

JOHN HENDEE

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP



THE AMAZING LIGHT

By Gene Rogers

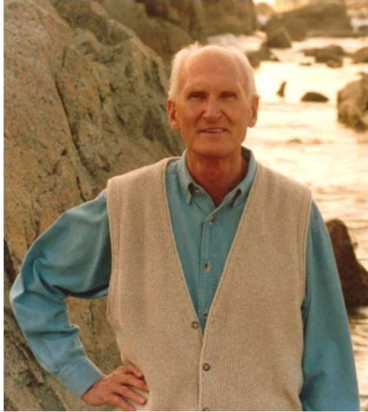
**LIVING IN THE LIGHT WHILE
PASSING THROUGH THIS DARKNESS
SERIES: BOOK 1**

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Gene Rogers received his B.A. and M.A. from Pepperdine University in Los Angeles, CA. For over fifty years he was the pastor and teacher of Normandie Avenue Christian Church in Gardena, CA. During the last few years of his life, Gene had passion for developing leaders in his home congregation and in Chile, South America. He wrote several books, booklets, and had many articles published. This book is one of the many he wrote. Gene went to be with the Lord in December of 2000. He left behind his wife Alice, two daughters and five grandchildren.

I was fortunate to do my Internship in my last year of college with Gene. He became my mentor and my spiritual father. I learned so much from him. You can too through these valuable books he wrote that will help us to live in the light.

I am grateful to Alice Rogers for giving me permission to reprint three of his books for this Living In The Light series. Gene had a powerful ministry for many decades and his work is continuing in these books.

John Hendee

PREFACE; By Gene Rogers

I grew up knowing very little about Jesus. As far as I knew there had never been anyone in my family who had ever been a Christian. What little I came to know about Jesus growing up I learned from a few visits to Sunday School and from hearing people talk about him in the media and in general conversations.

When I was twenty years old a friend from junior high school days came to see me and encouraged me to join him in attending college. He said the government would pay for everything and assured me that all we'd have to do would be to attend a few classes and spend the rest of our time going to sports events with pretty girls. He said that because we were veterans the government would not only pay all the bills, but would even give us spending money each month. That sounded like a great idea to me. So I joined my friend and enrolled in college.

I didn't know it, but the college I enrolled in was a Christian college which required all freshman to take a two semester course called "Survey of the Bible." The fall class was on the Old Testament. I thought the stories were interesting, but they didn't do much for me. In the spring the class was supposed to be an overview of the entire New Testament. But for some reason the professor spent the whole time in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John going over the life and ministry of Jesus.

I went through an entire semester hearing about Jesus three hours a week from the professor, and reading about him between classes so that I could pass the course and stay in the college.

The more I read and heard about Jesus, the more I found myself becoming captivated by him. One day as I was reading, I came upon Matthew 22:15-22 which told about how the enemies of Jesus tried to entrap him with an impossible question. They wanted to know if it was right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? I could see that if he had answered "Yes," the Jews would have stoned him to death. And had he answered "No," they would have reported him to the Romans as a seditionist. He seemed to have been caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place. How could he answer without getting into deep trouble? What could he do? He asked for a Roman coin. They brought him a denarius, and he asked, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

The day I read that I became fully convinced that Jesus was everything he claimed to be. And I said, "Jesus, I believe you are everything you say you are in this word, and I surrender my all to you. I'll follow you the rest of my life as long as you give me strength to do so." He immediately led me to become associated with his people and to be baptized in witness to my newfound faith. So I became a Christian.

I became a Christian by carefully considering the New Testament story about Jesus. That led me to fall in love with him and surrender my life to him in wholehearted commitment.

Shortly thereafter I decided to spend my life telling others about him and the wonder of his person. Recently I was led to jot down some of the things I have been teaching about Jesus over the years. Those jottings have turned into this book. I hope you will read it and that it will help you become as enthralled with Jesus as I became when I first heard about him as a young college student.

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JESUS

First century people had difficulty recognizing Jesus for who he was. It was not entirely due to their spiritual blindness. There was much about him that was quite different. Had he been ordinary, there would have been no redemptive value in his coming. If he had been just like us, he would have been incapable of delivering us from our problems and sins. Had he been a carbon copy of us, he could not serve as an example of a superior life. Surely he had to be different in order to accomplish all that he came to do for us. And he definitely was.

Jesus was not a plain, run-of-the-mill, ordinary person. He didn't fall into neatly prearranged categories. He wasn't an assembly line product- just one more, another pressed out of the mold.

He defied definition. He was beyond categorizing. So much so that he appeared to be a stranger in his own world. As one song has it, he was "The Stranger Of Galilee." By ordinary human standards, both his life and message were uniquely different. Let's consider some ways in which they were.

His Unique Beginning

To begin with, Jesus had an extraordinary beginning. He was conceived in a young virgin girl by God himself. No such thing had ever happened before or has happened since. He was born in a stable to a poor couple from an obscure town of a little known province. A chorus of angels sang at his birth and men near and far were summoned by God to his birthplace through some very unusual means. They made haste, came and worshiped him.

He grew up as the oldest son in a family of four brothers and several sisters. In time he assumed the responsibility for their care by working as a carpenter for most of his adult years.

His Unusual Life

Second, the life of Jesus was very unusual. With such a great work to do he only lived thirty-three years. And only three were spent ministering to those outside his own family circle. For those three years he "went about doing good" and calling men to repent and enter a strange new kingdom which he called "the kingdom of heaven" or "kingdom of God."

All he ever owned was the robe and sandals that he wore. He never obtained any real estate, and he had no financial investments or retirement plan. He said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

He wasn't very religious by the standards of his day. As a matter of fact, he appeared to be irreligious. He did "illegal things" on religious days. He violated long standing religious customs. He contended against religious leaders and even called them names. He ran around with the wrong crowd. He spent time with religious and social misfits, and ignorant and common people. He even attended parties hosted by notorious social outcasts.

Though he came to be a king and set up a new kingdom, he refused an earthly crown. And in a day when political connections and expertise determined most things, he was politically incorrect. He continually spoke of a kingdom that would supersede all others, and solicited citizens for it.

During his three year ministry he did some very unusual things. He walked on water, healed incurable diseases, restored sight to the blind, and even raised the dead.

His Thought And Message Were Different

In the third place, his thought and message were different. He taught some things that were hard to understand and accept. He declared, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." He said, "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it." He asked, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" He warned, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters yes, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple." He stated that, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." He taught that, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on

every word that comes from the mouth of God." He said, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' but I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." He warned, "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell...and if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell..." He said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

His Claims Were Astonishing

In the fourth place, his claims were astonishing. In one discourse he said that he was greater than the temple, Jonah, or Solomon which was to say that he was greater than the seat of all true worship where the very presence of God dwelt; greater than the most successful prophet of all time (Jonah's preaching converted Nineveh, a city of 100,000 people); and greater than the wisest man that had ever lived.

He said he had lived before Abraham who was 2,000 years his senior." He claimed that he and God were one." He took upon himself the very name of "Jehovah God" five times in John's Gospel where, he is quoted as saying, "I am who I am," (Which means "Jehovah God"). He claimed for himself the attributes of God when in the seven "I Ams" of John's Gospel he claimed to meet all of man's needs as only God could.

Unlike any religious leaders of his day, he spoke in his own name and by his own authority. He asked people to believe in him and do what he said. He revised the religious law of the day. He even forgave sin.

His Spiritual Life Was Unique

In the fifth place, his spiritual life was unique. As you would expect of a moral or religious leader, he was humble, gentle, unassuming, a servant of all - he even washed his disciples' feet. He was different. Not even his enemies could convict him of sin even though he challenged them to do so. There is no record of his ever confessing sin or asking for forgiveness for any wrong. He never prayed for deeper commitment or greater consecration.

He Had A Strange Ending

And finally, he had a strange ending. One day he was being welcomed with great fanfare into the city of Jerusalem as a king of peace. The very next day crowds jeered him and called for his life which was soon taken in crucifixion and he died as a common felon criminal.

He was betrayed by one of his own disciples, tried illegally and unjustly by his spiritual leaders, beaten undeservedly by the military authorities, sentenced to death without cause by the leading magistrate of the area, and put to death unmercifully for no legal or legitimate reason.

But the strangest thing of all was that death could not hold him. He rose from the dead on the third day after being crucified and left in a tomb. His grave wrappings were found in perfect concentric order in the place where his body had been laid.

Men Were Baffled By Him

Is it any wonder that the people of Jesus' day were baffled by him? At Nazareth they asked, "Is this not the carpenter?" At Capernaum they wondered about him. On the hillsides and lakeshore of Galilee they marveled at him. At Jerusalem they argued about him. On the open sea they whispered, "What manner of man is this?" His enemies questioned and accused. He was hard to label, harder yet to classify, explain, or ignore. He just didn't seem to belong.

He Is Still "The Stranger Of Galilee"

After twenty centuries of having disciples write books about him and his message, perform mighty deeds as a result of his inspiration, and traverse the world preaching about him, you would think that he would be the best known figure of the twentieth century. He isn't. For the most part he still remains what Bruce Barton calls, "The Man Nobody Knows."

Through twenty centuries he has been lost in inaccurate and obscuring art; lost in philosophies about him which have sought to explain him, but all too often have explained him away; lost in creeds and dogmas which have only crystallized and stagnated him; lost in the divisions of denominationalism which have carved him up and served him in slices; lost which on the one hand has sought to other has made him a formula. He and his message have been lost in such distortion and obscurity that by and large this generation doesn't even know him. He is in need of being rediscovered.

He is not content to remain a stranger. He calls his witnesses, sends his Spirit, and seeks to rally his church in an attempt to make himself known. And whenever a person is willing, they can come to know him.

ENDNOTES

1. Mark 6:3
2. Luke 9:58
3. Luke 9:23
4. Luke 9:24
5. Luke 9:25
6. Luke 14:26
7. Luke 12:15
8. Matthew 20:26, 27,
9. Matthew 5:38, 39
10. Mark 9:43,47
11. Mark 10:25
12. Matthew 12:6, 39, 42
13. John 8:58
14. John 10:30,33, 38
15. John 8:24,28, 58, 13:19, 18:4,5
16. John 8:46
17. John 5:39
18. Philippians 3:10

HIS COMING

The coming of Jesus into this world is associated with many wonders. It is unlike that of anyone else. People have been marveling over it for almost twenty centuries. Though the story has been told and retold, it might help us to know and appreciate him more if we consider some of the wonders associated with it. Some will be familiar, perhaps some will not. Let's consider seven.

It Is A Wonder That He Came At All

Jesus pre-existed with God in eternity and helped plan all that he would do for man when he came. He therefore knew ahead of time how he would be received and the awful things men would do to him when he came. He was not unaware of man's enmity toward God. He had seen what they had done to his prophets. He knew that the religious leaders of his day would receive him no differently. He knew that he would be despised and rejected. He knew that even his own people, the Jews, would reject him. He knew that he would end up being beaten nearly to death and then executed in the most painful way known to man; death on a cross.

Knowing all this, it is a wonder that he came. If he had been anything less than love divine he might have said to the Father, "I pass! Let them all go to hell. They deserve it."

He Perfectly Fulfilled All Prophecy

The wonder of Jesus' coming is that he fulfilled so many prophecies made about him centuries before he came. Some were made 400 years before he was born; but most were made more than 700 years before.

A good number of these prophecies predicted details about his birth. They told how he would be preceded by a forerunner who would prepare the way for him. They foretold that he would be born of a virgin who would be from the tribe of Judah and be a direct descendent of Abraham and King David. He would be born in Bethlehem the city of David at which time gifts would be brought to him. Following his birth, all male children in Bethlehem two years old and younger would be killed, but he would escape to become a refugee in Egypt.

There were prophecies predicting almost every other detail of his life and ministry. The gospel of Matthew is devoted to listing most of them. In fact, the phrase "to fulfill what was said through the prophet," is repeated over 16 times in this gospel as it refers to prophecies fulfilled by Jesus.

If you were to use the modern science of probability and apply it to only eight predictions about the coming of Jesus, the chances of anyone fulfilling them would be 10, or one quintillion. The chances that anyone could have fulfilled 48 out of the 300 would be 10 to the 157 power.

His Coming Was "At the Right Time"

One of the wonders of Jesus' coming was that it was "at the right time" in history. With the passing of twenty centuries it is easy to look back and see that. There could have been no better time in history for Jesus to have come than when he did. Man's recognition of his spiritual poverty was as great as it had ever been. Greek was the universal language of the day which made it easy for his message to be transmitted. There was a network of fine Roman roads to take his

messengers anywhere they wanted to go. Roman peace guaranteed people's safety wherever they traveled. Universal Roman citizenship opened the world to travel. Because Jews had been dispersed all over the world, there were Jewish synagogues in most every city to serve as a base for preaching the message of Jesus.

