and live life with a reverence and awe at the unshakable future we have stored up for us in Heaven. We need to recall this in the worries of our daily lives. May the Holy Spirit testify in us and through us a simple and pure devotion to Christ, that we would worship Him in reverence and awe for His wonderful salvation. May He inspire us to a deeper love and understanding of His Gospel and a deeper commitment in our witness to the world as His lights.”

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