



THE GOD I LOVE

By Glenn and Ethel Coon

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CHAPTER ONE

HOW I KNOW GOD LOVES ME—PERSONALLY

HILDA WAS REARED in a Christian home, but Christianity did not appeal to her. She was not a bad girl. She just did not understand the wonderful love of Jesus.

As Hilda was growing up, her brothers and sisters were all baptized and united with the church. But she held back. Maturing into womanhood, she married and had three children. Even though she realized that her children needed the Lord, Hilda did not accept the challenge to begin the better life. Then her husband died.

Sometime later, Hilda remarried. Now it was discovered that, as much as she wanted another child, it was physically impossible. This the doctor made clear with a simple explanation that left Hilda almost heart-broken.

An Answer Undeserved

It was at this time that Hilda prayed, "O Lord, please let me have another baby. I want so very much to have another child." But she never promised the Lord that she would serve Him. Nor did she vow to teach the child she so much wanted about God's love if her prayers were answered. She merely prayed and wept before the Lord,

Within six weeks Hilda was pregnant. Of all things! She could have a baby regardless of the physical "impossibility"! Her doctor had not made a mistake. It was nothing less than a miracle from the hand of the Lord, whom Hilda had still not accepted

When Hilda's baby, Sharon, was born, it was observed that she had a tiny lump in her left side about the size of a small marble. Neither Hilda nor the doctor were particularly concerned. But as the days stretched into weeks and months, Sharon did not show the ruddy, healthy development that one would expect of a growing baby. And by the time the next Christmas came, less than a year after her birth, fever developed. By New Year's Eve it had increased to around 105 degrees. It was then that Sharon was rushed to the hospital.

A Hopeless Case?

The specialist sent Hilda home and later in the evening called her, instructing her not to return to the hospital that night. In sad tones the doctor said, "You should think of Sharon as you saw her last, and not as she looks now, for she will pass away before morning. There is absolutely no hope. Still, be assured, we will do all we can for her."

A few hours before the New Year was to be ushered in, Hilda and her good Methodist husband slipped over to her sister Mary's home. She had called the hospital and given them her sister's phone number so they could reach her there if necessary. Hilda and her husband, Dan, and her sister, Mary, discussed the grim situation. Mary, a devout Christian, suggested having her pastor and another minister come over to pray for Sharon. Hilda and Dan agreed to this. So Mary called them.

When the pastors arrived and were seated in Mary's home, Hilda could not restrain her tears. She knew in her heart that, barring God's intervention, Sharon would soon leave them. "I prayed for this child when pregnancy was a physical impossibility," Hilda explained, "and God gave her to me. Now I wonder if He would be willing to spare her life,"

Pastor Johnson kindly asked Hilda, "Do you know of any reason why God should not answer your prayer?" There were several other ways he could have asked the question. He could have bluntly

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demanded, "Have you fulfilled this condition to answered prayer, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me' (Ps. 66:18)?" Or he could have scolded, "Hilda, you know the truth. You were brought up in it. You have no excuse for not having given your heart to Christ long ago. Now, Hilda, you are only reaping what you have sown." But no, Pastor Johnson had partaken of the spirit and character of the One of whom it was prophesied, "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law," Isa. 42:3, 4.

This shows how to get people to accept God's law—by not smothering in any soul the smallest flame, which is likened to a smoking flax. There is scarcely a spark to be seen in that smoke. But the Lord is careful not to extinguish even one tiny, though hidden, spark. Nor will He count as nothing that unexpressed longing for the better life, that secret hunger, which is detected by none but Himself, It is written, "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." Isa. 50:4.

A Commitment

The Holy Spirit impressed Hilda to make a commitment to the Lord, She knew Pastor Johnson was the Lord's messenger sent to tell her of His love. Her reply was almost explosive. She blurted out in repentance: "I know plenty of reasons why the Lord should not answer my prayer!" Then she went on to state that, although she had been reared in a Christian home, she had never responded to the invitation of Jesus to bring her sins to Him and accept His cleansing love. The promise is: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9. Yes, God is "just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Rom. 3:26. Although "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), God can still be absolutely just, while at the same time forgiving and cleansing the repentant sinner. I say that is wonderful! Amazing"

Hilda recalled how, unrepentant and unsundered to the Lord, she had prayed for this baby. Also, how God had heard without her having fulfilled a single condition to answered prayer. Well might the words of the psalmist have been impressed upon her sad heart, "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." Ps. 103:10.

God knew all about Hilda's background. He understood the various circumstances of her early life which were the cause of her not being inclined after the Lord. It might have been an act of some professing Christian that unloving, un-Christlike. Or perhaps a word of cruel sanctimony and belittling of others. Or it could have been that scornful countenance of a professed Christian in discussing the mistakes of some tempted child of God. All of these things, and many others, could have had their part in beclouding Hilda's mind to the real Christ; His love and tenderness; His compassion and mercy. But now, as she sat there in the home of her sister, the Holy Spirit was picturing to her a different kind of Lord. He was One who had loved her, although she had never loved Him. She had never espoused His cause, yet He had in infinite mercy and love espoused hers, and given her a baby. And this, when medical science had declared it to be an impossibility.

When Hilda exclaimed, "Yes, Pastor Johnson, I know plenty of reasons why God should not hear my prayer to heal Sharon," she added a commitment. Said she, "But, whether or not He heals my baby, whether she lives or dies, I give my life to Him right now, unreservedly. I want to be His forever."

Pastor Johnson then turned to Dan, Hilda's kind-hearted husband, and asked, "What about you, Dan?"

Dan replied soberly, "As you know, I am a Methodist. I know that Christian families ought to be united as one. I am not sure that the teachings of your church are in every particular correct. I have not studied

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them. But I promise God this night that I shall, with Hilda, study these doctrines, If I find them to be scriptural, I shall cast in my lot with her and the church of her background."

We do not know the exact words of Pastor Johnson as he prayed that night for Sharon. After all, it was not the specific wording that counted. It was the deep surrender of Hilda and Dan that God considered. When they rose from their knees, they thanked the two ministers for their sympathetic interest in their problem, and for coming over to help them. Then they returned to their home.

The New Year was ushered in with tears and praises as on bended knee they confirmed their surrender to Jesus Christ. And their united request to spare the life of little Sharon was wafted heavenward. After their prayer, they sat on the edge of the bed where they had knelt. Sleep was far from their eyes. After some time, they again knelt and prayed to God. Again they sat on the edge of the bed and talked together. Still once more they knelt, and besought God in behalf of their baby.

The Miracle of Love

By this time the hands of the clock pointed to around 2:30 A.M. Climbing into bed, they slept soundly until they were awakened by the phone ringing at 7:30 A.M. It was the doctor. "Hilda," he began, "I didn't steep a wink all night. I was in Sharon's room every half hour. Each time she showed improvement. Today you may come and take your baby home. She has recovered!" Then he added, "In a few weeks, after she has regained her strength, we will do surgery on that little lump in her side,"

Hilda and Dan were jubilant and awed! Sharon was healed! A few weeks later, she was returned to the hospital for the surgery. When it was over, the nurses reported to Hilda: "The little lump in Sharon's side was a baby."

Hilda gasped. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"Sharon was supposed to have been a twin," said the nurse. "But instead of the other twin being developed normally, it was enveloped in Sharon's side. There were tiny bones and hair in that little lump. But now everything is all right." I am not sure the nurse's explanation was medically correct. But the miracle of little Sharon's healing had happened.

Today Sharon and her husband are Christian workers in Riverside, California. And Hilda and Dan are devoted children of the living God, thrilled to know that God loves them personally.

This is the God I love! What Hilda discovered, others have also discovered. They, too, have often had to learn the hard way.

Behold This Love!

Moving back in reverent imagination 2,000 years, we observe a disciple of Jesus by the name of John. He is the thunderous young man who wants to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritans because of their prejudice against Christ. (Luke 9:54.) But the compassionate Saviour converts his prejudice and fiery zeal. Again, we see John observing the love light in the eyes of Jesus, just after John has lost his temper. There is no condemnation registered there, and no belittling. John beholds, also, Jesus dealing with the Pharisees who demand His condemnation of the woman taken in adultery. John hears the merciful words come from the lips of Jesus, "Neither do I condemn thee." John 8:11. On another occasion, Nicodemus tells John how Jesus spoke to his haughty heart that night on the mountain. Jesus said, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." John 3:17.

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John follows Jesus as He eats at the table of the wicked Zaccheus, as well as the greedy Matthew. He hears Jesus, on still another occasion, speak kindly, lovingly, tenderly with the woman who had had five husbands, and was now living in open sin. (John, chapter 4.) What a merciful Lord John has found! What a forgiver! What a mercy extender! And to cap it all, He forgives, cleanses, and saves a thief right there beside Him on the cross of execution. It is a thief who, but a little while before, had ridiculed the One who now saves him! He promises the repentant thief eternal life-paradise, instead of eternal death, eternal separation from life and love.

No wonder John, thinking of himself as so unworthy and Christ so tender, writes of himself as the "one whom Jesus loved." It was as if he were saying, "Even me?" And the Lord replied, "Yes even you." No wonder he calls on the world to "Behold, what manner of love the Father bath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." 1 John 3:1. John seems to say, "I cannot describe it. I cannot portray it. I can merely call on you to see it for yourselves."

What Hilda felt, John had experienced. That is what Nicodemus beheld, too. And the woman of Samaria was brought face to face with a love that is infinite. A mercy that is immense. A tenderness that is heavenly. That is what Peter awakened to in the courtyard of Caiaphas, when Christ's forgiving eyes met his guilty gaze. That is what Saul, the cruel persecutor of Christians, discovered when he heard the voice of Jesus asking, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Acts 9:4. Later, after his name was changed to Paul, he cried out, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Not tribulation. Not distress. Not persecution. Not famine, Not even nakedness or peril, or sword. No, he triumphantly proclaimed, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. 8:35, 38, 39.

Moving farther back in point of time to Old Testament days, we observe the same love at work in the lives of unworthy men. Those were days of darkness. Those were years of idolatry. The chosen people of God, the professed light of the world, bowed down to calves of gold; Idols of brass and wood. They were carved out by filthy hands and sordid hearts.

Arms Encircle the Rebellious

Hear the poetic description of God's loving arms surrounding that rebellious, stubborn, seditious people: "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock.... (But] they provoked him. ... They sacrificed unto devils. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful," Deut. 32: 10-18. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Deut. 33:27.

Now hear David--adulterous, murderous David. Turning to God he exclaims, "I have sinned." He receives immediate assurance. "The Lord also hath put away thy sin." 2 Sam. 12:13.

Most Cruel Sinner-Saved

As in imagination we pass through these Old Testament days, let us behold the amazing life of Manasseh, king of Judah. He was the son of the good king Hezekiah, you may remember, who led Israel into so many reforms and new allegiances to God. But Manasseh had sinned and done wickedly. He had despised and hated the noblest, most innocent, godly men of his kingdom. He had slaughtered them. Here is, briefly, the account of this monster: "Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled

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Jerusalem from one end to another." 2 Kings 21:16, "One of the first to fall was Isaiah, who for over half a century had stood before Judah as the appointed messenger of Jehovah." Prophets and Kings, p. 382. "Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." Heb. 11:36-38. We cry out to Manasseh: You wretch! You beast in human form! You deserve to be struck down in one swift bolt of the lightnings of a consuming God!