Wonder of Wonders, Jesus Was Born Of a Virgin

One of the great wonders of Jesus' coming was that he was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit of God in the womb of a young Hebrew virgin. He entered the world as no one ever had, or ever would. His life began and concluded with a great miracle: he was born of a virgin and was resurrected from the dead. Conceived by God and born of woman he was a God-man. He was fully God and fully man. Being God he was able to show us God as he really is, and being perfect man he was able to show us man as man was meant to be.

Being conceived of God, he was freed from the curse of man's fallen nature and therefore never sinned. This freed him from sin's consequence of death and enabled him to die for the sins of mankind.

He Was Born In Poverty and Grew Up in Obscurity

He was born in poverty and, grew up in obscurity in a small, unknown town of poor parents. He was, raised in near poverty with four brothers and several sisters. He never owned any real estate. He never held a position of power or prestige. When he came to his death, the only thing he possessed was the robe on his back. He was a king, but not of this world.

He Was an Unwanted Savior

Although Jesus came to be the Savior of his people, he was not the kind of Savior they expected or wanted. He came to be a spiritual Savior, but they wanted a political savior. They wanted someone to deliver them from Roman tyranny and restore to them the power and glory they had known when Solomon reigned as king. So Jesus was a terrible disappointment to the people of his day, and even to his own disciples at first. Things haven't changed much. People today still want a "this world" savior. They want someone who will make them healthy, wealthy, happy and successful. They're not interested in a Savior who takes away sin and reconciles them to God. If Jesus had waited until today to come, he would be rejected as quickly and completely as he was by first century people.

Jesus: Savior of the Lonely Hearts

Since Jesus experienced rejection from his own people, even those from his own home town, he is able to empathize with us when we experience rejection and loneliness. As members of the human family, we have all suffered from the plague of loneliness because sin has separated us from our Father God.

The wonder of Jesus' coming was that he came to seek us out and restore us to fellowship with God so that we might never be alone again. Once we are reconciled to the Father he promises to be with us forever: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you"¹⁴ David the shepherd boy knew this and sang: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me."¹⁵

ENDNOTES

1. John 17:5,24; I Peter 1:20
2. Matthew 23:31
3. Isaiah 53:3
4. Malichi 3:1; Matthew 11:10
5. Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22,23
6. Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1,6
7. Jerehiah 31:15; Matthew 2:13,14
8. Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:13,14
9. Galatians4:4
10. Luke 1:34,35
11. Revelation 19:i6
12. Mark 6:3
13. John 19:23,24
14. Hebrews 13:5
15. Psalm 23:4

HIS AMAZING LIFE

To consider the life of a person like Jesus who was so refreshingly strange, so excitingly different, and so revolutionary in thought, can leave you wondering, "How did he live such an unusual life? What was his daily life like? What principles governed it? What made him what he was?"

It would be next to impossible to list all of the many characteristics that made him who he was. To think about attempting to jot down even a few, brings to mind the challenge of the concluding words in John's gospel: "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."¹

Impossible as the task may be to determine all the things that made Jesus the person that he was, nevertheless we can at least consider ten.

He Lived By Faith

For one thing, Jesus lived by faith. What does that mean? It means that he lived his daily life in confidence and trust that it was in the hands of a loving Father who was looking out for him. In response to that, he lived in complete dependence upon God for everything and readily acknowledged that apart from him he could do nothing. He lived moved and had his being in his Father God. He often said so. For example he said, 'I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.'² Also, "By myself I can do nothing. . . "³

To say that he lived by faith is also to say that he lived by conviction. His life was driven by it. To have faith is to have conviction. And Jesus certainly had plenty of it. He never compromised or violated the beliefs that he held dear. If he had, he wouldn't have ended up on a cross, and mankind wouldn't have a Savior.

His One Aim Was to Please the Father

Jesus lived out his life with the aim of always pleasing the Father. He said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."⁴ "The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."⁵

From the days of his boyhood visit to the temple when he told Mary and Joseph who had been diligently searching for him, "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"⁶ Until at last he prayed in the garden of Gethsemene, "not my will, but yours be done," ⁷ he lived always to please and glorify the Father.

He Walked By The Power Of The Holy Spirit

Jesus lived his daily life by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit of God. He was conceived of the Spirit and anointed by the Spirit at his baptism. He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested and came up from the wilderness by the power of the Spirit to begin his ministry. He cast out demons by the power of the Spirit and offered himself up to God by the eternal Spirit. By the power of the Spirit He was raised from the dead.

He Lived By The Counsel Of Scripture

Jesus lived his daily life by the counsel and authority of scripture. He

most vigorously denounced man-made traditions and the taboos of society and religion and appealed to scripture. He would ask, "Have you never read in the scriptures?"⁸ "What is written in the law? How do you read it?"⁹

He condemned the Pharisees saying, "You nullify the word of God by your tradition."¹⁰ He rebuked the Sadducees saying, "You are in error because you do not know the scriptures."¹¹

His response to the Devil's temptation to turn stones into bread reflects the way he lived by the word of God. He said, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."¹²

Jesus Lived In An Atmosphere Of Prayer

Jesus lived his daily life in the very atmosphere of prayer. He is seen praying early in the morning, late at night, and sometimes all through the night.¹³ We see that he "often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."¹⁴ Every major decision he made was prefaced with prayer. For example, before choosing the twelve Apostles he "went out into the hills to pray, and spent the night praying to God."¹⁵ He spoke three parables on prayer and concluded "that men always ought to pray and not lose heart."¹⁶ He agonized in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, and finally died on the cross praying.¹⁷

He Never Missed Church

Jesus' life included weekly worship in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Luke observes that "on the sabbath day he went into the synogogue, as was his custom."¹⁸ This was his way of life from childhood.

In his weekly visit to the synogogue he had fellowship with God's people, studied and discussed the word of God with them, sang praises to God, prayed, gave offerings, and sought wise counsel from the synagogues' spiritual leaders.

He Walked In The Joy Of The Lord

Though he is described as "a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering,"¹⁹ nevertheless he had an abiding joy within him. He told his disciples in the upper room, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you..."²⁰ In his high priestly prayer for them he prayed, "that they [might] have the full measure of [my] joy within them."²¹ He continually contended against the killjoy attitude of the religious leaders of his day who accused him of being a party animal.²² In defense of his disciples' exuberant lifestyle he told the critical religious leaders of his day that life with him was like being at a never ending wedding feast.²³

Jesus had a deep, inward, abiding joy because he had an untarnished, right relationship and fellowship with God.

He Was Controlled By Love

Jesus lived out his life controlled and driven by love which by definition means that he spent his life giving to others and not taking from them. He loved; so he gave.

He loved the Father, so he gave himself to doing his will.²⁴ He loved his disciples, so he gave himself to serving and developing them.²⁵ He loved us all, so he gave himself up in death on the cross for us.²⁶ He loved the church, so he gave himself to purify and mature her.²⁷ "This is how we, know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for

us."²⁸ All that he did he did in love.

He Went About Doing Good

Because Jesus was driven by love, "he went around doing good..." ²⁹ In one sense, doing good was his life's occupation. He traveled about healing the sick, casting out tormenting demons, feeding the hungry, shepherding lost sheep, comforting the hurting and bereaved, preaching good news to the poor, raising the dead, and freeing those enslaved by sin. He lived by the very words he preached: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."³⁰

He Sought And Saved The Lost

Jesus was given a name that means Savior at his birth and he lived his life with the single driving concern of seeking and saving the lost. He said that "the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."³¹ And that "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." ³² He finally gave his life up in death on the cross to secure an eternal redemption for all mankind.

Walking In His Steps

Paul writes that "God ...wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."³³ He wants us "to be conformed to the likeness of his Son"³⁴ whom he has given to us to be our great pattern and example. He wants us "to walk in the same manner as He walked."³⁵ He desires that we imitate Jesus in all the things that we have just considered.

ENDNOTES

1. John 21:25
2. John 5:19
3. John 5:30
4. John 4:34
5. John 8:29
6. Luke 2:49 NKJV
7. Luke 22:42
8. Matthew 22:29
9. Luke 10:36
10. Mark 7:13
11. Matthew 22:29
12. Matthew 4:4
13. Mark 1:35/ Matthew 14:23
14. Luke 5:16
15. Luke 6:12
16. Luke 18:1 NKJV
17. Matthew 26:36; Luke 23:46
18. Luke 4:16
19. Isaiah 53:3
20. John 15:11
21. John 17:3
22. Cf. Luke 7:33, 34
23. Cf. Luke 6:33, 34
24. John 14: 3;

25. John 13:1; 15:9
26. Galatians 2:20b
27. Ephesians 5:25
28. I John 3:16
29. Acts 10:38
30. Luke 6:27
31. Luke 19:10
32. Mark 10:45
33. I Timothy 2:3,4
34. Romans 8:29, II Corinthians 3
35. I John 2:6

HIS AMAZING CHARACTER

So many people want to dismiss Jesus because they think he is weak and represents weakness. They see him as a frail, thin, feminine sort of character incapable of commanding the attention of "real men." Likewise they think of Christians as weak people who must have Jesus as a crutch to help them through life. The whole Christian scene is perceived in terms of weakness.

People who view Jesus this way need to toss aside their obscuring traditions, unwarranted prejudices, and subjective presuppositions and get a look at the real Jesus. They need to be introduced to the Jesus of strength; the carpenter who was a man of unusual physical ability who felled trees and sawed them into boards. They need to get to know the Jesus who had superior strength of both mind and will. Even more important, they need to be introduced to the Jesus who exhibited great strength of character, for he is best defined by this. Let's take a look at some of the examples of his character.

His Inner Strength

Jesus had a great inner strength. There was something about him that overwhelmed the crowds. We get glimpses of it in Nazareth where the townspeople were about to throw him over a cliff but somehow he was able to walk through the raging crowd without anyone laying a hand on him.¹ At the feeding of the five thousand the people were about to forcibly make him king, but somehow he withdrew from them and went into the hills to be alone.² Toward the end of his ministry he "resolutely set out for Jerusalem" and nothing could stop him.³ While preaching in the temple the authorities tried to arrest him, "but no one laid a hand on him."⁴

His forceful inner strength is seen in his unopposed cleansing of the temple; his constant control of things even at his arrest; his strong silence before Herod; His calm dignity that outraged Caiaphas the high priest; and his personal ascendancy that exasperated Pilate.

That same strength was manifested in his searching criticism of authorities, institutions, ideas, individuals, and ancient sacred traditions. You see it in his anger at callousness, hypocrisy, and cruelty- It is also seen in his refusal to lessen his terms of discipleship.⁵

His strength comes across loud and clear in his realistic outlook, determined firmness of purpose, uncompromising assertion of truth, unflinching acceptance of pain, unhesitating adherence to duty, and his undaunted demand for decision.

He was empowered by an inner strength like no one you have ever met or heard about.

His Strong Gentleness

Jesus had a strong gentleness that came from a sympathetic heart, a deep anger against heartlessness, and a strong indignation against so much suffering in his Father's world. It is seen in a hundred moving ways: His reaching out to lepers in defiance of prevailing social and religious taboos; his compassion for the crowds "because they were harassed and helpless like sheep"⁶; his healing on the Sabbath witnessing that human need superseded religious ritual; his righteous anger and deep distress over indifference shown to hurting and exploited people, his demonstrated concern for women, and his receiving of children when

even his own disciples tried to dismiss them.

He was gentle and compassionate, but at the same time he was strong.

His Powerful Love

All of the strength that was in Jesus' miraculous powers, his great truth, his strong resolve, and his powerful grace, was entirely at the service of others to work for their best interests. That was what made him powerful in living.

His love was not an emotional indulgence in hand-wringing pity, but an enterprising power at work doing good to all. He washed men's feet, relieved their suffering, comforted their sorrow, was forgiving to his enemies, and died to save those who betrayed him.

Out of his fullness many received him, and all who sought his help found in him inexhaustible grace and help.

None came in vain, none needed to come twice, none had to justify his coming, and none had to argue his worthiness. His unlimited, unconditional, powerful love was available and freely given to all who came to him.

"Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean. I am willing." "Son of David have mercy,"⁸ and he had mercy. "Lord, my servant lies at home paralyzed,"⁹ and he healed him. "Your sins are forgiven. . . get up take your mat and go home."¹⁰ "My little daughter is dying,"¹¹ and he raised her from the dead.

His Moral Excellence

Jesus was triumphantly resistant to every approach of evil. He not only triumphantly resisted evil, he radiated a powerful, positive wholesomeness in everything he said, did, permitted, or suffered. He had a goodness that was in addition to his sinlessness. Medieval painters tried to capture it in the golden halos they painted above his head but it is better seen in his life. It is seen in Peter's response to him following his miraculous catch of fish: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."¹²

It is seen in Zacchaeus' making restitution to everyone he had cheated after having Jesus as a guest in his home.¹³ It is seen in the woman at the well coming to faith in him after he revealed her inner life.¹⁴ It is seen when the Pharisees brought a woman to him caught in adultery and all her accusers departed when he challenged them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."¹⁵

In the presence of Jesus the false and shameful could not stand. They had to either submit to his purifying grace, or depart from him. The rich young ruler came seeking salvation, but refused his counsel in order to continue pursuing his idolatrous lifestyle.¹⁶

Those who submitted to this strong Son of God were saved to the uttermost. Even today he will still save and make strong of character those who are willing to submit to him. To see Jesus as he really is in all his strength, is to see ourselves as he is able to make us. The two words that will start us on the road to that transformation are, "Yes, Lord!"

ENDNOTES

1. Luke 4:29,30
2. John 6:15
3. Luke 9:51
4. John 7:30

5. Luke 14:25-27,33
6. Matthew 9:36
7. Matthew 8:2
8. Luke 18:38
9. Matthew 8:6
10. Luke 5:20-24 n.
11. Mark 5:23
12. Luke 5:8 NASB
13. Luke 9:8
14. John 4:29
15. John 8:7-10

HIS AMAZING COMPASSION

Although the primary purpose for Jesus coming into this world was to "proclaim the good news of God" and "to seek and to save what was lost,"¹ he did not limit his ministry to preaching and teaching. He could not meet up with a sufferer without having compassion for them and doing whatever was necessary to ease their pain. He personified his story of the Good Samaritan.

Jesus is often pictured having compassion for hurting people. The word used to describe his compassion was the strongest word for compassionate pity in use in his day. Consider some examples of how it was used to describe him.

"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."² When the crowd of five thousand followed him into "a solitary place," "he had compassion on them and healed their sick."³ When the four thousand followed him up into the hills, he healed people with all kinds of infirmities. After three days had passed, "he called his disciples to him and said, 'I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat.'"⁴ As he was leaving Jericho on his final journey to Jerusalem, two blind men cried out asking him to give them their sight. Matthew writes, "Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him."⁵ A man with leprosy came crawling on his knees before him begging to be made clean. "Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.

Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured."⁶

Jesus was God become man revealing to us a tenderhearted side of God that for many has proven to be the most endearing thing about him. The Apostle Paul was moved to praise God saying "the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort."⁷

To know what it was that moved Jesus to compassion is to gain insight into the heart of God. One sure way of determining what moved Jesus to have deep-seated feelings for people is to consider some of the situations that led him to be so merciful. Let's consider five general areas in which it is said that "Jesus was moved with compassion."

He Was Moved To Compassion By Peoples' Pain

Jesus was moved to reach out to the sick and hurting wherever he found them. Seeing blind people groping in darkness led him to give them sight. Coming in contact with those whose lives were controlled by demons compelled him to cast the demons out. Being painfully aware of the lonely, miserable plight of lepers stirred him to offer cleansing to those he met.⁸ Wherever he went "The people brought to [him] all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each, he healed them."⁹

The concern he showed for suffering people has inspired disciples of every generation to be compassionate, and has led them to do all kinds of things to alleviate human suffering. His disciples were the first to come up with the idea of hospitals and nursing. They have established care centers for the invalid, nursing homes for the elderly, orphanages for the parentless, shelters for battered women, child-care centers for working single parents, family counseling centers for troubled marriages,

kitchens for the hungry, shelters for the homeless, and homes for unwed mothers-to-be. They have been quick to feed the hungry, and have developed highly successful drug rehabilitation programs for those hooked on narcotics. They have become the "fellowship of the compassionate hearts."

He Was Moved To Compassion by Peoples' Sorrow

The ultimate in suffering which this life has to offer is to lose an intimate loved one in death. Jesus demonstrated his compassion for those experiencing this pain in an incident that took place in a little town called Nain.

It was a sad scene he came upon one day as he approached Nain. He saw a dead young man being carried out of the city for burial. The processional was led by professional mourners and musicians followed by the mother of the deceased whom he learned was a widow and so was now twice a loser. She had lost her husband, and now her only son. Jesus knew what was in store for her. She would have no income, no one to protect her, and no heritage for a future hope. Since there were no jobs readily available for women outside the home in those days, she might have to turn to begging or prostitution. Luke says that when Jesus saw this "he felt compassion for her" - his heart went out to her.¹⁰ He immediately sought to comfort her by telling her not to cry. Then he raised her son from the dead and gave her a reason not to cry. Since we only know of three people that he raised from the dead in his entire earthly ministry, raising her son from the dead was a rarity for him. For Jesus to go to such lengths for this widow emphasizes the depth of his compassion for her.

Sooner or later we will all stand in the shoes of that widow. We're all going to have to face the death of intimate loved ones. Maybe it will be our mate of many years. It will certainly be our parents. Will Jesus meet us in that hour as he did the widow of Nain? Will he have compassion for us? Will he care? Will he offer comfort? Oh yes, if we will permit him he will meet us in that hour. He will comfort us both spiritually and physically through his physical body, the church, as when Bob and Phyllis lost their twenty-eight year old son to AIDS. The church was there showering them with compassion and help as it has done with so many others.

Will Jesus raise our loved ones from the dead as he did the widow's son? Yes! And it will be a greater resurrection than that of the widow's son. He was raised only to die again. Our loved ones who die believing in Jesus will be raised on that great resurrection day to never die again. Jesus said that on that day "the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live."¹¹

He Was Moved To Compassion By Peoples' Hunger

On more than one occasion Jesus was stirred to compassion when he saw tired and hungry people and utilized his miraculous power to feed them. This is especially significant because many of the people of Galilee lived on meager rations. His typical response to meeting up with tired and hungry people was, "I have compassion for these people."¹² And he fed them. To the tired and weary he said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."¹³

Jesus continues to feed tired and hungry people through the compassionate generosity of his body, the church. His disciples are responsible for feeding more hungry people in this world than any other

benevolent group or agency.

He Was Moved To Compassion By Peoples' Loneliness

The loneliest people in Israel in Jesus' day were lepers. When people became afflicted with this dreaded disease they were immediately isolated from all others and doomed to a very lonely life. They would never be allowed to come any closer than shouting distance to unafflicted people for fear of giving them their awful disease. It was unthinkable that anyone would ever get close enough to touch a leper because to see one was to immediately withdraw from them.

One day "a man came along who was covered with leprosy."¹⁴ Upon meeting Jesus he fell down before him with his face to the ground and begged: "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus had already done a most unusual thing by allowing the leper to get close enough to speak to him. But then he did one of the most remarkable things of his entire ministry; he touched him. He touched the untouchable! He touched an unclean, despised, infected, lonely, and rejected leper. He "reached out his hand and touched the man" and said to him, "I am willing, be clean." "And immediately the leprosy left him."

The hand of Jesus was always extended in compassion to the shunned, isolated, lonely, and despised people of this world. The disciples of Jesus have always reached out to them too. No one can rightly consider himself a disciple of Jesus until he has begun to be moved with some sense of compassion for the lonely of heart as Jesus was.

He Was Moved With Compassion For Those Harassed And Helpless

Matthew writes that when Jesus "saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."¹⁵

"Harassed" and "helpless" are descriptive words. Harassment can describe a corpse that has been beaten and mangled; someone who has been plundered and treated shamefully; or one who is utterly wearied over what seems to be a never ending journey. Helpless means "laid prostrate." It describes a drunk, or one wounded into unconsciousness. Jesus said that people without a shepherd were in this kind of condition. He stated that one of the reasons for his coming into this world was to become a shepherd to such neglected people.

He presented himself as just such a shepherd saying, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."¹⁶ He not only proved to be the Good Shepherd, but also the "great Shepherd of the sheep," and the "Chief Shepherd."¹⁷

As shepherd he leads his sheep to green pastures and still waters, and protects them from all their enemies. Surely he is picturing himself as the Good Shepherd in his parable of the Lost Sheep when he has a shepherd leave his flock of ninety-nine to pursue one stray.¹⁸

The Ultimate Compassion

The ultimate expression of the compassion of Jesus was demonstrated in his leaving the loving presence of God to come into a God-hating, lost and dying world to suffer, bleed, and die a horrible death to save us from our sins and deliver us from the wrath of God. The Apostle Paul writes, "At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his

own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." He adds, "When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son.¹⁹

Jesus was one who had deep feelings of compassion for people and demonstrated it in his willingness to help those who were hurting, hungry, lonely, harassed and helplessly lost. He sought out people who were empty, hopeless, and sometimes even pathetic. He loved and cared for them, and gave them direction for life.

ENDNOTES

- 1 . Mark 1:14; Luke 19:10
2. Matthew 9:36
3. Matthew 14:14
4. Matthew 15:32
5. Matthew 20:29-34
6. Mark 1:40,41. II Corinthians 1:3
8. Cf. Matthew 14:14; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 9:22
9. Luke 4:40, 41
10. Luke 7:13
11. John 5:25
12. Matthew 15:32
13. Matthew 11:28
14. Luke 5:12
15. Matthew 9:36
16. John 10:11,14
17. Hebrews 13:20; I Peter 5:4
18. Luke 15:3-7
19. Romans 5:6-10

HIS AMAZING WORDS

The Chief Priests had ordered the temple guard to go find Jesus and arrest him. The guards were not uncultured peasants or ignorant soldiers. They were officials of the rulers of the Jews and were used to hearing the best teaching and preaching of the day. But when they found Jesus and listened to him, his eloquence and the depth of his message led them to forget their orders and return to the Chief Priests empty handed. When asked why they hadn't brought him back with them they declared, "No one ever spoke the way this man does."¹

On another occasion Jesus gave a very hard teaching in order to thin the thrill seekers from the crowd. As people began to turn away in numbers and it appeared that even his close disciples were entertaining the idea of leaving, Jesus asked, "Do you want to leave too?" Peter answered for them, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."²

Though all the recorded words of Jesus could be printed in a sixteen page pamphlet, his words have revolutionized and brought new life to countless millions of people over twenty centuries and have done more to change this world for good than all other writings put together.

In order to get the impact of his words, let's consider ten noteworthy things about them.

Ten Important Things About The Words Of Jesus

1. They were not his own. The first thing we need to note about the words of Jesus is that they were not his own. Those who first heard him were amazed at the brilliance of his teaching and wanted to know, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?"³ "He didn't go to Bible College or seminary. He didn't study with any of us." Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me."⁴ He assured them that this could be verified if they wanted to do so. He said, "If a man chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own."⁵

On another occasion he said, "I do not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it."⁶ This is why he is continually called prophet in the New Testament: because he spoke in God's behalf.

2. They were spoken with authority. Because Jesus' words came from God he could speak with authority, unlike the religious teachers of his day. For example, when Jesus finished preaching what has been called "The Sermon On The Mount," the listening crowd was left in amazement "because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."⁷ Their religious teachers would never make a pronouncement without quoting some authority to back it up.

Jesus continually made pronouncements about things that only God was qualified to address. He spoke of such things as sin, forgiveness, eternal life, worship, prayer and judgment.

The authority of his word is seen in that he never argued or debated with anyone about anything that he said. He simply made declarations and that was it. Much of what he said was self verifying.

The authoritative impact of his words can even be felt by those who read them today. Three of his often repeated phrases convey this impact:

"Truly, truly, I say to you," "You have heard that it was said...but I say to you," "Therefore I tell you." These words ring with authority and when you read or hear them you sit up and take notice,

3. They were without error or uncertainty. Because Jesus' words came from God, they were without error or uncertainty. When you read them you don't find them containing either mistakes or contradictions. There is never a hint of uncertainty about anything he addressed. He didn't say such things as "I think," "perhaps," "possibly," "maybe." He never made mistakes, never admitted faults, and never made apologies.

4. They were authoritative. As you read Jesus' words you can sense that he came from the presence of God because he spoke of the things in God's realm as the familiar. He spoke of God as someone he knew and had been with. He talked about heaven as a place where he had been. He described hell as a place he had seen.

5. They were dignified. As you would expect from one who had come from the presence of a Holy God, there is no coarseness, vulgarity, off color, or cheapness about his talk. There isn't any sentimentality, or sob-stuff either. There is always dignity, purity, and wholesomeness.