Then we observe Manasseh as he is carried a prisoner to Babylon. "The Lord permitted their king to be captured by a band of Assyrian soldiers, who bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon, their temporary capital."--Prophets and Kings, p. 383. Tuning our ears, we hear words that leave us almost in shock: "He besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom." 2 Chron. 33: 12, 13.

Well might Manasseh, on his way to Babylon as a captive, meditate like this: "I killed Isaiah. I sawed others asunder. I cruelly mocked and scourged many people. I tormented innocent men and women. They fled in sheepskins and goatskins. They had to hide in caves and dens of the earth. In Jerusalem, the capital of my kingdom, blood of innocent sufferers flowed like a creek. Now what right do I have to cry to God and expect an answer?" But when he prayed, God "heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom." 2 Chron. 33:13. So declares the inspired Word of God, Manasseh can cry out through the eternal ages, I know God loves me personally!

Nebuchadnezzar

Among other Old Testament experiences, we have God's amazing, forgiving love extended to Nebuchadnezzar. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had taken God's people captive. He had boasted. He had exulted against the God of heaven. Among the captives of Judah were four men who were ten times wiser than his own wise men. One of these four was Daniel. He had shown his ability, not merely to reveal what the king had dreamed, but also to give the interpretation of the dream. The monarch was greatly impressed, but not converted. Nebuchadnezzar haughtily rebelled against God. The Lord had made clear that his kingdom of gold would pass away. Three other universal kingdoms would follow. But idolatrous Nebuchadnezzar later ridiculed the revelation. He boasted that his kingdom would never pass away!

To build his godless ego, he made an image all of gold. He set it up in the Plain of Dura. He made a decree. All both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, must bow down to his image. It must be in absolute submissive worship. It must be at the sound of the royal music. Three men refused to compromise the worship of their Maker. These were three of the men who had explained to the king his dream, (Daniel, chapter 2.) But pride and arrogance saturated the king's mind. He had the temerity to command the mightiest men of his army to fling these three stalwart Hebrews into his fiery furnace. It had been heated seven times above what it was "wont" to be heated. What rage against God! What rebellion against his Maker! It was then that he witnessed a spectacle of deliverance which was before unknown in all human history. He sees Christ, the Commander of heaven, the Potentate of the universe. Walking in the midst of the fire with His obedient, non-compromising children, Following this experience, King Nebuchadnezzar temporarily extolled the God of heaven and he had decreed that no one might, from that moment on, so much as speak even one word against the true God. But God does not force the will of His creatures. He draws the sinner by the hands of love. (Jer. 31:3.)

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Not long after this, Nebuchadnezzar returned to his sinful life of idolatry and total rebellion against the God of love. To warn him, God gave him a dream. It is recorded in Daniel chapter 4. This dream was of a tree so mighty that its branches seemed to reach out to the ends of the earth. It was so expansive that its fruit seemed to furnish all peoples of the earth with food. Cattle, the world over, could rest under it. People of all nations could dwell under its shade.

Daniel interpreted this dream, The king learned that he was represented by that mighty tree. His fame would cover the then-known world. Kings and princes would bow before him. Officers of state would worship him. People of all nations would hold him in reverence. What a tree! What a picture! What an interpretation!

But then came the sad follow-up. A voice cried out that this giant tree must be cut down. Daniel explained the meaning. It was that the king would be forced to abdicate his throne. He would be driven out into the fields with the cattle. And with the wild beasts. He would be compelled to live like an animal. His hair would grow like bird's feathers. His nails like bird's claws. This horrible experience would continue for seven full years. During this time he would lose his sanity. Demented, and bereft of the friendship of his trusted counselors, who would turn on him with disgust, he would walk and live like an ox.

But wonder of wonders! The great King of the universe accomplishes a miracle of love. He restores to Nebuchadnezzar his sanity. Then follows another miracle of divine grace; These very officers of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, who expelled him seven years before, now welcome him back as their ruler. A God of unspeakable love accepts this former wretch into divine favor. He forgives his sins. He claims him as His child!

Yes, this actually took place! History records it. Inspiration testifies to the fact. Think of all the persecutions perpetrated by Nebuchadnezzar! All the opportunities for repentance neglected! All the calls of mercy spurned! All the testimonies he had given to the God of heaven, only to backslide! Then God forgave!

Do you want to know what God is like? Let Hilda tell you. Let John, once thunderous but now converted, picture Him. Let converted Saul of Tarsus declare Him. Hear David, the psalmist, sing of Him. Watch Manasseh, the wretched blood-letter of innocent Isaiah and his friends; write it out in letters of gold. Yea, listen to King Nebuchadnezzar, He proclaims to the world: "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment," Dan. 4:3,

Personal Testimony

We have on record a cloud of witnesses to the love of God. We have barely tapped the testimonies! Millions of martyrs have lived and died for Christ. Their love and devotion was more precious than the plaudits of earth. Their cause was dearer to them than life itself.

When I was a little boy, Mother told me the story of the love of Jesus, and it broke my heart. I fell in love with Him. Since that day, my life has been faulty, but He has never failed me. When I was 9 years of age I had surgery. My Lord brought me through the appendectomy. When I was still young, something very serious happened to my knee. It would not heal. But again God saw me through. Later in life my wife was at death's door. God brought her back to health. In South America during a series of meetings, I was stricken down with dengue fever, The advice of the physicians was, Don't get out of bed. But throughout the entire siege, God gave me the strength to preach each night my turn came around. And I attended every night when my teammates preached.

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When the doctor told me in 1953 that I had cancer, God saw me through. We never gave up our revival itinerary. Then in 1959 I lay low. I overheard my doctor speaking to another. He indicated that he held out no hope. The cancer was terminal. But I was sustained, then and since. If God spares me a few more months, I shall be 71 years of age. God is still with me. We are carrying on an amazingly heavy preaching and writing schedule.

How do I know God loves me? He told me so in His Book, the Bible. How do I know God loves me personally? He gave His beloved Son to die for me on Calvary. How do I know God loves me personally? He has never once failed me in my weakness, my sinfulness, my sickness. He is always there.

Someday I shall see Him face to face, and be encircled in the forgiving smiles of a God to whom I have been reconciled, to sin no more. I shall bask in the sunlight of heaven. Plunge into the silvery spray of the river of the water of life, and forever be refreshed. I plan to recline under the shadow of the tree of life and never again become weary. I look forward to walking down those streets of gold, which mirror the form, the blessed person, and the forgiving face of my Saviour. It is all because of His saving grace. His mercy, His pardon. I invite you to fall in love with Jesus, my Lord, to meet me in that wonderful day so soon to come.

Lucy

We heard from the lips of Pastor M, T. Battle, of Takoma Park, Washington, D.C., the account of a girl whom we shall call Lucy. She was a teen-ager who became disgruntled. She had run away from home, much to the sorrow of her loving mother. Dissatisfied with the restrictions of the home, she decided to go out into the world to seek its tinsel. She would sip the sounds of worldly music. She would fellowship with its darkness.

In relating this story, my friend pictured the heartbroken mother on the continent of Africa, studying how she might reach her daughter with her message of love. She wanted to post, publicly, pictures of her daughter so she would know that the message was meant for her personally. But she had no picture of Lucy. After earnest study, the mother decided that she would do the only thing left for her to do. She had a picture of herself. She would have the local printer do some fliers with her picture on them. If Lucy saw her picture, she would read the message that went with it. It read, "I have never ceased to love thee." This was the only way she knew to attract the attention of her rebellious daughter. It might woo her back to the home of love; of endearment; of fellowship.

The fliers were finished. The mother took the bus and went to the city where she suspected Lucy had gone. On poles, on sides of buildings, and on trees, posters were placed. Usually at these locations were posted announcements of sports events and other festivities.

When all the fliers had been posted, Mother boarded the bus and returned home. There she wept and prayed for the return of her Lucy.

One day, Lucy was walking down the street. She observed a crowd of people around a pole. Lucy drew near. She was astonished to see the face of her own mother on one of the fliers. In greater astonishment, she read the words, "I have never ceased to love thee."

Strange emotions began to stir in her rebellious heart. They were tender, submissive emotions. Walking on, she saw another group of curious people looking at a sign on a building. She drew near in curiosity. Again she saw a picture of her loving mother. Underneath were the same words. "I have never ceased to love thee." Similar posters were seen on street after street. The same picture and love words met her gaze. Lucy could stand it no longer. With tears on her cheeks and with warmth in her heart, she rushed back to her temporary abode. There she gathered up her things, and hastily packed them. She was soon

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on a bus headed for home. It could not go fast enough to take her to the arms of the mother who had never ceased to love her.

From the time Adam and Eve left the home of their innocence until the day Lucy, and others, left the home of purity, our Lord's message to backslidden humanity is. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee," Jer. 31:3. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." 1 John 3:1. "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely" Hosea 14:4, comes ringing down the corridors of time for every rebellious, wandering son and daughter of Adam to hear, ponder, and decide whether he will choose to return to his Father's house or continue to wander in sin.

Dear one. You too, in reverent imagination, may see the face of Jesus in infinite love. He is wooing you to the One who "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," John 3:16.

You, with the psalmist, can jubilantly sing the 150th psalm:

"Praise ye the Lord.
Praise God in his sanctuary:
Praise him in the firmament of his power.
Praise him for his mighty acts:
Praise him according to his excellent greatness,
Praise him with the sound of the trumpet:
Praise him with the psaltery and harp.
Praise him with the timbrel and dance:
Praise him with stringed instruments and organs.
Praise him upon the loud cymbals:
Praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.
Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord.
Praise ye the Lord."

Prayer

Would you kneel now before the Lord and pray this prayer with me?

Dear Lord in heaven: I believe Your promise, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." Jer. 31:3

I believe that Your love is strong enough to forgive every sin I have committed. I pray, "Take away all iniquity." Hosea 14:2. Fulfill Your promise, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him." Hosea 14:4. I ask believingly because it is "impossible for God to lie." Heb. 6:18. I claim triumphantly that You have forgiven all my iniquity, That You love me freely and have healed my backslidings. I rejoice exceedingly that I am Your child. I cry out in holy joy, "I know God loves me personally!" I exclaim, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon" me that I should be a child of God, through Jesus Christ my Lord! Amen.

Review

1. God does not deal with us according to our merits. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." Ps. 103:10.

2. When one is almost without hope, God does not chide. He does not quench the little spark of hope in the heart. "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench." Is. 42:3.
3. Jesus does not condemn the guilty sinner. He gives him strength to sin no more. "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." John 8:11.
4. There is nothing we can do that will cause God to cease to love us. "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. 8:38, 39.
5. God's love is everlasting and full. "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." Jer. 31:3.
6. We cannot describe this love. We can only call upon others to feel it for themselves. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." 1 John 3:1.
7. God wants to forgive our sins, and to heal our back-sliding. "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from him." Hosea 14:4.

CHAPTER TWO

HOW I KNOW GOD ANSWERS PRAYER

DURING THE WAR of 1812, there was an American boy who passionately hated the British. An English gunboat was just offshore. This American boy, finding a large wasps' nest, plugged the end with mud. Then he cut the branch on which the nest hung, and took it to the gunboat. These British sailors had never seen a wasp's nest. As they heard the wasps humming inside, they asked what the noise was. They were told it was a hummingbird's nest. The British boys thought it really was, because they heard the humming. Then the boy said, "I have come to make you a present." He cautioned them not to open the nest until he was back on shore because the hummingbirds would follow him. So he left the nest with these boys and went back to the home shore. When the English sailors opened this "hummingbird's nest," the wasps swarmed out and went to work. Every boy had to take to the water.

Now that was the work of an enemy. But our Father in heaven is not that way! If His son asks of Him bread, He will not give him a stone. He will not give him wasps for hummingbirds—not our Father! Enemies do that, but not our Father! So we may look upon God through the gift of Calvary and see His attitude. If that does not cause us to know He freely gives, then look at His eyes and behold what loving, eager eyes they are. If we still cannot grasp it, think of Him as your Father—your Daddy. One father said to me, "I give my children anything they ask of me." He paused, then added, "unless there is a good reason why I should not." That is a father! That is a daddy! So look at the cross. (Rom. 8:32.) Look at God's eager eyes and think of Him as our Father. (2 Chron. 16:9, Luke 11:13.) These mental pictures will help us through our agony of believing that God loves us in spite of the reasons Satan presents to cause us to doubt.

God's Attitude

We cannot understand any Bible doctrine aright unless we study it in the light that streams from Calvary. Here we find God's attitude. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Rom. 8:32.

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We are studying God's attitude toward us as we pray. God's attitude is this: Since I gave My Son to die for you, you should know that anything you request is a minor gift in comparison to that supreme gift. Simple, isn't it? If I loved my neighbor enough to give my son to die for him, and later he came to me questioning whether I would give him food when he was hungry—that would be an insult. If I permitted my son to die for another boy, and that same boy later needed money to make a trip to the hospital, and I had it, would it not be an insult for him to question whether I would give it to him, since I had already given him my son? So the bright rays that shine from Calvary reveal the attitude of God toward us and our prayers. "He that spared not his own Son [His only Son, John 3:16], but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Rom. 8:32.

Agony of Faith

Therefore, as we come to the Lord, agonizing in prayer, the agony is not to overcome God's reluctance. Never! It is the agony of faith. The agony to believe, in the conflict with doubt. (1 Tim. 6:12.) When I ask the Lord to give me that which I need the devil is there saying, The Lord won't do it. Don't you see that circumstances are all against it? Everything is against it. Your sins are against it. Your past forbids it. You are not worthy of it. How can you expect it? And so the devil is there to thwart the prayer of faith. But God says it is "the prayer of faith" that saves. James 5:15. It is faith that is essential. "Without faith it is impossible to please him." Heb. 11:6.

So, as I come asking Him, the devil will throw up many objections. The question is, Will I truly believe that God will freely do as He has promised? That is the question for me to settle in my mind. In spite of the sins that I have committed. Do I know God will still freely help me? In spite of the host of circumstances surrounding me that seem to indicate an impossibility, do I still believe that God is eager to help me and will freely do it? So I agonize before Him, not to overcome His reluctance, but to be set free from Satan-inspired doubts, He has said that He is an eager God. He has said that He will freely do for us. So I must see His Son in order to see His attitude. And when I see His Son on Calvary, I know God's attitude is one of eagerness to give. This, in spite of all the doubts Satan raises.

I may also see the Father's eyes. "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." 2 Chron. 16:9. If I look at His Son and see how freely God gives, I may also look up into the Father's eyes and see them scanning the whole earth. They are eyes eager to find someone who will ask for help. Satan wants to picture to you and to me a God who is not eager to help us, so that we shall pray backslidden prayers. He wants us to tell the Lord that He does not seem to care about us. All this obscures faith and precludes the answer. God wants me to know that He is eager to answer, regardless of my sinfulness, my weakness, and my limitations. He wants me to let my eyes of faith meet His eyes of eagerness. This will build faith.

Seeing God as a good Father helps me to believe He wants to answer. "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone?" Luke 11:11. Jesus is here picturing God as a father. But you may say, "That doesn't help me, I never felt my father loved me." But even an evil, sinful father, will not, in response to the son's request for bread, give him a stone. Not a father! Some enemy might do that, but not a father! Never!

Agony of Surrender

What should be our attitude in prayer? "We know not what we should pray for as we ought." Rom. 8:26. Our attitude should be one of surrender. Perhaps I have set my heart on something that I thought was for my highest good. But it might prove my destruction. So, Father, my attitude is—I surrender to Your better plan. And there is agony in that creaturely attitude. So it is, sometimes, with agony that we give

up our cherished idea and commit it to Him. It is difficult for us to know what to ask for unless we claim what God has promised. We are tempted to add a few extra words of our own to His promise.

Perhaps you will recall my telling how one day I stepped into our living room and found our little daughter, Juanita, placing a double-edged razor blade in her mouth. Immediately the Lord flashed into my mind what to do to help her. She had just put it in and had not yet closed her mouth. I said, "Nita," as I smiled broadly. "Nita. Nita," and walked very slowly and cautiously toward her. While her mouth was wide open in a smile. But she did not know what she had in her mouth! "Nita, Nita," I repeated softly, continuing to smile. I slipped that blade right out of her mouth. After it was out, I exclaimed. "It would have cut you all up!" But I didn't dare say it while it was in her month. She did not know how to choose, as she ought, what to put in her mouth. She thought she had something good to be sucked on or eaten. She doubtless thought so with all her heart. But I had never promised her a razor blade diet!

The Spirit Helps and Agonizes

So many times we have set our minds on something that we felt surely must be the will of God, but which He has not promised. Let our attitude be, "We don't know how to pray as we ought." And that is often agony. We have outlined in our thinking all the circumstances that make us fairly sure that a certain thing is God's will, in spite of the fact that He never promised it. Maybe that is not God's plan at all. We don't know what to pray for as we ought. We must endure the agony of surrender.

Blessed be God! He comes along and helps! We read, "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities." He does it with "groanings which cannot be uttered." Rom. 8:26. I have often wondered why the Holy Spirit groans for us. It touches the great heart of God that the thing which you and I have often sought for is not for our good. He knows how disappointed we will be when He gives us something else. We don't think at the moment it will be better. We think God merely says, "No." And so the Spirit helps us with groanings. It is an agony on the part of God to take from us the thing that we thought was good when we do not know He will give us a better answer. Even God suffers agony over that. For He knows how human, how shortsighted we are. God knows our basic needs, you see. His promises cover our needs, but not our fancies.

Our little three-year-old granddaughter, Rena, went with her other granddaddy one day to see a neighbor. It was cherry season, so she had her fill. Then, the neighbors offered her a sandwich (which she loved), but by now it was between meals. "Would you like one, Rena?" they asked her. Delightedly, little Rena nodded her head, But when she looked up at her granddaddy and saw him roll his eyes, she knew exactly what he meant. His eyes meant, No! So she looked up into the neighbor's face and corrected herself, "No, I don't want any. I just `fought' I did." Her granddaddy had not promised her that she could eat one continuous meal all day. It would not have been good for her. He had a better plan. One can be happier and healthier eating rightly.

Oh, how many times the Holy Spirit agonizes when you and I think that which we are asking of the Lord is just what we should have! He must agonize in empathy over the very promises that He gave to us and we neglect to claim. He must groan in helping us to turn to His assurances. We think all His providences have led to it. The sandwich is right there before us. Yet God knows it is not the best for us. Even the Holy Spirit agonizes, as we agonize because we don't get it! Then we have to substitute what God sees is really best for us in place of that which we thought was best. So my attitude must be: "I yield my judgment to God's better and more beautiful plan. So, Holy Spirit, show me what I really need. I am not sure that I want what I really need most." The Holy Spirit will then lead me to what God has promised. He promises best things.

A Disappointed Woman

Recently we received a sad letter from a woman who had prayed for a mate. Then a drinking divorcee came along, and she fell head over heels in love with this alcoholic non-Christian. She wrote, "I asked God to give me a mate. And now, isn't this man the one I prayed for, in spite of the fact that he is not a Christian and is a heavy drinker?" We knew she was in agony. She knew in her heart that she should not unite her life with a non-Christian. But she was a very lonely woman. She was like our baby daughter; about to close her mouth on a razor blade.

God suffered with her, The Holy Spirit agonizes with us. But still, He, in love, withholds razor blades; that is, if we will but take the right attitude. She could say, "God never promised me a drinking, non-Christian mate. I just let my lonely mind run ahead of Him. But His great heart sympathizes in agony with my loneliness."

God's Method of Answering

Now this leads us into God's method of answering our prayers. "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things." Now notice the rest of the verse, "which thou knowest not." Jer. 33:3. That is a tremendous statement regarding God's method of granting our requests. I want to tell you, friend, that it has taken me years to learn this. I have read that text repeatedly. I suppose I have quoted it hundreds of times, Yet, for years, I never realized the importance of the last part. It says, "which thou knowest not." "Call unto me, and I will answer thee." Oh, I have quoted that in exuberance! I have exclaimed, He will answer! And then the promise, "I will ... shew thee great and mighty things," has thrilled me, too. But the last part, somehow, did not make an impression until recent years. It is the clause which says, "which thou knowest not."

I used to say, in effect, "Now, Lord, I am going down the highway of life. I am coming to great forks in the road. At that point I must make a decision. If I should take the right fork, then let such-and-such happen. If it does not happen, I will know that I should take the left fork." Did any of you ever do that? Well, I have done it again and again. I have preached on it. I have taught it. Then I came to the "fork," But behold, it was no "fork" at all.

It was five points! I found that God's method of taking care of me and guiding me was not my method at all. Yes, I had prayed. But I was greatly amazed at finding five points. Now, what was I going to do? God answered, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee and shew thee great and mighty things [but do not forget], which thou knowest not." God's method is not yours or mine. He has a thousand ways of guiding us. Many times He leads us to five points when we thought it was a choice between only two things. The promises are sure, But God reserves to Himself the how and when.

Let us never forget that God is too wise to err. When I took that razor blade from Nita's mouth she could not understand why I did it. I knew her basic longing at the moment was for food. But had I permitted her to have what she thought was the answer to hunger, it would have injured her mouth. She could not have enjoyed the very thing she thought she was getting, you see. God is too kind, too loving to err. So He takes away the very thing that seems so precious, and so lovely, and so grand, to give us the very thing, the basic thing, we are needing all the while. He fulfills His promises; but in His own better way. When I am so sure it must be done by one of two "forks," I discover that God in His love and wisdom often uses some other method entirely. Then there may be an agony of surrender.

The Example of Elijah

It was this agony that so floored Elijah. He had it all worked out how God was going to bring reformation in Israel. When it did not take place that way at all, he ran and climbed into a cave. His agony of

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disappointment was followed by an agony of surrender. He was disappointed because he did not understand all of God's methods. And it took a lot of agonizing and reappraising on his part to finally understand that God, many times, accomplishes His purposes in ways we do not understand. Don't forget, God always fulfills His promises. But He seldom does it our way.