6. They were spoken with simplicity. Though what Jesus had to say was profound, there was always a simplicity in the way he said it. His great stories, his potent, witty sayings, his constant barrage of questions, and his rhythmic utterances were all given in the greatest of simplicity.

Whatever problems his words may raise, rarely are we left in doubt about what he means. Our problems with his words are seldom due to misunderstanding, but rather with the conviction they bring and the obedience they call for.

His stories are simple but powerful. They are so easy to grasp and remember. Who could ever forget the stories of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan once they've heard them? Who can fail to be left pondering over the messages they convey? Who is there that can't recall some of his simple but pithy sayings such as, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of things;" "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's;" "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

7. They are in touch with reality. Today's attitude toward the words of Jesus is that they are archaic, out of touch, impractical, irrelevant, and unrealistic. They belong to the superstitious past.

Such an attitude is usually held by those who have never read his words and have obtained their information from bumper stickers and second hand misquotes. They are about as informed as the man who was approaching San Pedro harbor and saw a sign atop a building that read, "Jesus Saves" and exclaimed, "I wonder what savings and loan he saves with?"

Anyone who will take the time to read the words of Jesus will find him to be more in touch with reality than anyone they've ever read. They will find him to be amazingly impartial, candid, honest, and completely frank; a bottom liner who spares no one and avoids no subject. Yet, he is full of love, compassion, mercy, encouragement, wisdom, help, and hope. He

doesn't fight straw men or deal with the hypothetical or speculative; he only deals with reality.

8. Jesus is the main subject. Amazingly, the main subject of Jesus' words is Jesus himself. "I am—the bread of life, the light of the world, the good Shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way, the truth, and the life." "I say to you..." "Come to me..." He frequently focused attention on himself.

No one ever accused him of egotism or pride, not even when he challenged his enemies to point out sin in his life saying, "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?"

9. They speak of things to come. His words were not limited to the here and now; they took you into the then and there. He spoke of things to come as though he had already been there. He had because he had come from the eternal now of eternity. He had already seen his own resurrection, ascension, and second coming. He had seen the end of the world, the judgement to come, and both heaven and hell. He knew all about such things.

10. They are self verifying. Finally, to those who hear his words, they are self verifying. They appeal to our innate sense of the truth: that which we know down deep inside is true. Our inner person agrees with his words.

On one occasion he challenged his listeners: "Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right?"⁹ Indeed, why not?

Seven Things Jesus Said About His Words

Jesus had a number of compelling things to say about his own words that must be considered. Let's look at seven.

1. He said that they were spirit and life: "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."¹⁰

2. He said that they had cleansing power. He told his disciples, "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you."¹¹

3. He said they would bring freedom to those who received them and continued to live by them. He declared, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."¹²

4. He said that his words would bring eternal life and deliverance from condemnation. He told people, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."¹³

5. He said that those who would keep his words would never see death. He said, "I tell you the truth, if a man keeps my word, he will never see death."¹⁴

6. He said that his words would never pass away: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."¹⁵

7. He said that if his words did not save us, they would end up judging us: "As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him...There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my word; the very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day."¹⁶

Responding To Jesus' Words

There are two responses that must be given to Jesus' words for them

to have meaning and power in anyone's life. All the power that his words possess and all the things they can do will be of no effect unless two conditions are met.

First, they must be heard and believed. Jesus continually said, "He who has an ear let him hear."¹⁷ As we have already noted, he said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life."¹⁸ The Apostle Paul added: "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."¹⁹

Second, they must be obeyed. Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples."²⁰ "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching."²¹

No matter how great and powerful the words of Jesus are, they will be nothing more than nice sounding theory unless they are put into practice. Jesus said, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."²² When put into practice they will become as the old song says, "Wonderful words of life."

ENDNOTES

1. John 7:46
2. John 6:68
3. John 7:15
4. John 7:16
5. John 7:17
6. John 12:49
7. Matthew 7:28,29
8. John 8:46
9. Luke 12:57
10. John 6:63
11. John 15:3
12. John 8:31
13. John 5:24 14
14. John 8:51
15. Matthew 24:35
16. John 12:47,48
17. Mark 4:9,23; Luke 8:8; 14:35; etc.
18. John 5:24
19. Romans 10:17
20. John 8:31
21. John 14:25
22. Matthew 7:24

HIS AMAZING PROMISES

Jesus made greater promises to people than anyone who ever lived. In fact, he made promises that only God could possibly make good on. He promised people such things as forgiveness of sin, eternal life, immortality, heaven, answers to prayer, and rewards for service. He made such promises on his own authority. This often left the people of his day astonished and exclaiming, "What manner of man is this?" "Who but God can forgive sin?"

The promises of Jesus played a big part in his life and ministry. We could never fully know him unless we were familiar with some of them. So let's briefly consider ten.

The Promise Of Eternal life

To begin with, Jesus repeatedly promised eternal life to those who came to faith in him. He said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."¹ "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish..."²

He promised his disciples a home in eternity. He told them, "There are many rooms in my Father's house; otherwise, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come-back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."³

The Promise Of A Loving Shepherd

Jesus offered himself as a loving shepherd to unprotected, uncared for, parched, starving sheep who needed shepherding. He said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me."⁴

The Promise Of Deliverance From Death

Jesus promised deliverance from death and a never ending life. He said, "I tell you the truth, if a man keeps my word, he will never see death."⁵ Again, "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."⁶ The Apostle Paul adds clarification by saying that when a believer falls asleep in death here, he will wake up in eternity with Jesus.⁷

The Promise Of The Holy Spirit

Upon his departure from this world Jesus promised to give his disciples the Holy Spirit to take his place and become their permanent Helper. On the night before he went to the cross he told his disciples, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, the Spirit of truth, to be with you forever."⁸ This Helper would help them in many ways: in their praying, their understanding of the things of God, in making Jesus and his word real to them, and in strengthening them for trial and witness. He would help them in their battle for righteousness, help them to worship correctly, establish and maintain unity, utilize their gifts properly in service, and help them live lives of godliness.

The Promise Of Freedom

Jesus promised freedom from the enslavement of sin. He said, "I tell

you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin" but "if you hold to my teaching... you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" and "if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."⁹

The Promise Of Answered Prayer

Jesus promised to answer people's prayers upon the condition that they believe in him, faithfully follow him and his word, and pray according to his will. He said, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."¹⁰ He didn't promise to answer immediately or as his disciples thought he should; but he did promise to answer. He promised to keep an open ear to their requests.

The Promise Of Reward For Service

Jesus promised great reward to those who faithfully served him, especially if it involved them in persecution. He said, "Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great..." To those who would be persecuted he offered comfort saying, "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven." He even went so far as to promise that "if anyone gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will not lose his reward."¹¹

The Promise Of His Personal Presence

Jesus promised his continued presence with each individual believer and a special presence when they all got together. He promised, "Surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." And, "Where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them."¹² He promised those who became his disciples that they would never ever walk alone again.

The Promise Of Rest For The Weary

Jesus promised rest for the weary. To those weighted down and exhausted from the heavy burden of religious or secular life, he promised rest. He said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest...my yoke is easy and my burden is light."¹³

The Promise Of His Return

Finally, he promised his disciples that after his departure he would come again some day to take them out of this present evil age into eternity to be with him forever in the place he had prepared for them. He said, "I will come back and take you to be with me that you may also be where I am."¹⁴

These Promises Are For All Disciples

Jesus meant for these promises to be not only for first century disciples, but for disciples of every age. That being so, how can we claim them today? We must begin by asking the obvious: "Can Jesus deliver on all these promises today?" "Is he reliable?" "Is he trustworthy?" "Is he capable?"

People in responsible positions make promises to us almost every day they that have no intention of keeping, and aren't even in a position to keep. Most of us have been promised so many things we've never

received that we automatically filter out promises made to us by anyone. We have a sort of built-in promise rejector. So why should we make Jesus an exception and believe in his promises? Why? Because of who he is. He is God come in the flesh as demonstrated by his sinless life, miraculous deeds, and his resurrection from the dead to life everlasting. Since only God can make good on the promises he has made, he would have to be God.

Why do we believe that he will keep his promises? Because he fulfilled all the promises he made to first century believers as the record testifies. We have twenty centuries of testimony from people who declare that he has made good on the promises made to them.

Once we come to believe in the reliability of Jesus to keep his promises, we can experience their fulfillment in our lives as we claim them by faith. Exercise your faith! Start claiming them today.

ENDNOTES

1. John 5:24
2. John 10:27, 28
3. John 14:2,3
4. John 10:11,14
5. John 8:51
6. John 11:25,26
7. Cf II Corinthians 5:8, Philippians 1:21-23
8. John 14:16
9. John 8:31,32,34,36
10. John 15:7; Matthew 21:24; Cf I John 5:14
11. Luke 6:23,35; Matthew 10:42
12. Matthew 28:20; 18:20
13. Matthew 11:28-30
14. John 14:3

HIS AMAZING CONCERN FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

If Jesus came to save the whole world and only had three years in which to do it, how could he have possibly had any time for individuals? Wouldn't he only have time to lead the masses in large crusades and mass meetings designed to reach the optimum number of people in the minimum amount of time? Isn't that how it's done when you want to reach large numbers and only have a little time in which to do it?

Isn't this how Church leaders and politicians alike operate? They think in terms of the many. They are concerned about numbers. They measure the weight of the crowd. This leads them to attempt to reach people through the use of mass media, mass politicizing, and mass evangelism by using radio, television, mailings and social media.

The goal of church leaders seems to be to create mega churches with thousands and tens of thousands of members. The goal of politicians is to have larger districts and more constituents. There is almost a disparagement of anything small. Many question that God could be a part of anything that is small or remains small.

Jesus Cared For the Individual

How strikingly different to see one on history's most important mission - the salvation of mankind - allow himself to be frequently interrupted by one person. He would eat with a social outcast, converse with a foreign woman, listen to a sick person's appeal, or answer an inquirer's question. Jesus never seemed to consider himself to be too important, too busy, or in too big a hurry to give time to an individual. The fact that Jesus spent so much time with individuals indicates that he had a value system that differed greatly from most of the famous leaders in history, including the people of his day. In one sense human history seems to say that the individual is dispensable. One person isn't very important, he doesn't count for much, so don't waste time on him. Millions have been enslaved or slaughtered in battle with little or no thought of their worth as a person.

To see Jesus go out of his way to demonstrate his concern for an individual- even a social outcast -sets him apart; makes him different. How thankful we can all be for that! We can love him for it. This attracts us to him. It's almost inconceivable to think that the Son of God cares for each of us as a person and that we have worth and value in his sight? His concern for us as individuals has translated into rich blessings for all of us.

Jesus' Interaction With Individuals

Jesus' interaction with individuals has left us with a great heritage. It has left us daring to believe that there is great worth in an individual. It helps us to see that Jesus not only came to save the world of men, but each individual in it. He didn't come to scoop us up in mass like a giant earth moving machine. He came more like a gardener picking one rose at a time.

Seeing Jesus spend time helping so many individuals out of so many difficult situations, encourages us to believe that he will do the same for us.

The time Jesus spent with individuals resulted in some of the greatest truths he taught. The time he spent talking with a religious leader named Nicodemus led to his teaching about the new birth.¹ His encounter with a

Samaritan woman at Jacob's well revealed truth about the Holy Spirit and true worship.² His discussion with an expert in Jewish law resulted in his giving us a summary of the message of the Old Testament.³ From an evening he spent dining with a Pharisee we learn about true love.⁴ From his response to a question from "someone in the crowd" we learn about the value of life.⁵

Jesus had at least fifteen personal conversations with various individuals. Let's consider three.

Talking To A Religious Leader About A New Beginning

Realizing that he had a need, a religious leader of the Jews named Nicodemus came to see Jesus one night. Jesus knew what his need was and that it was no different from that of any other person. Though he was a man of education, culture, heritage, and religious and social position, he needed a new life. Jesus knew that. At the beginning of their conversation he told him that he needed to be born anew from above. He informed him that the Kingdom of God was unthinkable and unattainable to those who had only experienced a natural birth. He said that they would be unable to "see it" or "enter it."

Nicodemus couldn't understand how time could run backwards and erase the mistakes of youth. He couldn't understand how the bonds of age and habit could lose their grip and life could start anew. So he asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? Surely he can't enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" That's the question of the ages: "How can a person have a new beginning? Is there any way we can undo the mess we've made of life and start all over again? Is there any way we can be freed from the weight of past failures, the sting of its guilt, and the defeat of its failure?" Doesn't everyone cry out at one time or another, "If only I could start all over again?" In his conversation with Nicodemus Jesus assures us that we can, by putting our faith and trust in him and his renewing power.⁶

Conversation With A Woman Whose Well Had Run Dry

To a foreign woman who had gone through five husbands and hadn't bothered to marry the sixth, Jesus taught about the thirst-quenching ministry of the Holy Spirit.