A church day-school teacher and his family were moving from Boston, Massachusetts, to Knoxville, Tennessee. Their small daughter was with them. But they did not have room for their little pet dog named Troubles. On the way down to Knoxville, the little girl prayed this prayer to the Lord: "Jesus, when we get to Knoxville, help Troubles to be there." She had a lot of faith. But she did not understand how to surrender, you see. God knew she needed companionship. But she needed a companionship of angels more than that of little Troubles. When she got to Knoxville and to their new home, she thought Troubles would be there. But when he wasn't, she exclaimed, "Jesus disobeyed me." My friend, Jesus does not disobey us. He promises us. He only maintains His right to answer our prayers in His way, which is the best way. There is no better way than His way. To give up our way for His often involves an intense agony. It is the agony of surrender based on trust. Had the little girl looked in the Bible for a promise to ship Troubles supernaturally to Knoxville, she would have found none.

Our Motive in Asking

Years ago, my wife and I were starting a project for the Lord. We studied the laws of prayer. Then we came across a suggestion in the beautiful book *The Desire of Ages*. It is to the effect that God sometimes delays the answer to our prayer until He has purified the motive that caused us to ask Him. And that set us to thinking: What is my motive? When we pray for healing, for instance, what is our motive in desiring healing? Is it that we might extend our period of service to God and to humanity? Or is it merely for the convenience of health? What is our motive when we ask the Lord to help us to pay for a house? Is it merely that we may have conveniences? Or is it that we may use it to God's glory and to the saving of souls? What is our motive? The motive must be far more than that of pleasure, convenience, or gratification. Had sin never entered our world, convenience would have been the order of the day. But sin has changed the whole program of Christ on earth.

Jesus came to this world, not for convenience. He had no place to lay His head. (Matt. 8:20.) I never once heard of His praying that God would give Him a bed for the night. Do you find that in the Bible? No, But I do read of His spending all night in prayer. I have wished that I could have a recording of one of Christ's prayers. I feel sure He was not praying for conveniences, I know He was not. He was praying for humanity. "He spent whole nights in prayer in behalf of the tempted ones" He was seeking to save. *Review and Herald*, Oct, 30, 1900.

Are we praying that God will heal us that we may be able to give more energy to saving souls, comforting the sorrowing, strengthening the weak, when we are not giving the energy we already have to blessing others? Are we using the time that He has so graciously entrusted us with now, for ourselves? Are we hoping and praying that we may be granted more time, thinking that someday we might decide to give some of it back to God in blessing others? That "someday" may never come. Again the question comes to us, What motive do we have in making our request?

Wonderful Answers

In Luke 11:5-8 Jesus tells the story of a man who came to his friend at midnight, asking for bread that he might give to another. "Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him." That is a worthy motive. If I want the Lord to give me that I might in turn share with others, then I may expect a wonderful answer to my prayers.

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In our ministry for others, we have discovered that the times when our motive has been the purest, the most unselfish, are the times when we have received the most remarkable answers to our prayers. They are so extraordinary they almost take our breath. It was when our very souls were poured out, as it were, in the deepest, most fervent desire to bless others. In giving, we received. In giving unselfishly, you will receive, it has always been thus in the lives of men and women of God. It will always be so in the future. History abounds in experiences of men and women who have put unselfishness to the test. Says our Lord, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. Luke 6:38.

Once we shared our own little home in Tennessee. God in turn made it possible for us to secure a motor home. When we purchased a car for another, God gave us a new car. When we were willing to suffer great physical discomfort in writing books (for every book we write brings pains in my back, neck, stomach, and shoulder blades), God gives us a joy which is satisfying, rewarding. What is true of our experience is also true of others. God gives a rich reward, too, in sacrificial letters we write, in letters received from those who have been relieved of the torture of defeat in their lives. God does this when we sacrifice with the specific motive of serving others.

Blessing of Sharing

We presently have working with us two bearded brethren who recently escaped what we call "Drug-land, America." They had been steeped in marijuana, LSD, cigarettes, alcohol, sex, et cetera. Then they decided to spend the rest of their lives serving humanity. It is true they had not at that time met Jesus Christ in a personal way. But as they made their decision to serve others unselfishly God revealed Himself to them. In a matter of only weeks, God delivered them completely from these evil habits, and made them into beautiful soul winners for Him.

If you want to see two happy faces beaming with satisfaction, meet these two young men. They pray for others. They work for others. They live for others. They witness to others of the wonderful love of Jesus Christ. They receive no salary. They never solicit money. They move out in faith--pure, unselfish faith, And what joy is theirs! What a reward! What spiritual satisfaction!

When you compare what they are in Christ today with what they were when they were living for sensual pleasure, it bears no comparison. It is all contrast. It is like the contrast between light and darkness, good and evil, holiness and wickedness. And this experience will last only as they follow Jesus unselfishly. To turn from His unselfish service is to fall. I know God answers their prayers just as He does ours, because they know God's attitude is that of a free giver. Their attitude is that of complete trust. They, like many of us, go through the agony of disappointment, then new surrender. Then they relax, knowing that when God does not answer their expected way, it is because He has something better—far better. They may not recognize it as such at the moment. But someday they know they will. This truth, this experience is for all, it is for you, for "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Rom. 8:32.

And this is the God I love!

Prayer

Our Lord in heaven, we thank You just now that we know Your attitude. Whatever the circumstances, whatever argument the devil uses, we still know that we serve the Christ of God who is eager to answer. When we set our minds on something that is pleasant but not for our soul's good, we will claim Your promises that state You will give us Your answer in Your way.

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Then, Lord, we pray You will purify our motives. May our requests be unselfish. We thank You, in the pitchy darkness that is ahead, that there is to be light in every dwelling of every one of Your children. We thank You too, Lord, for the beautiful promise that in the time of Jacob's trouble, we shall be saved out of it. O mighty God, draw near to every heart that seeks victory! Some have struggled on for many years and have never found deliverance. There are those who have never accepted Christ. May they take You, confessing their sins, and accepting Your promise of eternal life. It is so simple! For those who have slipped away, may they come back and say, Lord, heal my backsliding as You have promised. (Hosea 14:4.) We thank You in the loving name of Jesus. Amen,

Review

1. God gives freely. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Rom. 8:32.
2. We are to fight, not to overcome God's reluctance, but to express faith. "Fight the good fight of faith." 1 Tim. 6:12.
3. As I look at the Son's willingness, I can also by faith see the Father's eyes, searching for someone who will ask for help. "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." 2 Chron. 16:9,
4. I may think of God as my Father. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Luke 11:13.
5. We must have the humble attitude that we know not how to pray. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought." Rom. 8:26.
6. God often answers in a completely different way from what we expect. "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and chew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." Jer. 33:3.
7. Our motive for asking should not be selfish, "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss that ye may consume it upon your lusts." James 4:3. We should rather ask to give, as did the man who awakened his friend at midnight asking of him loaves of bread that he in turn might share with another. (Luke 11 -13)

CHAPTER THREE HOW I KNOW THE SECRET OF SUCCESS

A SHORT TIME after my wife, Ethel, and I were married, we were sent on a mission to the West Indies and the northern tip of South America, We spent happy years with the wonderful people there. Our fellowship was most sweet in the Lord Jesus. When our furlough came due, it was hard to break away from those dear hearts.

One day while there, we overheard one of our friends exclaim, "Mrs. Coon's voice is like a pipe organ." That statement really amused us, and my wife was a bit embarrassed, since she felt she did not deserve such a compliment.

It would seem that the translators of the King James Version of the Bible felt that in the long ago there was one who had a pipe organ voice. Listen to this: "The workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created.... And I have set thee so." Eze. 28:13, 14.

Lucifer and Christ Sing Together

When I was a young man entering the ministry, I heard an older minister suggest that Lucifer's voice was beautiful indeed. He stated that Lucifer actually sang a duet with Christ. He gave as his authority the statements of Scripture which speak of Lucifer as "son of the morning," and of Christ as "the bright and morning star," and the "day star." Isa. 14:12-14; Rev. 22:16; 2 Peter 1:19. Also the Scripture which states that the "morning stars sang together." Job 38:7. The remainder of the text suggests that there was a great antiphonal response from the angels. It states, "all the sons of God shouted for joy."

Wouldn't it have been wonderful indeed to have listened to the music of the heavenly hosts! Our Lord's voice was above them all. His is "as the sound of many waters," described in Revelation 1:15. This suggests that His voice may have carried many parts of music at the same time. After all, our vocal chords are but human. What will it be, someday soon, to hear the voice of Jesus?

Lucifer was a created being. He was absolutely perfect. "Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou east created, till iniquity was found in thee." Eze. 28:15. The Bible declares that God "created all things by Jesus Christ." Eph. 3:9. "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist " Col, 1:16, 17. Therefore, Lucifer owed his very existence, his beauty, his wisdom, to Jesus our Lord.

His Transcendent Beauty and Wisdom

The Bible pictures Lucifer as being the highest of all created beings, for it was he who later led the angelic hosts into the great rebellion. (Rev. 12:3, 4.)

The reason for his fall is brought to view in various Scripture texts: "Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness." Eze. 28:17. His beauty was almost indescribable! "Every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold. . . . Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire." Verses 13, 14. It is most difficult for us, today, to picture a being as brilliant as described here. But more than this, he had what he called "my throne." Isa. 14:13. Lucifer was "full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty." Eze. 28:12.

How He Fell

Listen to the enraptured prophet Isaiah, while in vision, breathlessly exclaim, as in awe and wonder he beholds that once gorgeous creature, Lucifer, as he is falling from his high estate: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!" Isa. 14:12.

The contrast between what Lucifer was and what he is now is so great that the prophet was led to wonder in amazement. Think of one so wise, so beautiful, so holy, so perfect, deteriorating into one of whom we read: "Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?" Isa. 14:15-17.

Is he the one who is to "go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcass trodden under feet"? Verse 19. Is he the one who is so vile that, "Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people: the seed of evildoers shall never be renowned"? Verse 20.

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We may well inquire how such a beautiful, successful leader in heaven could become "the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan," to be cast "into the bottomless pit," Rev. 20:2, 3. How did he become "the accuser of our brethren ... which accused them before our God day and night"? Rev. 12:10.

But before we discuss the Bible answer, let us consider questions raised today concerning men and women who were once bright and shining lights for our Lord, When they go into darkness, many a Christian believer almost gasps in astonishment. They are amazed. Dumfounded! It is such a shock that some actually lose their own faith. They exclaim, "If such a saint of God could lose his way, what hope is there for a poor, weak sinner like me?"

But the answer is very clear. Extremely simple. It is not complicated at all. In the answer is the secret of every man's failure or success in this life and the life which is eternal.

I recall some of these bright and shining lights. Many, in fact. Let me share a few before we go back into the secret of their failure.

Muncy gave her heart to God during a series of our meetings in the West Indies. Her courage, sincerity, humility, and her zeal were almost unmatched. She was willing to sacrifice anything, and all, for the fellowship she had found in Jesus Christ. She was one of the most beautiful inspirations to my wife and me! It was my privilege to place her beneath the sacramental waters of baptism. She gave a sincere testimony to Jesus and claimed Him as her Lord. Time and again our hearts thrilled in admiration of her witness. We noted a steadfastness that did not waver. Often there was cruel persecution, hatred, and bitterness. But she rode over them all, just as did the little boat on Galilee when Jesus spoke the calming words, "Peace be still."