At a famous well in Samaria two tired people met. One had grown weary in the service of God, and the other was worn out from sinning. A woman parched of soul, over-stimulated by her sensuality, drained of healthy interests and emotions, poor and bedraggled, had come out from the city to draw water from the well.

Jesus faced her as he would anyone today who might be weary, empty, bored, and trying to pump some life into themselves with stimulants, sedatives, narcotics, or like this woman, sex. He offered her as he would any of us, perpetual refreshment and an unfailing spring of inexhaustible and fulfilling life.

He worked through her evasions, her spiritual facade, and her sin and finally led her to see who he really was. He then convinced her that he could give her a life that would well up to eternal life. Persuaded, she surrendered her life to him and he wiped out her past, delivered her from her weariness and gave her an overflowing new life. What he did for this individual, he desires to do for every other sin-laden, empty, weary person.

Talking To An Empty Young Rich Man

Though he seemed to have everything - position, wealth, good character, and social prominence - nevertheless he had an emptiness and hunger of soul. Somehow he sensed that he was missing out on eternal life. So a rich young ruler came to Jesus inquiring, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus could read the young man's heart and knew both his failure and his need. But he gently helped him discover it for himself. "You know the commandments," Jesus replied, and then listed several by way of example. The young man responded, "All these I have kept since I was a boy." "When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me.'"

In a moment of time his covetous heart was exposed and he could see that his pretense of keeping the law since his youth was sheer folly. He stood as a self-condemned idolater. He was guilty of failing to keep the very first commandment: he had another god: money. So he sadly turned away humbled, chastened, and self-exposed, unwilling to give up his god of wealth and gain the eternal life he said he wanted. How sad!

How powerfully that conversation speaks to those who would trade away eternal life for present position, power, pleasure and ease. How convicting it has been to those who have identified with the rich young ruler.

The Similarity Of His Individual Encounters

The stories of these three encounters Jesus had with individuals teach us the same thing as the stories about his other encounters with individuals. They all teach that Jesus wants to deliver each of us from that which enslaves us, robs us of life, and eventually damns us. He wants to erase the blackboard, destroy the evidence, burn the records, and clear the computer of our sin. He wants to impart to us a great new life of freedom and peace. He wants to assure each of us that God can, and will, forgive and forget the wrongs of our past and receive us into his family to be his own dear children forever.

ENDNOTES

1. John 3:1-15
2. John 4:4-42
3. Matthew 22:34-40
4. Luke 7:36-50
5. Luke 12:13-21
6. John 3:1-17. The "you" in verses 3 and 5 are second person plural meaning you all."
7. John 4:4-42

HIS AMAZING BEFRIENDING OF 'SINNERS' AND OUTCASTS

One of the stinging criticisms the religious leaders of Jesus' day hurled at him was that he associated with "sinners." Actually, it was more than a criticism, it was a condemnation. He was condemned because in fact he did spend considerable time with sinners. He ate with them, directed much of his teaching to them, healed them, cast demons out of them, forgave them, defended them, and finally died with them and for them. What a mind-blowing revelation of God he was!

Jesus' religious contemporaries believed that God was supposed to condemn and distance himself from sinners, and embrace and reward good people. They therefore rejected his claim that he had come from God because of his association with "lawbreakers" and social outcasts.

Jesus Was A Friend Of Sinners

The enemies of Jesus called him "a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners.'"¹ And although he was not a glutton nor a drunkard, he was definitely a friend of tax collectors and sinners. He spent time with some of the most notorious. Because he did, his religious critics complained, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" His stinging reply was, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."² He was saying in effect, "I don't associate with people of low reputation to be hobnobbing with them; I'm not their comrade in evil; we're not birds of a feather flocking together. I'm on intimate terms with tax collectors and sinners as a physician trying to heal those who are unworthy and desperate. As a physician I don't go among sin- sick people to be contaminated with their diseases, but to heal them and make them well. My ministry is to sinners - to the lost, the straying, the burdened, hungry, thirsty, lonely, rejected, and hopeless. I didn't come to minister to you so-called 'well people.' If I had, you wouldn't have listened or responded to me anyway because you're too smug in your religious self-righteousness.' If you religious hypocrites were half as spiritually healthy as you think you are, you would have been the ones ministering to all these tax collectors and sinners who you say are so sick. If those who are healthy have an ounce of compassion in them, shouldn't they be putting forth some effort to heal the sick?"

Some Sinners And Outcasts Jesus Befriended

Jesus befriended and extended grace to a lot of "sinners" and outcasts of his day. Let's consider a few examples.

"When a woman who lived a sinful life" came to a dinner party Jesus was attending and washed his feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, "and poured perfume on them," Jesus commended her to his host and said to her, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."³

When the religious leaders brought a woman to Jesus who had been taken in the very act of adultery, and pressed him to agree with them to stone her to death, he answered them, "If any of you is without sin, let him begin stoning her." When none did and they all departed, he asked the woman, "Has no one condemned you? 'No one, sir,' she replied. 'Then neither do I condemn you, go now and leave your life of sin.'⁴

His final words to Judas, the infamous disciple who betrayed him, were, "Friend, do what you came for."⁵

For those who actually nailed him to the cross he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."⁶

He was still befriending sinners while he hung on the cross between two criminals. One said to him, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."⁷

Perhaps we could better see how Jesus befriended and helped "sinners" and outcasts if we considered in more detail an example of his befriending the worst of sinners and the worst of outcasts.

Jesus Befriended The Worst Of Sinners

The worst of sinners in Jesus' day would have been a tax collector. He called one of them to company with him for three years and be one of his specially chosen assistants.

It would be difficult to understand the unique thing Jesus did in choosing a tax collector to be one of his followers unless we had some idea of a tax collectors' position in the society in which he lived.

All conquered people had to pay taxes to Rome. The way the Romans went about collecting them was to sell the right to collect them to citizens of conquered countries. They would assess a district at a certain amount and then sell the right to collect the taxes within it to the highest bidder. As long as the buyer gave the assessed amount to Rome at the end of the year, he could keep whatever else he could extract from the people beyond that amount. So a tax collector in Jesus' day would have been a Jew who collected taxes for the Romans and fleeced his own people for all he could get out of them.

Of all the people in Palestine, tax collectors were considered the worst. They were classified along with robbers and murderers. They were regarded as traitors. They would be equivalent to today's pimp, child molester, rapist, porno king, sodomizer, thief or all of these put together.

The religious people of Jesus' day would have nothing to do with tax collectors. To them they were despicable sinners who would in time be fueling the fires of hell. They actually forbid them to attend their places of worship. Anyone who associated with them was in danger of losing their reputation and being ostracized from society.

This didn't seem to matter to Jesus. He cared more about tax collectors than he did his reputation or position in society. That's why he spent time with them attending their parties and eating and drinking with them. And they loved him for it, and sought his company. They readily received him as a welcomed and honored guest at their gatherings.

When his enemies rebuked him for spending time with such horrible sinners," he answered them by saying, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." And again, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."⁸

Jesus Touched An Untouchable

The best example of an outcast in Jesus' day would have been a leper. Leprosy has always been considered an unclean disease and has been associated with shame and horror leaving the diseased person feeling guilty for their condition.

In Jesus' day lepers were hated until they came to hate themselves. They were so shunned and despised that they often ended up taking their own lives. Upon contracting leprosy people were immediately banished

from society and compelled to live lonely, isolated lives. Whenever lepers came within shouting distance of non-lepers they were required by law to shout, Unclean! Unclean! ' If they got too close, people would throw rocks at them. A leper suffered as much from loneliness as he did from his disease. He was usually sick of mind as well as of body.

On more than one occasion Jesus had encounters with lepers and always dealt with them kindly and mercifully. He often healed them.⁹ On one occasion a man "who was covered with leprosy" approached him begging, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." He responded to him by doing the unthinkable; he touched the man." Then said to him, "I am willing, be clean!" "And immediately the leprosy left him."¹⁰ Touching this leper was one of the most remarkable things Jesus did in his entire ministry. He touched the untouchable! He touched a diseased, unclean, despised, guilt-laden, rejected leper. His hand went out to one from whom everyone else withdrew. No one in his day had ever done such a thing.

Jesus made touching the untouchable, loving the unlovable, and forgiving the unforgivable the very essence of his ministry. And for twenty centuries Christianity has led the way in touching the untouchables of the world. It has thrived on reaching out to the despised and rejected. It has done more to help the enslaved, imprisoned, poor, weak, and unwanted than any other. One cannot call himself a true disciple of Jesus unless he has kissed a frog and turned him into a prince, and touched a leper and made him whole.

ENDNOTES

1. Matthew 8:3; 11:19
2. Luke 5:31,32
3. Luke 7:36-50
4. John 8:1-11
5. Matthew 26:50
6. Luke 23:34
7. Luke 23:42,43
8. Luke 5:32; Luke 19:10 NASB
9. Cf. Matthew 10:8; 11:5; Luke 17:12
10. Luke 5:12,13

HE MET WITH SUCH AMAZING HOSTILITY

One of the difficult things to understand about Jesus is that so many people reacted to him with such hostility. Some of them came to hate him so that they would not rest until they saw him executed. Those who have come to know him find it hard to understand why anyone who loved and served others as he did could have been so savagely resisted and hated by so many.

Why was he so opposed that his enemies finally executed him in such a horrible manner? What was his crime? What evil had he done? Who had he offended? How could one so perfect in all his ways incur such hostility?

What kind of people could do such a mean, hateful, terrible thing to such a lovely person as Jesus? It's hard to believe that anyone could hate him that much, especially the religious people of his day. Yet, they were the driving force behind his opposition.

Identifying The Enemies Of Jesus

The identifiable people responsible for opposing and finally killing Jesus came from four religious or political sects of the Jews who conspired together to do away with him. What really killed him was man's hatred for God. God had entered the world of men and lived among them in the person of Jesus and they couldn't stand having him in their midst. The brilliance of his life revealed the darkness of theirs. And rather than come to the light, they sought to extinguish it. As Jesus told his contemporaries, "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."¹

By Nature People Hate God

People do not naturally love God; in fact, they hate him. They may say they love him, but deep down in their hearts they really don't. They actually live at enmity with him. Paul wrote that "the mind of sinful man...is hostile to God." He reminded believers that they had been "God's enemies" before coming to faith in Jesus. He said, "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior."²

People seldom come right out and say that God is their enemy. They like to think that they're really on his side and support what he's doing. If they are brought face to face with him, or if their way of life becomes threatened by him in any way, you will find them reacting to him like a cat cornered by a dog. Their claws will be bared and their hair will stand on end as their hatred for God surfaces. Even a mouse will fight if it senses that an enemy has it cornered.

People Today Attack Jesus Indirectly

Rarely does anyone today attack Jesus directly as they did when he was here. They go after him indirectly. They attack those they think represent him. They assail what they call the "religious right" or "fundamentalist Christians." They critically label Christianity as "Puritanism" or "antiquated morality." They censure well known Christian leaders.

To see what led the enemies of Jesus to have such hatred for him that they attacked him directly, is to get inside man and see what there is

about him that causes him to be at enmity with God. Let's take a look at those enemies and see what we can discover.

The Opposition Of The Scribes And Pharisees

The group that opposed Jesus longest and most consistently was the Pharisees. They were a religious group that had replaced God's word with their own set of rules and regulations. They had come to believe that by keeping them they were actually keeping God's word. This had led them to be filled with pride in their achievement and had resulted in their looking with contempt on everyone who was not one of their group. It also led them to believe that they were the only ones qualified to be the religious teachers of their people. They felt that they alone should have the right to be called "teacher" and be honored wherever they went.

They tried to impress people with their piety and position by going through ceremonial rituals in public places. Jesus denounced them for their insincerity and said that they were hypocrites who had no real love for either God or man. They were so fanatically committed to their own religious system that their minds were absolutely closed to considering teaching from anyone outside their own group, even if it came from the Son of God.

Jesus said that they exalted the insignificant and refused to consider what was really important. They majored in minors. He condemned them for making much ado about nothing saying, "You have neglected the more important matters of the law - justice, mercy, and faithfulness."³

The main reason the Pharisees hated Jesus and sought to do away with him was because he didn't line up with them. They claimed that he was uneducated and unqualified to be a professional teacher like them. He was saying things that were terribly offensive and untrue.⁴ He even taught that God loved sinners and freely received them.