Thirty-five years later we made a short visit to the same islands. There we heard that Muncy had given up her faith. We sadly inquired where she lived, eager to fly to her side. Perhaps we might be used of the Lord to renew her faith and courage in Him, But when we entered her little home we were sadly disappointed. The love light had gone from her eyes. Her love for the brethren and even for us, was shadowed. Her voice was sad. Her countenance downcast! We scarcely recognized Muncy as the same person we had known and loved so many years before. We almost wept. Why such a change? This change in Lucifer is what puzzled the prophet Isaiah when he exclaimed plaintively, "How art thou fallen ... !" Isa. 14:12.

Mack

About the same time that we first presented Muncy in the arms of faith to our Lord, we had the privilege of uniting Mack in marriage to a young Christian woman. Mack was not wealthy. We had, in fact, purchased his marriage license for him. It was our great joy to bury him with his Lord in the baptismal waters, while at the same time the Holy Spirit blessed the occasion by healing a 73-year-old woman, who was also baptized.

Thirty-five years later we met Mack again. Imagine our great disappointment when we were informed that Mack had given up his faith in God!

At one of those meetings though, our hearts were made extremely happy. There approximately fifty individuals who stood, signifying that they were still rejoicing in the Lord since we had had the blessed privilege of baptizing them some thirty-five years before.

I shook Mack's hand (for he did me the honor of attending my meeting in his hometown), but the enthusiasm was gone from his face. The Christian elasticity from his steps. The Christian warmth from his heart. Again we ask, Why?

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I inquired about another brother who had been a most faithful associate of ours back there thirty-five years before. He had been a dynamo for God. His voice often witnessed to the saving power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. His loyalty was unquestioned back in those days when hundreds were finding the richness of God and His message for the last generation of mankind.

The answer to my question as to what had become of him was pitiful. It was almost unbelievable. He had gone out like a light. The light that had been in him had become so dark that he turned against the people with whom he had found such sweet fellowship. He died in bitter opposition to the truths and the people he had once loved so deeply. Again, the heart-searching question, Why?

Sam

Sam and I were close friends in the days of our academy experience. He was tall and handsome. I was short and homely. His faith was fervent. One summer we sold Christian literature together. Sam often testified of Christ his Saviour before groups of students and in churches. His sincerity and faith almost knew no bounds. One day, as we were crossing a little creek, Sam turned to me and exclaimed, "I feel as if I could reach out by faith and dry up this creek so we could pass over!"

Twenty years later, Sam was a defeated, homeless captive of sin. The fervor had left his soul. The glint of faith had long since fled his countenance, Bewildered, befogged, drug-addicted, Sam left his wife and abandoned his children. A few years later, in the prime of life, he died.

Probably you, my dear reader, know of one or more persons near and dear to you who have "gone down the drain," similar to those depicted here. And your heart has ached, as has ours, at a sweet memory turned to heart break.

The Secret

The secret of failure is the opposite to that of success. To discover one is to understand the other. Before I read it to you from the Holy Bible, let me picture it as demonstrated in God's scientific laws.

I hold in my hand a light bulb. It shines when I connect it to the power. When I disconnect it, it goes out. Then I hold in my hand an electric cord, Its power is obvious. It lights up our motor home. Feeds the air conditioner, electric typewriters, thermophore, and various appliances.

You and I could sit down and wonder why all of a sudden all the service rendered by this electric cord ceases. But really, would we become alarmed and confused when someone casually tells us that the cord was pulled? When the cord is again connected, on come the lights, the air conditioner, and all the rest, Connection, or lack of contact, is the simple answer.

From Strength to Weakness

Jesus worded it oh so simply, but so truly, when He said, "Without me ye can do nothing." "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." John 15:5, 4,

Christ the Source

The Scriptures constantly shed light on the fact that the very center of our existence is Christ. He is the source of joy. (Ps. 16:11.) He is the center of love. (1 John 4:8.) He is the heart of life. (1 John 5:10-12.) He is God. (John 1:1.) "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." Col. 1:19. For "he is

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before all things, and by him all things consist." Verse 17. He is the head of the church and the heart of the Christian's life, (Verse 18.)

Lucifer's Fall

How did Lucifer fall? He lost contact. He turned his mind from the Lord and centered it on himself. "Thou hast said in thine heart, I .. , I , . , I , . , I ..." It was not the conversational "I" that Lucifer used. It was the separation "I." the egotistical "I". "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High." Isa. 14:13, 14.

Lucifer refused to recognize that his brightness came as a result of the connection with God. Just as the electric light bulb shines only through contact with the source of power. Here is the statement: "Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty. Thou has, corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness." Eze. 28:17. Observe with us that Lucifer considered it "his brightness," not a brightness that came from a connection with the Creator in whom is "life; and the life" is "the light." John 1:4.

Not Enough to Know

Jack came to me one day during our series of meetings in a certain city and exclaimed, "You haven't told me anything that I didn't already know!" But merely knowing is not enough, It is not enough to know that the electric cord must be connected. It must be connected. It is not enough to understand that the water hose needs to be connected to the source if it is to be of any service. It must be connected. We need to connect with Jesus Christ anew every morning, and then watch to make sure the plug is not pulled throughout the day. Then we can shine! Then we can receive the living water. Then we can have heat for our cold souls. No, it is not enough to know, It must be experienced.

A Joyful Experience

To be connected with Jesus Christ is not boredom, as some persons think. "In thy presence is full of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore," Ps. 16:11. Neither is it boredom to take time to read God's love messages to us as contained in the Bible. "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." Jer. 15:16.

Turning God Off

To turn God off leads to sadness, not gladness, as many suppose. "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful." Rom. 1:28-31.

Keep the Plug Clean

A letter from a doctor friend tells us this story: He was reared in a Christian home where family worship, both morning and evening, was their custom. But he never personally connected with Jesus Christ.

He loved to play cards and gamble with other professing Christian young people. His personal choice of games was the innocent "Flinch," although he also enjoyed "Pit" and "Rook." Then he moved into the gambling games. He often drove from California to Las Vegas and spent the weekend there, gambling

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away his money. Then he returned home Monday morning, with practically no sleep the night before. This was a common practice. He wrote, "A guardian angel drove my car ten miles for me when I went to sleep at the wheel. I saw an overpass in the near distance, but was asleep as I went under it. I went around curves, across the overpass at Victorville, over the Mojave River, the railroad, and the street, up the hill, another curve, under the overpass, around another curve, and up the hill some miles before I woke up, doing 65 miles per hour."

He further says, "The reason I am telling this is to point out that these near accidents and miss; had no power to make me stop. Neither did the realization that I was almost ruining my physical health and spiritual life, and being entirely unfair to my sweet wife and friends.

"After some years, I finally admitted to myself that I am, by nature, a compulsive gambler. All these years I wouldn't admit it to anyone—not even myself. I finally decided that it was no use being dishonest with myself. As time went by, I would seem to be down in a deep hole that was always getting deeper. The light coming in from the top was smaller, of course, as the hole got deeper. I began to wonder if I would ever get out and up to that light again. I knew that my wife prayed for me constantly, and also that some others were praying for me." Unbeknown to this doctor friend, many of his friends were pleading with the Lord for his salvation, including another Loma Linda doctor.

"Through the prayers," he now says, "the blessed Holy Spirit worked on me until I gave myself up to Jesus, I finally found the power to stop gambling. It is the same power that enables any sinner to stop whatever his pet sin is. It is the power in the love of Jesus for me, demonstrated on the cross. I can never, never thank and praise Him enough."

Then the doctor sums up the point thus: "I need to turn my eyes to the cross every day. I am never safe away from Jesus, as the enemy still whispers in my ears how much fun it would be to take another trip to Vegas. Only in His hand am I safe. I believe life is electric—Jesus is the only dynamo. But it is my job to keep the plug clean so the life-giving current can flow from His life to mine, to give me the power." His letter concludes: "'Christ is sitting for His portrait in every disciple.' (The Desire of Ages, p. 827.) I want to keep His portrait correct, and by His grace, and in the power of the, cross I shall."

Lucifer Breaks Man's Connection

Lucifer, becoming "the serpent," moved into the Garden of Eden, and sold his "declaration of independence from God" to Adam and Eve. He told them flatly that they did not need to maintain this connection with their Lord, for they themselves could become as "gods." Gen. 8:5. But sin and death followed. "He [Adam] died," Gen. 5:5. And "Cain," his first-born son, "slew" "Abel his brother." Gen. 4:8. "Cain went out from the presence of the Lord." Verse 16. He became the progenitor of a race of men who defied God as Lucifer did at the time of his rebellion and fall. (Rev. 12:4). Seth, the child born to Adam and Eve after Abel's death, was the progenitor of a race that connected with God. (Gen. 4:26.) One race became more and more wicked until "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. . . , And the Lord said. I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth.... But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." Gen. 6:5-8.

After the Flood, the spirit of independence from God broke out in Noah's own family. Ham became the progenitor of Nimrod. "He began to be a mighty one in the earth." Gen, 10:8. (How like Lucifer this sounds! "I will be like the most High." Isa. 14:14.) "And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel," or Babylon. Gen. 10:10. Babylon so completely represented the evil spirit of Lucifer, Satan, it became a symbol of apostasy against God and rebellion against Jesus Christ. "Babylon ... is become the habitation of devils." Rev. 18:2.

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It was Babylon, tinder Nebuchadnezzar, that took God's professed people captive because "the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand," Dan. 1:2. And this was because, "as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the Lord." Jer. 3:20.

The history of the battles of earth is not of strategy, merely. It is of connection with, or separation from, God. When Babylon overcame God's professed people, it was because, "They forgot God their saviour, which had done great things." Ps. 106:21.

But man is bound to worship. He is a worshipful being. He cannot restrain himself from some form of adoration. While God's chosen people "unplugged" themselves from the Source of their strength, the heathen who had overcome them were careful to give their idols credit for their victory. "And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god: and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god." Dan. 1:2.

Men will either worship God our Maker, or Satan, in one form or another. "They sacrificed unto devils, not to God." Dent. 32:17. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?" Rom. 6:16.

Just yesterday, a woman, whom we know very well as a devout child of God, forgot Him, disconnecting herself from Him, and began to lose her temper against her godly husband. Said she, "I am going to divorce you, and sue you for all the money you have, and then throw it in the ocean and live a simple life." My wife exclaimed to me in amazement, "That is devil possession!" We discussed the problem and decided that it might be that "this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." Matt. 17:21.

The history of the world is not one of human strategy and genius. It is a battle between men who are in league with Satan and those who are in league with Jesus Christ. "Yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." John 16:2.

When King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and carried away captives to Babylon, he gave his gods credit. Little did he realize how soon those who remained steadfast to God would prove the fabulous results of contact with the true and living God. Of those who were true, like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, the king discovered that "in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm." Dan. 1:20.

Daniel's prayer life was the secret of his success. (See Daniel, chapter 6.) No one, and nothing, not even the king's decree, could cause Daniel to break contact with the Lord.

King Nebuchadnezzar stood in astonishment when his dream, recorded in Daniel, chapter 2, was read to him like a primer, by Daniel, together with the interpretation. Daniel was very frank as he stood before the king. Said he, "The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king; but there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days." Dan. 2:27, 28.

To the man who has learned the secret of daily communion with God, any other secret can be unraveled at God's time and bidding. In a matter of moments Daniel informed the king that the statue, with the head of gold, that he saw in his dream, represented Babylon. (Dan. 2:38.) That the kingdom to succeed Babylon would be less glorious but stronger, like silver. Medo-Persia answered to this, and overcame Babylon in the year 538 B.C. (Dan, 5:28.) The abdomen and thighs of brass represented the third kingdom, namely, Grecia, (Dan, 8:20, 21.) The legs of iron would be the iron republic of Rome, which was ruling when Christ was born. (Luke 2:1.)

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As the image had two legs, so Rome would be divided, "And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided. . . . They shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay." Dan. 2:41-43.

Daniel, because of his contact with God, read with ease the history of the world in advance, while those who had no contact with God could not so much as reproduce the dream of the king. (Dan. 2:1-12.) In a matter of moments, Daniel outlined the future of the divided Roman Empire, right down to our very day. The nations cannot unite to form another universal kingdom. The powers of Europe have tried repeatedly to unite the fragments of Rome into another empire; but each time they have failed. Napoleon, Louis XIV, Wilhelm, and Hitler all tried in vain. The royalty of Europe have intermarried. But God said, "They shall not cleave one to another."

No, the next great universal event must be the glorious kingdom of God spoken of in Daniel 2:44. "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed."

Keep in contact with Him, friend of mine. Be sure. Be safe, Be loved. Be saved.

Picture again Daniel standing before this great king! A Hebrew slave in the kingdom of Babylon, keeping contact with the God of heaven and reading the future of the world right down to our very day. Then stating that "in, the days of these kings [the ten toes] shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: ... it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." Dan. 2:44.

By Daniel's uninterrupted contact with God, we, today, have the blessed privilege of knowing that God is about to set up His everlasting kingdom which shall stand forever. I am glad that I am a citizen of His kingdom of grace. Aren't you? By this citizenship we may be ushered into His kingdom of glory. "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory." Matt. 25:31. That will be glory enough for me!

And now for the climactic part of the story of old Babylon, versus the humble servants of God. If you want drama, here it is! "Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him. The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a King of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret. Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon. Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king." Dan. 2:46-49.

What happened back there six centuries before Christ came to earth is but a type of what is going to happen when Jesus Christ comes as "King of kings, and Lord of lords." At that time all the wicked, though unchanged in heart, will acknowledge His wisdom; His supremacy. "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Phil. 2:10, 11.

"And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." Rev. 5:13.

John Connects

John was reared in a Christian home in British Columbia, Canada. His mother; a jewel of a woman. His father; the most godly man he ever knew. Both were connected with God. Both were successful in

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finding the way of happiness. But John had never found Christ himself. So when he reached 18, John decided that happiness must be found apart from the Lord. Consequently he left home for a life of "wine, women, and song."

John's life of pleasure apart from God was short-lived, however. In the midst of an "Eagle's smoke," John took deathly ill with a severe pain in his chest. An ambulance rushed him to the hospital in Victoria, where everything they could do was done for his restoration. But he grew steadily worse. His father, determining to save his life, secured the best specialists money could afford. So great was the father's love for the wandering, dying son that he sold his home and went into debt in an effort to save his son's life.

One day a chest specialist, after examining John, shook his head and sadly remarked that only a miracle could save John's life beyond a week, or ten days at the most. But John's father prayed earnestly for his unsaved, dying son. Though balancing between life and death, John still clung to the thread of life for months. About this time, C. T. Everson began a series of religious meetings in the city of Victoria. John's father was in attendance. He secured literature on the topics presented, as only C. T. Everson could do it, and took them to the bedside of his son.

But although John was merely clinging to the thread of life, he laughed at the messages his father shared with him. Lying there on his deathbed, he saw the tears coursing down his father's cheeks, but appeared unmoved by them. He secured and read, when it was possible, pleasure and lust-filled magazines, which were stacked by his bed at all times.

John lay there for fourteen months, during which time complications developed. Stomach trouble, throat problems, mastoiditis, and a severe skin condition on various parts of his body caused even the doctors who entered his room to literally hold their noses until they had closed the door behind them as they left.

In the meantime, John's father had received a promise from John that if he gave him a Bible he would read it. And he began to do so in his feeble condition. By now John was often unable to raise his hand or speak. He could only hear others when they raised their voices. It was at this time John "chanced" to tune in to a distant radio station actually, Shreveport, Louisiana. Although the static made reception very poor at first, the faint signals of the station began to grow stronger, and John heard a voice, the pleading voice of a speaker inviting his listeners to give their hearts to Jesus Christ. The call was based on Colossians 1:16 and 17. For almost fifteen minutes John heard this stranger's voice pleading with his hearers to accept Jesus and His salvation.

Then the voice faded away. The invitation was no longer heard. It left John deep in thought. The Holy Spirit was speaking to his heart. God has promised to forgive us if we will only come to Him, confessing our sins, (1 John 1:9.) John decided to connect with the Lord Jesus Christ in simple faith, and humble confession of his sins. He became a new creature in Christ Jesus; the Source of peace, the Sound of joy, the Center of life. In spite of several relapses, John made improvement. It is too long a story to relate here, but today John is more than 65 years old. When I met him a few weeks ago he was a specimen of perfect health. His step is quick and elastic. His eye keen. His expression full of enthusiasm. His bearing testifies to the fact that he moved from death to life when he connected his whole being in simple trust with Christ Jesus.

Some time after John completely recovered, he saw the chest specialist who had lost faith in his recovery. The specialist was so astonished: that he opened his mouth and all he could say was, "Hell!" But he was mistaken. John had found "heaven" when he found Jesus. Today John is still in business and is an active lay preacher for Christ.

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What others have found, including Daniel and John, we have found. It is an open secret. "Christ . . . is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." 1 Cor. 1:30.

I invite you, dear reader, to spend the first quiet hour in the morning with the Lord. Then keep plugged in to His source of power throughout the day. Thank Him at night for another day of life, and lie down to pleasant dreams. "Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, ...)" Heb. 3:7, 8.

And this is the God I love!

Prayer

Would you offer the following prayer?

Dear Father in heaven, I come to You through Jesus Christ, my Maker and Redeemer. You have invited me, "Give me thine heart." Prov. 23:26. And with it the promise, "They shall praise the Lord that seek Him: your heart shall live for ever." Ps. 22:26,

Lord. I give You my heart. My mind. Myself. And claim Your promise, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9. Confessing my sins, I ask; believing in Your immediate forgiveness. I accept Your cleansing. I return thanks that I am even now, at this very moment, forgiven and cleansed, because "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent." Num. 23:19.

You have promised me, Father, that as I believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, I shall be saved. (Acts 16:31.) I believe that Jesus is my personal Saviour, even as promised in Matthew 1:21. "Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."

Therefore, as I arise from my knees, I cry out in triumph, through Jesus Christ, that You have forgiven me, cleansed me, and saved me from the guilt and power of every known sin, And you have given me birth into the family and fellowship of Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

Review

1. Lucifer was created perfect, but he made himself into Satan. "Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee." Eze. 28:15,
2. He became self-centered and it caused his fall. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! ... Thou halt said in thine heart, I ... I ... I ... I ... I ..." Isa. 14:12,14.
3. He suggested to Adam and Eve that they could be as gods, without God, their Maker. "Ye shall be as gods." Gen. 3:5.
4. When Nimrod became a mighty man and a "mighty hunter," he founded Babel, or Babylon. "Nimrod ... began to be a mighty one in the earth. . . . And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, ..." Gen. 10:8-10.
5. The secret of success is union with our Lord. "Without me ye can do nothing." John 15:5.
6. Israel's history of defeat is when "they turned back," disconnecting themselves from God. Ps. 78:41. "And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah" into the hands of the heathen. Dan. 1:2.
7. When we turn to the Lord again, "Christ ... is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." 1 Cor. 1:30.

8. Christ's kingdom of glory will soon be ushered in. (See Daniel, chapter 2.)

9. We may make contact, and become His children, by simple faith. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." John 1:12.

CHAPTER FOUR

HOW I KNOW JESUS IS COMING FOR ME

ADA WAS a member of our church family. I observed nothing remarkable about her until she was involved in an automobile accident. She had not seen the oncoming train as she approached the railroad crossing. Her car was dragged down the tracks. Ada was mangled almost beyond recognition.

Yet she recovered. So complete was her restoration that one could scarcely detect there had been plastic surgery. She looked beautiful. And this was the same Ada to whom the doctors gave no hope.

What was the answer? It was God's response to Ada's courage, faith, and hope. Ada's reaction to difficulties in life had become quietly habitual. Her positiveness and solution-centeredness had become a way of life. In a great crisis they proved invaluable. Now she reaped a harvest in good health, and physical, as well as spiritual, beauty.

Marie

I knew another woman whom I shall call Marie. We first met Marie, when we were holding a series of meetings 3,000 miles across the continent from where Ada lived. She too had been involved in an accident. Not with a train but with another automobile. But her accident was extremely minimal so far as damage to her car was concerned. The total cost of damages was about \$45. She had merely brushed fenders with another vehicle going in the same direction. Marie had imagined a car behind her was going to hit her, and in looking back she swerved into the car beside her.

The scrape was so minimal that she scarcely observed what had happened. She was not even shaken up physically. Yet when we were urged to go to her home, her friends intimated that her case was serious. And it was.

When we entered her home, Marie was in hysterics. As she sat there sobbing her heart out, we tried to bring comfort. In an attempt to learn the basis of her emotional upset, we discovered we must piece things together a little at a time, for she could not speak coherently or think clearly.

After perhaps half an hour, we were able to put the pieces of the puzzle into place. Marie was now reaping the harvest of a life of habitual negatives. She had worked where she imagined everyone was trying to find occasion for dismissing her. She suspected everyone of being unfriendly, selfish. Just as looking back had involved her in the accident, so her negativeness had weakened her life forces and she was reaping a harvest of years of seed sowing.

Little by little our faith and courage took hold of Marie. She determined to sow different seed in her life. Almost immediately she landed an excellent position in a large hospital.

But by not being mindful of the need of practicing the positive traits of character, she gradually slipped back into the old negative route. One night she took an overdose of sleeping tablets. Her funeral was conducted three days later. It was a ceremony. But it was also a sad harvest of a life of habitual negatives. Another harvest is yet future.

Gnashing or Shining

When Jesus Christ returns to this earth, it is to harvest the ripened grain of character. "The harvest is the end of the world." Matt, 13:39. "As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun. . ." Verses 40-43. We are omitting the rest of this sentence temporarily. Not that it is unimportant, but so that we might observe a contrast. While one, like Marie, is reaping a harvest of doubts, suspicion, self-pity, another, like Ada, is shining like the sun. The sentence closes with these words, "in the kingdom of their Father." And then follows this challenge, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." Verse 43.