They said he was a deliberate lawbreaker who violated religious days and cleansing rites. He encouraged others to do the same. He was a sinner because he was not one of them. He even sought out sinners and associated with them. He was a heretic who needed to be silenced. They started making plans to get rid of him early in his ministry. Today's Pharisees still want him silenced for all the same reasons.

The Opposition Of The Sadducees

The Sadducees were a rich man's political and religious party. They were liberal in their politics, religion, and lifestyle. They were secular, materialistic, and worldly in their outlook. Their religion was subservient to their politics. They had collaborated with Rome and ruled with Rome's consent providing they were able to maintain law and order. They controlled the ruling body of the Jews (the Sanhedrin) and therefore their nation's interests at home and abroad. One of their number was chosen by Rome as High Priest which was the the highest political and religious office in the land.

The Sadducees position, power, wealth, and lifestyle depended on their ability to maintain Roman peace in the land. They therefore could not allow disturbances or uprisings of any kind to occur. The threat or even the suspicion of trouble had to be crushed immediately. They were prepared to do whatever it took to stop it.

It was inevitable that the Sadducees would see Jesus as a threat to their way of life. He seemed to be inciting trouble. He was gathering crowds and teaching new revolutionary, explosive things. He was criticizing

the status quo. He was stirring people up. He was a dark cloud gathering. Because they knew that Rome would not tolerate anything that threatened their peace, he was a threat to everything they held dear. Their rich, powerful, comfortable way of life was in danger. Either Jesus had to go or they might lose it all. To ensure their own luxurious lifestyle they joined with the Pharisees in a plan to do away with him - and they eventually succeeded.

The Opposition Of The Priests

A third group that strongly opposed Jesus was the temple priests in Jerusalem. You don't hear much about them until Jesus comes to Jerusalem for his final days of ministry because his work centered in Galilee and theirs in Jerusalem. Once he came to Jerusalem they began to strongly oppose him. They are continually pictured plotting to do away with him.

They appear in scene after scene. It was to them that Judas Iscariot went with his offer of betrayal. They completely controlled Jesus' mock trial at the house of Caiaphas the high priest. They were the ones who delivered him to Pilate the Roman governor and called for his death. They led the mob in shouting for his crucifixion. They mocked him as he hung on the cross. They urged Pilate to set a seal on his tomb to insure that his disciples wouldn't steal his body and claim that he was raised from the dead. They tried to bribe away the evidence of the empty tomb.

Why all this enmity against Jesus? Why did the priests hate him so? For the same reason that the Sadducees did. He threatened their rich, easy lifestyle. They could see that either he had to go or he might bring an end to the priesthood with its luxurious way of life.

The priests were a rich, privileged group in a comparatively poor country. They lived in greater luxury and ease than any other people in the land. Josephus, the Jewish historian informs us that there were 100,000 priests who served in the temple in Jerusalem and they all served only at the great annual feasts. Otherwise they were divided into twenty-four groups with each serving only two weeks out of the year. A priest's working year amounted to no more than five weeks, and his pay for this was enormous.

How does knowing this help us understand why they hated Jesus so? Because he was the supreme challenge to the whole priestly system. For centuries God had been denouncing the priestly system with its sacrifices and rituals. He had called for broken, repentant hearts and righteous living. 5 In Jesus the matter had come to a head. He continually called for life, not ritual. More than once he declared, "Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'"6 He said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."7 The priests could see the hand writing on the wall. They would be doomed if Jesus persisted. He had to go, and go quickly. It was simply pocketbook protection.

The Opposition Of The Herodians

The Herodians were a fourth group that conspired to do away with Jesus. Mark writes in his gospel, "Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.8

The Herodians' reason for wanting to do away with Jesus was similar to that of the Sadducees. Both were political parties of the rich who were concerned with control of the country and maintaining the status quo.

The difference between them was that the Sadducees wanted to rule through their ruling body with Roman oversight and a Roman governor present to insure peace. The Herodians, on the other hand, wanted more distant rule from Rome through a client king from the Herod Dynasty. The Herodians stood against Jesus because his claim to be God and king conflicted with their political ambition of having a Herod on the throne. He had to go. It was a matter of political expediency. Sound familiar?

ENDNOTES

1. John 3:19
2. Romans 5:10; 8:6,7; Colossians 1:21
3. Matthew 23:23
4. John 7:15; Mark 1:27; Matthew 13:54
5. Cf. Psalm 51:16,17; Isaiah 1:11; Micah 6:6-8
6. Matthew 9:13; 12:7 (quotes from Hosea 6:6)
7. John 10:10
8. Mark 3:6

HIS AMAZING GRACE

Jesus can offer himself to us as an inexhaustible resource of help because he is a limitless source of God's grace. The Apostle John points this out in a statement he makes about Jesus in his gospel when he writes, "And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace."¹ The Amplified New Testament adds emphasis to this as it reads, "For out of his fullness (abundance) we all received - all had a share and we were all supplied with - one grace after another and spiritual blessing upon spiritual blessing, and even favor upon favor and gift (heaped) upon gift."

The emphasis in this verse is on "fullness." Grace and blessing are said to issue out of the "fullness" that was in Jesus. The word "fullness" as used here is a great word. It is the Greek word *pleroma* and is used to refer to the sum total of all that is in God. The Apostle Paul uses the word in a couple of statements he makes in his letter to the Colossians. He writes, "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Christ)."² And again, "For in Christ all the fullness of Deity lives in bodily form, and you have this fullness in Christ."³ He makes it clear that in Jesus we have all there is of God. We have all of his love, grace, mercy, wisdom, and all else that is in Him. Because of this, Jesus becomes an inexhaustible source of help to those who receive him. They can go to him with whatever need they may have and find in him the resource to meet it.

The Illustration of the Seven "I Am" Sayings

The seven "I am" sayings of Jesus in John's gospel help us to see him as a never ending source of help. In these sayings he actually presents himself as God come to meet man's need. To those who are hungry and thirsty of soul he says, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."⁴ To those groping in darkness and in need of light for their path he says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."⁵ To those looking for greener pastures, rest for their soul, and life with meaning he says, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture."⁶ To those needing tender loving care, counseling, help and protection he says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."⁷ To those seeking eternal life he says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."⁸ To those who are aware of their inadequacy and inability, and sense their need of help he says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."⁹ To those looking for direction, truth, and a full life he says, "I am the way and the truth and the life."¹⁰

The Cast Of Characters In John's Gospel

The fullness of grace in Jesus to meet human need can further be seen by considering how he met the needs of a whole cast of characters in John's gospel.

Chapter two tells the story of a bridegroom about to suffer lasting embarrassment because he had run out of wine at his wedding party. But Jesus saved him from his predicament by supplying additional wine of a

quality exceeding anything that had been served.

In chapter three a religious leader who sensed a need for additional direction is introduced to the new birth and the kingdom of God. Chapter four tells of a woman who had unsuccessfully sought to extinguish her thirst for life in a number of husbands. In Jesus she discovered a "living water" that quenched her thirst for life so that she never thirsted again. Also in chapter four, an official's son who was near death was given life by a word from Jesus.

Chapter five tells about Jesus healing a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years. The sixth chapter tells about a hungry multitude of listeners who were without food or any means of getting any and were miraculously fed by Jesus.

You read in chapter eight about a woman who had been caught in adultery and brought before Jesus for judgement. But instead of pronouncing judgement upon her he forgave her and gave her counsel for new life.

In chapter nine Jesus gave sight to a man born blind, which infuriated the religious leaders of the day. Chapter eleven has Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead to strengthen the weak faith of his disciples.

In the twentieth chapter he removed the doubt of a disciple by a personal resurrection appearance. Finally, in chapter twenty-one he restored a failing disciple who had denied him, and commissioned him to renewed service.

All these people and many more had their needs met out of the great reservoir of fullness that was in Jesus. He was a never ending source of help to those in need then, and will be to those who come to him in faith now.

Jesus: A Limitless Source Of Grace

John writes, "From his fullness we all have received grace upon grace." What does "grace upon grace" mean? It simply means more grace, grace added to grace, or grace piled upon grace. It was a way of describing the limitless source of God's help that has been made available in Jesus. It is a way of saying that Jesus can offer us help to meet every difficult situation or occasion in life and in every one of them there will be a need for his grace.

We have a need for one type of grace when all seems to be going well, and need for another when nothing seems to go right. We need one grace when we are young and immature, and another when we are old and childish. We need one grace when we feel great, and another when we are depressed, discouraged, and at the point of despair. We need one grace when we are certain about everything, and another when we aren't sure of anything. We need one grace when we're walking victoriously, and another when we're experiencing defeat. We need one grace to bear our own burdens, and another to bear the burdens of others. We need one grace for the loving brother or sister, and another for the hard and difficult to get along with.

In Jesus there is sufficient grace to meet every need we may ever have. When grace has met one need and another comes along, there will be sufficient grace in Jesus to meet that one as well.

The poet has caught the inexhaustible resource of help that is offered in Jesus in his poem

He Giveth More Grace.

He giveth more grace as the burdens grow greater.
He sendeth more strength as the labors increase.

To added affliction, He addeth his mercy.
To multiplied trials His multiplied peace.
When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done.
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources.
Our Father's full giving is only begun.
His love has no limit. His grace has no measure.
His power no boundary known unto men;
And out of his infinite riches in Jesus,,,
He giveth and giveth, and giveth again. 11

ENDNOTES

1. John 1:16 RSV
2. Colossians 1:19
3. Colossians 2:9,10
4. John 6:35
5. John 8:12
6. John 10:9
7. John 10:11
8. John 11:25,26
9. John 15:5
10. John 14:6
11. Author Unknown

HIS AMAZING INVITATION

Jesus offers us a life that promises to be a hundred times better than anything we might experience elsewhere and assures us that it will continue on into "eternal life". Nevertheless, each person must decide for himself whether or not he wants it. It is available to everyone, but not forced on anyone. Jesus provides, invites, and even urges us to receive it, but the response is left to us. His only coercion is that of love. He invites, but each of us must RSVP.

Participation with Jesus was always by invitation. He kindly asked people to join him. No one became his disciple through intimidation or compulsion, and no one was ever obligated to receive anything he offered. All that was his to give was freely given and freely received. He told his disciples, "Freely you have received, freely give,"¹

Since Jesus was forever calling people to follow him or receive from him, no consideration of his life and ministry would be complete without examining some of those invitations. Before we do, let's first take note of the main invitation he extended and to whom it was offered.

His Main Invitation

The life and blessings Jesus offered resulted from entering into a relationship with him. That's why he was continually calling people to, "Come to me," "Follow me," "Learn from me," "Believe in me," and "Abide in me." His invitation of invitations was, "Enter into a personal relationship with me and receive from me all that I have to give!"

To Whom Did Jesus Extend His Invitations?

To whom did Jesus extend his invitations? Amazing as it was to the religious leaders of his day, and even to some today, his invitations were often extended to those considered to be sinners. He said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."² His invitation to receive his love, forgiveness, light, life, and freedom was offered not only to those considered to be morally upright, but to those who were known to be notorious as well. His parable of the Wedding Banquet helps us to see that his invitation was offered to everyone regardless of birth, wealth, rank, or station. He has the king in the story ordering his servants, "Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find."³ His inner circle of disciples reflected the openness of his invitation. His core group was made up of everyone from coarse fishermen to vile, hated tax collectors and assassins.

Jesus extended invitations to both men and women, and to small and large groups. Let's take a look at six of them.

The Idolatrous

On one occasion a rich young man came inquiring of Jesus, "what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"⁴ Jesus told him to "obey the commandments." "Which ones?" he inquired. Jesus listed several. The young man responded, "All these I have kept, what do I still lack?" Jesus knew that he hadn't kept them, and was actually guilty of violating the very first commandment because he was putting the love of money before his love for God. So he identified his problem in the answer he gave him: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell you possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me." When the young man heard this he refused the invitation and "went away

sad, because he had great wealth."

By nature we all, like that young man, have broken the first commandment (as well as the rest). We have "exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator,"⁵ Jesus therefore calls us, as he did that young man, to forsake whatever we have placed above and before God and come follow him. He promises to rescue us from the sure disaster that is coming upon all who worship and serve anything other than the true and living God.⁶

The Weary And Burdened

Jesus issued a threefold invitation to everyone when he said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."⁷

His threefold invitation was, 1) "come to me," 2) "take my yoke upon you," and 3) "learn from me." He was calling people to come find rest for their souls in his salvation, be yoked to him and experience refreshing new life, and learn from him in order to begin thinking and living like him.