If everyone who hears, or reads, this message would accept at full face value the lesson of Ada and Marie, every one could be among those who will someday "shine forth as the sun." Everyone could be among that number, who at the second coming of our Lord would cry out, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; ... we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." Isa. 25:9.

This message comes to you, dear friend, so that you will be one of those who, when our Lord returns, will "shine forth as the sun." Does not your heart cry out, like the song so often sung, "Lord, I want to be in that number, When the saints go marching in"?

Wheat Versus Tares

Previous to the 39th verse of Matthew 13, Jesus described His kingdom and how it is developed like seed. You will benefit by reading the entire chapter. Among the parables of the chapter He refers to the wheat and the tares. It is this parable that culminates in the 39th verse. In verses 28, 29, Jesus makes clear that it is not always possible, during the Christian growth, to ascertain clearly which person is developing a "wheat" experience, and which is developing a "tare" character but at the coming of Christ, the harvest-time, it will be plain to all.

We are now in the developmental stage of Christ's kingdom. We ourselves are either tares or wheat. But conversion and a new heart can change tares to wheat. (See Eze, 36:26; 1 Peter 1:23; John 3:3-5)

Same Circumstances

You will observe that both wheat and tares are in the same field. (Matt. 13:27.) They both have the same soil, the same sunshine, the same rain. Yet one is a tare and the other is wheat.

For years I have been impressed with what can come from the same soil. One day I was expressing my wonderment to a friend. I suggested that in a small plot of ground, where the soil is identical, you could plant two different kinds of seed. One can be a tiny, tiny begonia seed, the other a thistle. Just the other day we were visiting with a gentleman who has been experimenting with tuberous begonias. He told us that it takes approximately 2 acres of tuberous begonias to produce as much as one ounce of seed. "One ounce," he explained, "is worth approximately \$3,200 U.S. currency."

Now these begonia seeds are so tiny that he used two magnifying glasses so we could detect which was seed and which was a tiny particle of dirt. The same soil that produces a begonia can produce an ugly thistle, or a wild weed. The same plot of ground that is capable of producing a beautiful peach tree can produce a treacherous thorn bush.

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I spoke in wonderment to my friend, "Isn't it amazing how the two different bushes can, by selecting various ingredients from the same earth, produce entirely different harvests?" Then I made an application to the Christian life, My friend had never thought of the parallel.

One Christian has the same grace of Christ from which he can draw as does the other. Also, the same ministry of angels. The same working of the Holy Spirit. The same power of God. The rosebush rises up through the same thunderstorms as does the thistle. It has the same dark, ugly sky one day, and the same blue sky, come another day. Yet, one develops into a thistle, and the other into a rosebush. One plant grows into a peach tree, and the other produces a bramble--all from the same set of circumstances. The same soil.

The Final Harvest

Not until the final Day of Judgment will it be known which is really wheat and which is a hypocritical tare. But "then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not." Mal. 3:18.

Just a little before our Lord returns the second time, a fiat will have gone forth from His throne: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Rev. 22:11, 12.

Thus, the coming of our Lord is the great harvest of all earthly harvests. Ada's wonderful and phenomenal recovery from her railroad train accident was a was a harvest of her own seed-sowing of courage practiced, of faith exercised in her Lord. Marie's sleeping pill death was also the earthly harvest of her sowing of negative thoughts, self-pity, suspicion of others. But when Jesus returns it is the great harvest of earth. All men everywhere will then find themselves in that final harvest. The one who has chosen to sow seeds which are unjust will then be "unjust still."

Not Arbitrary

Not by any arbitrariness on the part of God, for God says, "let him be unjust still." The one who has chosen to think noble, pure, and holy thoughts will then be "holy still." God does not make him holy all of a sudden, No, He at that day declares, "let him be holy still". He has already chosen holiness. He has already accepted, by simple faith, the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. He has already grown "in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 3:18. Now heaven permits him to remain what he has chosen to be. He is "holy still" or "unjust still," "filthy still" or "righteous still."

The same soil affects two seeds differently. As two automobile accidents have a dissimilar effect on two different minds, so the same events attendant at the second coming of Christ, affect the righteous and the wicked differently.

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Matt. 24:30, 31.

There we have it! The Lord is seen coming. The angels are gathering up His saints all over the world. The wicked look on in terror. That which brings exceeding joy to one brings unbearable sorrow to another.

The apostle Paul also gives a picture of the two classes. "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on

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them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with from everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe," 2 Thess. 1:7-10.

What an admiring time the second coming of Christ will be to the righteous! What punishment to the wicked! They have both had the same "Sun of righteousness" overhead. They have both had the same opportunity of prayer, of the Word of God, and of the fellowship of Christian believers. Yet one is punished. The other admired.

Those who have chosen the filthy, shady jokes, while professing Christ's holy life, will then reap the harvest of filth. "And he which is filthy, let him be filthy still." "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Rev. 6:14-17.

The same sun that melts the wax, hardens the clay.

Circumstances have but little to do with the experiences of the soul. It is rather our responses. This is why God commands us, "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." 1 Thess. 5:18. "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Rom. 8:28.

In our travels, people come to us repeatedly. Some with difficulties in the home, with their children, or their partners. They often become so deeply absorbed in their discouragements and problems that life itself is a burden. So they wish for death. What would they think were they to lose their eyesight, as Fanny Crosby did? Or become a blind, deaf-mute as was Helen Keller? How would they respond were they to be physically crippled for life? But thousands of cripples are, nevertheless, happy. In many cases, they are a real joy to be around.

Today, each man, each woman, each boy, and each girl is building his or her life. Some are building unrighteous lives. Others are satisfied with nothing less than noble, righteous, and unselfish characters. Some, like Ada, are successful because they build on faith and righteousness. Others fail because they build on doubt, evil, selfishness.

Harvest of Faith or Doubt

The second coming of Christ is the harvest-time of faith or doubt, of selfishness or unselfishness in two separate lives. One man believes in Christ. He believes that, with God, all things are possible. Another laments because certain conflicts are his, severe trials come his way, unpleasant circumstances surround him,

When Jesus comes, He does not come to sow the gospel seed. This is being done during this gospel age. When He comes, it is to reap the harvest of man's own seed sowing. (Matt. 13:39.)

Choice

A great difference in the parable between the wheat and tares, and man, is that the wheat and tares have no choice as to which they shall be. But mankind does. He is admonished, "Choose you this day

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whom ye will serve." Joshua 24:15. The one who chooses Christ exercises faith in Him. He is according to the parable, classified as wheat.

Another soul can hear a voice on the outside of the door of his heart saying, "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Rev. 3:20. If he chooses to meet life's problems in the atmosphere of doubt, he will, unless he repents, be one of the tares.

Today it is not always possible to discern between two professed Christians; the true, whole-hearted disciple of Christ, and the false-hearted professor of Christianity. One loves the world while professing to love Christ, He does not love Christ enough to attend prayer meeting. He does not care for the presence of Christ sufficiently to love the Bible, He does not find it a real joy to be in the presence of Jesus, so he does not bother to have secret prayer, and may not engage in prayer or devotions with his family. One believes in, and has a personal relationship with, the Lord Jesus. The other professes theology. But he has no personal relationship with Jesus. Yet he may be an active, energetic Christian worker, But without love, he is nothing. (1 Cor. 13:1-3.)

The growing "wheat" Christian takes time for secret and family prayer. He takes time while waiting for a bus or a train to read and meditate on Bible promises. He loves to think about Christ. His neighbor, the tare, is feeding on some exciting TV program, some Wild West radio show, some cheap novel, or lurid magazine. Both may go to church. They may also sing in the choir. They are both growing in a garden, just like the wheat and tares.

No one is to try to differentiate between them, We are to leave this judgment to the Lord of the harvest when He comes for His own. "Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not." Mal. 3:18. It is no arbitrary act on the part of God that causes one class of men to be smitten down by His bright glory. They choose worldly pleasures rather than Christ, and He will not force His eternal presence on people who do not want it. This would be sheer torture to the unregenerate one.

Luke's Gospel tells of two men who went on their way to their home in Emmaus with Jesus. Jesus made out as if to go on. He would have gone on, but that they pleaded with Him to come in and abide with them. So when Jesus comes again, He does not come to force wicked people to be righteous, but rather to gather the righteous home to be with Him. He does not then sow gospel seed, but disposes of the harvest that has already ripened. "The harvest is the end of the world." Matt. 13:39.

Note with me how unarbitrary is the second coming of our Lord. "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." Then the text tells why. It is "because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.... But had pleasure in unrighteousness." 2 Thess. 2:8, 10-12.

The righteous have, of their own free choice, set their sails heavenward, and they will disembark by the river of the water of life. The others have embarked on another course which has its end in the lake of fire. One traveler has set his goal in one direction, and ends up in the valley of Hinnom. Another rests in the valley of Eden. God says "Let him be." "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still," Rev. 22:1]. It does not say to make him be unjust. God is not dogmatic regarding men's choices. He is only dogmatic regarding the disposal of wheat and tares. Tares will not enter heaven; and the holy will not be smitten down by His glory.

Self-destruction

I am sure I know why the great glory and light of Christ at His second coming will be too great for certain ones. It is because they "loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." John 3:19. You take a man from a dark cellar, let him look at a midday sun, and see how it affects him. The sun is not arbitrary in its affect on him. It is he, himself, who makes the difference. It is in this sense that God does not destroy the wicked. They destroy themselves by putting into their characters those elements which cannot stand the glorious day of His coming. God cries out, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." Hosea 13:9.

In another sense, God does destroy the wicked, but not arbitrarily. God wants us to let Him put His life and His light into our souls now. If we do, then when our God, who is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29) returns, "thou shalt not be burned." Isa. 43:2. Like the experience of the three Hebrew captives (see Daniel 3), there will be no hurt in the fire, because the spiritual light of the life of Christ is within. Light meets light and the life is not destroyed. "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap." Mal. 3:2. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart." Ps. 24:3, 4.

The only way to be sure that we shall be ready to stand up under the majesty of His glory when He returns again, is to obey His command: "Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you.... While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light." John 12:35, 36.

Power of the Gospel in the Now

The second coming of Christ means that the gospel is strong enough to save men now. It means that every case will have been decided by the individual himself, before Christ comes. It means that it is not necessary for us to be granted a millennium of easy-going circumstances in order to make it convenient to accept Christ, with no ridicule to face, and no persecution to meet, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all tell of trials and persecutions the Christian will be called upon to bear for the name of Christ. Yes, the Bible states that every case will have been decided by men themselves, before Jesus comes. (Rev. 22: 11, 12.) And "the harvest is the end of the world." Matt. 13:39.

God's gospel is more powerful in the now than circumstances. Daniel believed God was able to save him from hungry lions' mouths under any circumstances. Three men bravely faced the fiery furnace, believing that God is greater than all circumstances and was able, under the most adverse conditions, to save them alive. And God rewarded their faith and their courage.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Rom. 1:16. God's gospel is powerful. It is more powerful than the Red Sea, the Jordan River, fiery furnace, or a lions' den. God's gospel is mighty also to save a Paul and Silas in prison, to rock the walls, and deliver His children. God's gospel is so strong it releases a Peter from the stocks, and a demoniac from the power of Satan. It is so strong and powerful it saves a decaying leper, a corrupting Lazarus, and a blind Bartimaeus. God needs no Utopia millennium to save men and women. He asserts that when Jesus comes, every case will have been decided by men and women themselves. The coming of Jesus is a harvest time. And "the harvest is the end of the world."