Then Come Follow Me And Take Up Your Cross

Jesus didn't hesitate to inform people that his call had three prerequisites. All three were logical and reasonable. He said, "If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."⁸

First, he said that to be his disciple one must deny himself. What does that mean? It means that to be a disciple of Jesus you must decide to live no longer for yourself and your own self aggrandizement and advancement, but for Jesus and his cause.⁹ You must come to believe as Paul did when he became a disciple, "Whatever was my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him..."¹⁰ When you become a disciple of Jesus you must realize that the new life you receive from him is not given to keep and spend on yourself, but on Jesus and others.

Second, to be a disciple of Jesus you must take up your cross daily. What does that mean? The cross was an execution instrument. It was used to execute those guilty of capital crimes. Usually the condemned were required to carry their own cross to the place of execution. It was a painful and demeaning experience. Jesus was saying that to become his disciple would entail taking up one's cross daily and voluntarily accepting the persecution, pain, and shame that comes with it.

Finally, becoming a disciple of Jesus means that you must start following him and keep on doing so for a lifetime. This necessitates trusting him for freedom, and new life, doing what he says, and walking in his footsteps.

Help For New Life

To enable his disciples to live the new life he had called them to, Jesus promised to give them the Holy Spirit. "Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." John explains that "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him, were later to receive... since Jesus had not yet been glorified."¹²

After Jesus was glorified in his resurrection and ascension, the

Apostle Peter declared that everyone who would receive him as Lord and repent and be baptized in his name would have their sins forgiven and "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."¹³ The Holy Spirit would be the believers' promised Helper who would enable them to rise up out of their weakness and daily follow him. ¹⁴ Peter declared that this "promise is for you and your children and all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call."¹⁵

Share In His Ministry

Jesus issued a call to Peter and Andrew to "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."¹⁶ Though this call was given to these two Apostles, it is consistent with the invitation Jesus extended not only to first century disciples, but to those of every age. He calls all his disciples to be his witnesses, ambassadors, and fellow servants. His final great commission to his disciples was to share in his ministry. He called upon them to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."¹⁸

The Final Invitation

Jesus said that his final invitation would be extended at the last judgement to those who proved to be faithful and true to him, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."¹⁹

We Must Respond Without Delay

Jesus said that those who heeded his call would need to respond to it without delay. He told about two people who said they wanted to follow him, but each had something else to do first. He made it clear to both that if they were going to follow him, he would have to have first call on their lives and that they would have to respond to that call immediately.²⁰

In those two stories he taught that in everything there is a crucial moment. If we don't act at that moment, it is doubtful that we ever will. The time to respond to the invitation of Jesus is at once when our hearts are stirred.

ENDNOTES

1. Matthew 10:8
2. Matthew 9:13
3. Matthew 22:9
4. Cf Matthew 19:16-22
5. Romans 1:25
6. Cf I Thessalonians 1:9,10
7. Matthew 11:28-30
8. Luke 9:23
9. Cf II Corinthians 5:15
10. Philippians 3:7-9
11. Cf John 3:16; 8:31,32; 15:14; I John 2:6; I Peter 2:21
12. John 7:37-39
13. Acts 2:36-38
14. John 14: 16,17
15. Acts 2:39
16. Mark 1:17

17. Cf Acts 1:8, 3; 15; 5:32; 10:39; 5:18-14:31; 22:15; II Corinthians 20
18. Matthew 28:19, 20
19. Matthew 25: 34
20. Luke 9:59-62

HIS AMAZING WARNING

It has been said that only a true friend warns. Others will not care enough or be willing to pay the price to alert us of impending danger.

People don't like to be warned, particularly of the consequences of their sin and of judgement to come. The story of God sending prophets to warn his people is the story of their being rejected, persecuted, and killed. Jesus said to those of his day: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you..." And again, "Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs."1 Stephen, the first Christian martyr, cried out against his executioners, "Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One."2

Although Jesus knew what had happened to those who had issued warnings against sin and impending judgement in the past, nevertheless his love compelled him to warn of such danger also. To keep his disciples from being taken unaware, or from being deceived, Jesus was forever bidding them, "Beware!," "Take heed," "Look to yourselves," "Watch and pray," .

A good part of Jesus' ministry was devoted to issuing warnings. This was true of his Apostles as well. In his farewell address to the Elders of the Ephesian church Paul exhorted, "Be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears."3

The Grace Of Jesus' Warnings

To bring together the many warnings of Jesus and read them one after another could prove to be a disturbing experience. Having already learned of the great love he has for us, we can be assured that his warnings are not meant to be harsh denunciations or judgements of condemnation, but rather appeals of love to save us from fatal mistakes and the damning consequence of sin.

When the warnings of Jesus are carefully considered they seem to be not only logical, but reasonable and gracious as well. They come across as caring, kindly cautions of one who deeply loves and wants to save people from disaster. As the rainbow follows the dark storm cloud, so his blessings follow those who heed his warnings.

Though the warnings of Jesus are numerous, for the most part they can be gathered under seven headings. Let's consider them.

The Danger Of Refusing To Hear and Obey

Jesus warned of the danger of refusing to hear and obey the word of God. He said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."4 In the parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders he denounced the foolish builder who built his house on the sand saying, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash" 5

In the parable of the Sower he declares that when the word of God is sown into any kind of heart except a receptive, understanding, obedient heart, it will end

up in disaster.⁶ When the rich man in the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus cried out to Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his five brothers of the awfulness of hell, "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses, and the prophets (the word of God); let them listen to them.'"⁷ Warning of the importance of hearing and obeying his words Jesus said, "As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day."⁸

The Danger Of Living And Dying In Sin

Jesus warned against living and dying in sin. He used a hyperbole to emphasize the awfulness of sin's consequence: "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes, you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."⁹

In the parable of the Rich Fool Jesus condemned the rich man who stored up his crops so that he could live a life of selfish ease. God calls him a "fool" saying, "This very night your soul is required of you." He concludes the parable with, "This is how it will be with anyone who stores things up for himself but is not rich toward God."¹⁰

The Danger of Self Deception of Hypocrisy.

Jesus warned against the self deception of hypocrisy which he said was religious play-acting. He warned against being outwardly religious while having a heart far from God.

The religious leaders of his day were a prime example of the hypocrisy he condemned and he continually spoke out against them. He warned the crowds, "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."¹⁴ "Do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach." "Everything they do is done for men to see."¹⁵

The whole twenty-third chapter of the gospel of Matthew is devoted to recording seven judgements Jesus pronounced upon the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. The most condemning words of his entire ministry to were spoken to them. He called them everything from filthy cups to a "brood of vipers." He said that they were "blind guides" and were "full of greed, self indulgent ...hypocrisy and wickedness." These words were meant not only for the religious hypocrites of his day, but for those of every age who live in the self-deception that an outward piety which masks a rotten heart is acceptable to God.

The Warning Against Coveteousness

Jesus warned against being coveteous. Jesus warned against getting caught up in coveteousness and the greedy pursuit of things because it amounted to idolatry. To covet means to long for, lust after, desire; usually in an evil sense. You are coveting when the driving force in your life is an intense desire to have power, fame, fortune, materialism, or someone of the opposite sex. Coveteousness is illustrated in the story of king David watching Bathsheba bathe and becoming so overcome with desire for her that he set aside his commitment to God and had her brought to his bedroom and committed adultery with her.

Coveteousness is a form of idolatry because it puts the pursuit of

things above the pursuit of God. Paul writes, "Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."16

In view of this, is it any wonder that Jesus warned, "Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."17 And again, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?"18 He made it clear that, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon (a word for material wealth)."19

The Warning Against False Prophets

Jesus warned against false prophets because he said they perverted the truth and turned people away from him. He warned, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."20 And again, "False Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect if that were possible."21 "Many will come *in* my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many."22

By the middle of the first century Christianity had already begun to be plagued by false Christs, false prophets, false Apostles, a false gospel, and a false church. False prophets and false teachers have proven to be more of a detriment to the Christian faith than any other single thing. Is it any wonder that Jesus issued warnings against them?

Beware Of Rejecting Christ

Since Jesus presented himself to be "the way, and the truth, and the life," man's savior from sin, death, and hell, and the "door" into eternity, is it any wonder that he said, "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be."23

He said that the work of the Holy Spirit would be to convince mankind "about sin and righteousness and judgement: about sin because men do not believe in me."24

He told Nicodemus that "whoever believed in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."25

John the baptist added, "Whoever puts his faith in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."26

The Warning Against Hell

Jesus warned about hell more than he did anything else. He said more about it than any other person in the entire Bible. He spoke of it in vivid terms as though he had personally seen it. He described it as a place of relentless torment "where the fire never goes out" and where one is never consumed.27

In the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man he pictured the rich man in hell after his death "where he was in torment" and had him crying out to Abraham, "I am in agony in this fire."28 He described hell as a place of "eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." There they would "be tormented day and night for ever and ever."29 He also made it clear that it would be the destiny of those who lived and died in unbelief. They too would

join the devil and his angels and "go away to eternal punishment."³⁰

Four Warnings About The Warnings

To add to these seven categories of warnings, here are four warnings about the warnings which need to be heeded.

1. Beware of putting up a moral umbrella over yourself as you hear these warnings thinking that nothing in them applies to you.
2. Beware of hearing these warnings only to pass them off to others to whom you think they apply, more than to yourself.
3. Beware of thinking that all is well in your life and that these warnings have nothing to say to you. You may be the very one they are speaking to.
4. Beware lest you heed these warnings too late. In most of the illustrations Jesus used in his warnings, the warning had been neglected until it was too late.

The Warned Are Without Excuse

Whoever hears the warnings of Jesus and does not heed them is without excuse. He is doubly guilty. He is guilty of his sin, and guilty of rejecting Jesus, God's means of deliverance from sin. Jesus declared, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."³¹

In view of this, consider s final warning from Jesus: "Consider carefully what you hear."³²

ENDNOTES

1. Matthew 23:37; Luke 11:47,48
2. Acts 7:52
3. Acts 20:31
4. Matthew 7:21
5. Matthew 7:26,27
6. Matthew 23:3-23
7. Luke 16:29
8. John 12:47,48
9. Matthew 5:29,30
10. Luke 12:16-21
11. Luke 13:3,4
12. Matthew 18:3
13. Matthew 25:41
14. Luke 12:1
15. Matthew 23:3,5
16. Ephesians 5:5 RSV
17. Luke 12:15
18. Luke 9:25
19. Matthew 6:24 NASV
20. Matthew 7:15
21. Matthew 24:11,24
22. Matthew 24:5
23. John 8:24
24. John 16:8,9
25. John 3:18
26. John 3:36

27. Mark 9:42-49
28. Luke 16:23,24
29. Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10
30. Matthew 25:46
31. Luke 12:48
32. Mark 4:24

HIS AMAZING RESURRECTION

As has been noted in previous chapters, Jesus demonstrated that he was God become man by living a perfect life, speaking with a wisdom no one could refute, and by performing miracles only God could. He proclaimed "good news" to the poor and brought freedom to those imprisoned in their own failures, mistakes, weaknesses, passions, and sins. He opened the eyes of those living in ignorance, prejudice, envy, malice, and hatred. He brought grace to the undeserving and restored people to a right relationship with God.

Though he did all this and his message of truth brought a wonderful new life to those who received him, it created hatred and bitterness in many who rejected him. They came to hate him so that they unjustly tried him as an enemy of God, a trouble maker, and an evil sinner. Finally they had him executed in an attempt to silence him.

Evil Did Not Triumph

After the enemies of Jesus had him nailed to a cross and he died, that seemed to be the end of him and all that he stood for. Hate and brute force had triumphed over love. Falsehood had won out over truth. Evil had been victorious over righteousness. All that was cruel, dark, and ugly had overcome all that was beautiful, good, and holy. Had Jesus stayed in the grave it would have been so. He was raised from the dead three days after he died signifying that he and all that he stood for would live on in triumph. God raised him from the dead to guarantee that no matter how long the struggle or how painful the wounds, righteousness would eventually triumph, truth would win out, and love would be the ultimate victor however it might seem to the contrary.

Jesus Our Contemporary

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead assures us that he is not merely yesterday's hero or history's high point. He is not lost in the past, he's never out of date, and he's never outmoded; he is our contemporary. He is of our age and our time. Because he is alive forever and lives in our day and time; we can walk with him in fellowship, listen to his counsel with assurance that his words are words of truth, kneel in his presence in worship, confession, and prayer, and meet life with the encouragement and strength he gives.

Becoming disciples of the resurrected, living Jesus will not lead us to perpetuate a memory but into a life of fellowship with a living Person from whom we can obtain forgiveness and peace with God, deliverance from emptiness and futility of life, and freedom from whatever enslaves us. Becoming his disciple will produce faith in us that will enable us to see the storms and trials of life as blessings rather than a curse. It will give us the ability to stand at death's door and cry out, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

His Work Continues

Because Jesus was raised from the dead and is alive, there is uninterrupted continuity in his work in this world. His words, "It is finished," uttered on the cross, signaled the completion of only the first chapter of his great story - the redemption story. As Luke put it, what "Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven."¹ He has now begun the second great chapter - it's all about what he will

continue to do.

While in this world in a human body the work of Jesus was limited. Now that he is resurrected and has ascended to the right hand of God, he has returned as Spirit and has taken up residence in the lives of the members, of his church. His church has become his new earthly body.³ With this body his work has enlarged to immense proportions. To compare the work he did while here bodily with what he now does through his church would be like comparing a stage play with a network television production. The whole world has now become his field of work and history has become his work day.

The resurrection means that Jesus is at work in a wonderful new way continuing to do what he did when he was here in person. More than ever the "good news" is being preached to the poor, freedom is being proclaimed to the imprisoned, the blind are recovering their sight, the oppressed are finding release, and grace is being freely offered to the undeserving.⁴

The Best Is Yet To Come

The resurrection assures us that this is not all there is to life; the best is yet to come.

Peggy Lee, the torch singer of past fame, used to sing a song that was a satire on the disappointments that follow even the great experiences of life in this world. She sang of the disappointment of going to a circus as a child. Then she sang of other let downs following several other highlight experiences. Finally she sang of her disillusionment with marriage.

After relating each experience she would ask, "Is that all there is?" Then she would break into the chorus singing, "If that's all there is my friends, then let's keep dancing, let's break out the booze and have a ball, if that's all, there is." The song sadly ended with life pointing to an inevitable suicide but she couldn't take her life because that would lead to the ultimate disappointment.

The resurrection of Jesus assures us that this life is not all there is. This is only the beginning. The best is yet to come! For those who come to faith in Jesus, this life is only the antechamber to eternity. Certainly, death is ahead, but it is only the doorway into eternity with Jesus where we will be forever with God in a glorious state of perfection in ourselves and in our surroundings.

The wonder of Jesus is that he came and made such wonderful provision for us in both time and eternity. It is all ours when we receive him as Lord and Savior. If you haven't received him, will you do it today? "This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life, he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."⁵

Here is the response God calls for in receiving Jesus: "if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."⁶ "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."⁷

ENDNOTES

1. Acts 1:1
2. I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19
3. Ephesians 1:22
4. Cf. Luke 4:18,19
5. I John 5:11,12
6. Romans 10:9,10
7. Acts 2:38

LIVING IN THE LIGHT WHILE PASSING THROUGH THIS DARKNESS

By John Hendee

THIS SERIES OF BOOKS IS DESIGNED TO HELP THOSE WHO HAVE CHOSEN THE LIGHT (JESUS) AND HAVE CHOSEN TO WALK IN THE LIGHT (JESUS). IT MIGHT BE A JOURNEY OF DECADES OR DAYS, DEPENDING ON HOW LONG WE LIVE AFTER BECOMING A DISCIPLE OF JESUS. IT CAN BE A JOURNEY MIXED WITH GREAT JOY AND GREAT SUFFERING. If we are in the Light, we know that this present darkness is passing. We won't be here forever, thanks to God. We are not alone. We will be with Jesus, the Eternal Life, soon. Stay in the light.

CELEBRATING IN THE LIGHT VS. SUFFERING IN THE DARKNESS

We are talking about either Light or darkness, not shades of gray.

It is one extreme or the other. Which one it is for each of us will depend on the choice each of us makes.

It is our call, our decision, our choice.

The world is described as the "dominion of darkness" in the Bible.

This dark world has its gods.

Psalm 82:5

⁵ The 'gods' know nothing, they understand nothing.

They walk about in darkness;

all the foundations of the earth are shaken.

The god of this age has blinded people

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

2 Corinthians 4:4 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Ephesians 4:1

This "blinding of the minds" results in spiritual blindness and darkness. That leads to turning off our brain to the truth. We become hardened, closed, and cold to God. We cut off the messages coming from God.

Our receptors only respond to promptings and messages from the "god of this world." We become his slaves, living (and dying) to carry out his will. The "god of this age" doesn't want to lose anyone he is holding captive. He will fight to keep you. He doesn't want to go down alone!

Light or darkness? It is our choice.

What draws us to the darkness to start with? It is pretty simple.

For everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life— comes not from the Father but from the world. 1 John 2:16

It is our love for or lust for what is attractive and desirable, but in the end destructive. While we lust for these illicit, damaging things, they lead us down the path into darkness.

Esau had this problem. In Genesis 25:29-34 we read that he had to have something. He couldn't

wait. He wanted it and he wanted it now. He sold his birthright to get it. You could say he sold his soul for something he had to have that satisfied his short-term wishes, but that was damaging to him in the long run. He couldn't wait. "Hey, it's just a bowl of soup." But it was a bowl with deep implications. It was dark soup. "Just once," I'm sure he thought. "What can it hurt?" But he crossed a line in his head and heart that changed everything for his future. He had to have it. He couldn't live without it. It would be more accurate to say he didn't want to live without it. It says he despised his birthright. He took what he had been promised as the oldest son for granted. He didn't appreciate or value it and what it meant. He valued something in the moment and was willing to trade what he was promised for the long haul in order to have something NOW. His choice took him into the realm of darkness where there was weeping, pleading, and gnashing of teeth afterwards. It seemed so innocent, so unimportant at the time. How wrong he was.

Isaiah gives an interesting description of those living in darkness.

Isaiah 5:20

*Woe to those who call evil good
and good evil,
who put darkness for light
and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet
and sweet for bitter.*

We, too, can cross into the realm of darkness when we try and take what is bad, damaging, destructive, evil, and bitter and say it is good, sweet, right, and OK.

But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! Matthew 6:23

What Jesus is saying is that if we live in the darkness where we are trying to justify what is really evil, then we have passed into darkness, the zone where it is REALLY DARK. We are in the deepest of pits.

To live in darkness or light is a personal, individual choice that every living person must make. Most think they can venture into the darkness, frolic in its delights, and get out of there without being hurt. It is sort of like "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas." The problem with that saying is that it is a lie. Proverbs speaks of that. There is a way that seems right to man, but ends in darkness and death.

Sorry, but you take it home with you.

Now the interesting truth is that we all start in the darkness. We are all in the same boat, and its name is Darkness.

More than a boat, it is a death cruise. It is a cursed ship. We are doomed if we stay on board. But help has come. A rescuer has come. There is a life boat.

The LIGHT has come.

*The people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.” Matthew 4:16*

*For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us
the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6*

God has a plan as to how to free us and rescue all of us who are slaves and prisoners in the darkness. He sent LIGHT to shine in our hearts. That LIGHT is the only thing that can guide us or lead us out of the darkness. It can save us and change our hard heart. When we see Jesus and what he has done to rescue us, how great his love is, what a huge price He had to pay to free us, our hearts will soften and we can be released from the darkness.

We can get off this condemned, cursed ship. It is our choice. Some prefer staying on the death cruise. What a terrible choice. It might look like it now, but it IS NOT a party cruise. Its end will be more horrible than that of the Titanic.

The light came, the life boat came, but people loved the boat named darkness.

*This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light
because their deeds were evil. John 3:19*

*When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me
will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12*

All have a decision to make. Do we want to live in the Light or the darkness?

In making that decision, we need to know that the darkness IS passing.

*Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is
passing and the true light is already shining. 1 John 2:8*

Being surrounded by darkness is temporary for those who choose the Light. It is permanent for those who chose the darkness, as in never ending. For them it will never end. Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 25:30 describes the destiny of those who choose the darkness in this life. Eternity, or hell, will be an extension of what they choose in this life, darkness. It says they will be in OUTER darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth as they realize what a bad choice they made. Do you know what it feels like to know you blew it, you missed it, that you passed up the best for a poor choice? This is that feeling on steroids, for eternity. This is serious stuff.

Paul says we Christians were once darkness.

*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.
Ephesians 5:8*

Jesus came to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. Acts 26:18

*Jesus came ⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace. Luke 1:79*

The Light is shining so those living in darkness can escape.

He will guide us out of the realm of darkness into a new life for eternity.

³⁵ Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. ³⁶ Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light." John 12:35,36

⁴⁶ I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. John 12:46

It is our choice to be children of Light or children of darkness. We don't have to stay in the darkness.

When we choose the Light, we are forgiven, justified, exonerated, freed, cleansed, filled, and liberated. We are made right with God. It is a free gift with free passage out of darkness into the Light. Living in the Light is so incredibly rewarding, fulfilling, and enriching. It is what we were created for. We were created to live IN RELATIONSHIP with our heavenly Father, in the Light. We weren't created to live in darkness.

It's our choice. But it is a choice with consequences.

Now even though the darkness is passing, those of us who have chosen to live in the LIGHT have to spend our years of life here on earth surrounded by darkness and those choosing to live in it.

It is not an easy journey!

It wasn't for Jesus. It won't be for us. Once we choose the LIGHT, we will still face challenges in life and very likely will experience suffering, persecution, unexplainable situations, and events. We will suffer losses, hurts, etc. Be strong. We aren't alone. The darkness is passing. It will end. We have been called from the darkness.

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.1
Peter 2:9*

We heard the CALL, and bailed out of or off of the ship of death. We are in Jesus.

We need to understand that we will live with a new TENSION the rest of our life here on earth. Don't be confused by that. It is normal. It is a result of the choice we made and we will need to continue making or renewing it every day.

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, Galatians 5:16,17

That tension is caused by HAVING TO CHOOSE between living in light or darkness every hour of every day for the rest of our life. While we changed ships, we chose Jesus, we are children of Light with all the benefits of that we will need to continue to decide and choose to be faithful to Jesus every day. The darkness (the dark side) will still be calling us to return. Satan wants us back. He will pull out the big guns. He is ticked off with our decision.

We have to continue to choose between Jesus and the light or the way of darkness or Satan. The god of this world is prowling around seeking for someone to deceive. The new tension is not a bad thing. It can strengthen us and build us up.

I ran across a picture some years ago. I don't know where it came from.

Jesus and Satan are arm wrestling.

What do you think they are arm wrestling over?

For me, as I interpret it, they are wrestling over you, over me.

We know Jesus will win in the end of time. Satan will be defeated. Satan can't and won't win.

Who will win in our life now? What determines who will win and who will be the most powerful of the two in our life?

It is the one we choose. We give the power in and over our life to the one we choose to obey and trust.

Choose to live in darkness and Satan wins but you lose.

Choose to live in the Light and Jesus wins, and you win too.

It is up to us.

Satan doesn't give up easily. Certainly Jesus doesn't. They both want us with them for eternity.

Satan doesn't want to suffer alone. Jesus doesn't want to celebrate alone.

The daily choice we have to make is between going after the false promises Satan offers us or the WAY Jesus offers. This choice puts us in a battle. Both Satan and Jesus are persuasive. All of Satan's promises are poison filled candies. They end in death.

Jesus' promises give life.

In the New Testament this conflict is described as being between the old man and the new man; the flesh and the spirit; the light and darkness. Take your pick. It is the same thing.

We need to stay in the light, close to Jesus. What draws us to and keeps us in Jesus? It's love.

We love because He loved us first.

1 John 4:19

He proved His love for us. John 3:16

Yet we are vulnerable. Just as married people are vulnerable to infidelity, so are we with our relationship with Jesus. Paul warns us to be alert, to be sincere and pure in our allegiance to Jesus.

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may

somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:3
It is a war.

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. 1 Peter 2:11

We are told to arm ourselves.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:10-16

But in this battle we can be victorious in Jesus.

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Romans 8:37
I remember the great basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski saying of basketball, "This is a mind game." The same can be said of living in the world, choosing between darkness and Light. It is a mind game better referred to as a war.

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Proverbs 4:23

What we give our heart to, is what will control us and our thinking and decisions.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1,2

We need to think differently. We need to see things from God's perspectives, and truth, not Satan's.

We were darkness but now are light in the Lord.

For you were once darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light. Ephesians 5:8

We are to shine in a wayward and crooked generation.

"so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky. Philippians 2:15

We are to help those still trapped in the darkness just as someone helped us. We are to try and

rescue those trapped in the villages of deceit. We are to risk ourselves, to go and pillage those villages of the captives living there.

Rescue those being led away to death;

hold back those staggering toward slaughter.

*¹² If you say, "But we knew nothing about this,"
does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?*

Proverbs 24:11,12

We are light; let our light shine.

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Matthew 5:14

The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Romans 13:12

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. I Peter 2:10-12

Have nothing to do with deeds of darkness.

Live to honor and please Jesus.

Venture out to rescue those in the darkness.

Be faithful till death.