Five Facts

Now let us observe, or review, five facts regarding the second coming of Christ:

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The first fact is that the second coming of our Lord is for reaping the harvest of the world, not for sowing the seed. "The harvest is the end of the world." Matt. 13:39.

The second fact is that the rewards Jesus brings at His second coming are not arbitrary. They are in line with choices the various classes have made prior to His return. Notice again four "lets." "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Rev. 22:11, 12. Yes, every man is permitted to choose whether his life will be unjust or filthy, righteous or holy. But according to his choice will be the reward.

The third fact is that Christ's second coming will be like the approach of a thief. Not in respect to silence, but in its being unexpected. The apostle Paul declares, "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child: and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief," 1 Thess. 5:2-4. He rio I. Christ's coming will be like a thief in suddenness it will¹¹ be unexpected. It will be when men are crying peace and safety. It will be unexpected even by the righteous. "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." Matt. 24:44.

Here Jesus is speaking directly to His disciples. He had just finished saying, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up." Verses 42, 43.

Speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul makes clear to us that the Christian is not in darkness regarding the times or the seasons of Christ's coming, and that the general trend of events enlightens the Christian to know that the coming of Christ is near. Yet, it will be as sudden as the approach of the thief! (1 Thess. 5:1-3.)

When Christ taught His disciples that even to His closest followers His coming would be like the unexpected approach of the thief, He had already made clear to them that they might know when it was "near, even at the doors." Matt. 24:33.

The fourth fact is that the identical circumstances which smite the wicked down to the ground, glorify the righteous and they are taken to heaven.

Read once more: "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Matt. 24: 30, 31.

The wicked mourn as they see Christ coming for His elect, or chosen ones, who will be caught up with Him. All the tribes of the earth will mourn. "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail [or mourn] because of him, Even so, Amen." Rev. 1:7.

There will not be a happy face, or a beaming eye among the wicked. Not one of them will be delighted to see Jesus. The power and great glory of the Lord Jesus will be unwelcome to them. They will say "to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." Rev. 6:16.

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He will send His angels. It will be with a great sound of a trumpet. These angels will gather up His elect from all over the world. God wants His children to know that when He comes to take His children to heaven, it will be worldwide in its significance and in its circumstances. "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Matt. 24:27.

The fifth fact is that circumstances of life merely reveal our spiritual constitutions. They have no power to change a real Christian. They cannot drown a man's soul if Christ dwells within. The second coming of Christ is a doctrine that ought to reveal to us, once and for all, that life is what we, through the indwelling Christ, make it. How appropriate are these lines:

"One ship drives east and another west
With the selfsame winds that blow.
'Tis the set of the sails and not the gales
Which tells us the way to go."
-Edna Wheeler Wilcox

The man who believes that the coming of Christ smites down the wicked and glorifies the righteous ought to forever settle one fact in his mind. It is this: That no circumstance of life is as powerful as the keeping power of our Lord. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Matt. 28:18. These were His parting words to His disciples.

In the daily circumstances of our lives, would it not be well for us to say, "Any circumstance that seems to be against me, is for me in Jesus." "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." Rom. 8:28. If someone says some unkind thing about me and another tells me about it, instead of letting it disturb me, if I have fully accepted this doctrine of the second coming of Christ in all its implications, will I let that person's speech dismay me? "Be not dismayed; for I am thy God." Isa. 41:10.

If I receive sad news that some financial matter has completely changed my standing in the business world, will I let this separate me from the love of God? Will succumb to circumstances which are earthly and sometimes downright devilish? Or will I remember that the Christ whose coming smites down the wicked, glorifies and raises the righteous from their graves? (See 1 Thess. 4:16.)

Since Christ can use the selfsame events which take the righteous to heaven and destroy the wicked at the end of the world; the harvest-time; cannot He do the same for His children today? Cannot He use any set of circumstances, man's making or the devil's doing, to be a steppingstone for the growth of His true child?

What would happen were you and I to think of this often as we go about our duties, whether in the home, the field, the factory, or the office? What would it do to our characters were we to say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"? Phil. 4:13.

Since Christ can use the same events which destroy the wicked to glorify the righteous at the last day, cannot He do the same today? "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." Heb. 13:8.

An Experiment

Here is an interesting experiment to test on yourself. It is for every time you receive bad news, or learn of some circumstance that is not to your liking, or which causes you to be tempted to fear. Go to God and ask Him, in the name of Jesus, to take over this problem. When you talk with the Lord, say something like this: "Dear Lord, You are able to use the same event that destroys the wicked to save the righteous when Jesus comes again. Now since He is the same today, I am going to let You use any ugly circumstances, adverse situations, or bad news to refine me, to purify me, and to bless me. I am going to

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rest completely in You. Please guide my life. Direct my steps. Perfect that which concerneth me' (Ps. 138:8), as You have promised, in Jesus' name. Amen."

Then you can rejoice like the psalmist. He cried exultantly, "By my God have I leaped over a wall." Ps. 18:29. You can remind God that He has promised, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper." Isa. 54:17. "For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee." Acts 18:10. You can beg His pardon wherein you have looked at circumstances instead of the Lord of circumstances. Wherein you have been dismayed because of some sad news, when you should have all your care upon Him; for He careth for you." 1 Peter 5:7.

You May Shine

Then, having grown in grace as good wheat, the harvest days will come, We shall be caught up to meet Him and go home to be with Him forever. Sin and sinners will be no more, They will be destroyed "root" and "branch." Mal. 4:1. Never again will sin invade the universe through long, unending eternity! Then the righteous will shine forth in our Father's kingdom, forever with Him in whose "presence is fulness of joy." And at whose "right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Ps. 16:11.

Power Available

Will you not let His Holy Spirit now indwell and prepare your heart? Will you not now invite Christ, the light of the world, to come into your soul? He will give you power to "walk in the light, as he is in the light." 1 John 1:7. You need not sit in darkness, but move continually in the light of His Word. If you have wandered, will you not return and let Him save? If you are not now Christ's, will you confess your sins and let Him forgive you? (See 1 John 1:9.) "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name," John 1:12.

And this is the God I Love!

Prayer

Dear Lord, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Rom. 8:31. We thank Thee for Thy abundant grace for every time of need. For Thy cleansing for every sin. And for Thy power for our every moment of weakness, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Review

1. The end of the world is harvest-time--not seed-sowing. "The harvest is the end of the world." Matt. 13:39.
2. It is a time of gnashing of teeth to the wicked. "There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Matt. 13:42.
3. It will be a time of shining for the righteous. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun." Matt. 13:43,
4. God can change a "tare" heart into a "wheat" heart. "A new heart also will I give you." Eze. 36:26.
5. He does not change filthy "tare" hearts into righteous "wheat" hearts after He comes again. "He which is filthy, let him be filthy still.... And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Rev. 22:11, 12

6. The same event which causes the wicked to mourn, gathers up the righteous. "And then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Matt. 24:30, 31.

7. The same event that smites down the wicked glorifies the saints. "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints." 2 Thess. 1:7-10,

8. Man is given the power to choose the presence of Christ today in his life, "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Rev. 3:20.

9. Men are not lost because there is darkness, but because they love darkness. "Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." John 3:19.

10. The gospel is the power of God-not our own creaturely power. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation." Rom. 1:16.

CHAPTER FIVE

I KNOW THE LOCATION OF PARADISE

THE WORLD'S largest rhododendron gardens are located in the area of our home at Roan Mountain, Tennessee. Each year a festival is held at this 600 acre beauty spot at an elevation of 6,000 feet.

A hotel with 166 rooms once stood amid its balsam firs, spruce, and rare mountain flowers. Mountain birds warbled their sweet strains of music. Royalty had come from Europe. Dignitaries and American celebrities also, as well as common folk. They admired what Dr. Elisha Mitchell has described as "the most beautiful of the high mountains."

This is the home of the gorgeous rhododendron Catawbiense, It grows amid the breathless mountain-valley scenery. Clouds form varying patterns. They conspire with the evergreens, the heather, and the flying creatures, to alert the artist, inspire the poet, and allure the naturalist.

Here once a year, amid song and dance, oratory and reunion chatter, a festive queen is chosen from the beautiful local lassies. Here nature whispers her messages of love, peace, and tranquility.

For years, we have been reluctant to leave this locality in the autumn for our lecture tours. We have counted the months, weeks, and sometimes even the days until we should return. But in recent years it seems our stay for the summer has been growing shorter. We spent but a brief few weeks last year. This year, not even my wife could accompany me. So brief was the trip that the door to our cottage was not even so much as opened.

Other Sky Gardens

One day, while pondering a very expressive description of the rhododendron gardens as "the magnificent natural gardens in the sky," we thought of Paradise, mentioned in Holy Writ. It is located not merely in the sky where loved ones may meet once each year in late June or early July. It gleams from beyond, even into the far reaches of the "third heaven," 2 Cor. 12:2. It is here that Jesus waits to welcome all His loved ones to the grand festival of the ages, He promises, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." Rev. 2:7.

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This life-giving tree grows in magnificent beauty beside the "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal." And this life-giving river proceeds from the very "throne of God and of the Lamb." Says the Scriptures: "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river" is there "the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits." It yields a different kind of delicious fruit each month. The leaves of this marvelous tree are "for the healing of the nations." Rev. 22:1, 2.

Paradise is a wonderful place. "And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him." Verse 3. What a festive reunion awaits the redeemed! "And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads." Verse 4. And talk about glory! Listen! And be delighted! "And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light." Verse 5. And talk about only gathering annually, where only one is chosen to be crowned for but a day, as at Roan Mountain! Oh, no! for "they shall reign for ever and ever." Verse 5. And what about its certainty? Listen once again: "And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true," Verse 6.

Promised to All

Jesus officially sits beside His Father on His throne in Paradise. He has promised us: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father, in his throne." Rev. 3:21, Shortly before His sacrificial death on Calvary, Jesus breathed upon His weary, burdened followers a glorious promise. He said, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

Jesus-Joy

The joy and delight of Paradise is Jesus. "In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Ps. 16:11. No home is a paradise of happiness without Jesus.

Some time ago, my wife and I were en route across the continent, and at the invitation of some wealthy friends, stopped off for a few days of rest. They had a beautiful and spacious home, a lovely swimming pool, gorgeous flowers and shrubbery, and a large playroom. There were beautiful tapestries, luxurious carpets, and many conveniences, besides a maid to do the housework. There was expensive china, and brilliant silverware, and beds fit for a king. Poodles played within the house, and birds warbled their cheery songs. But in all this luxury and beauty the atmosphere was cold, clammy, and dark. Misunderstandings clouded the minds of the occupants, and a deadly miasma seemed to pervade the place. As we tried to relax, we sensed the reality of a home without Jesus, a castle without the Prince of Peace.

In our hearts we were sympathizing with these dear ones when we overheard the maid singing in plaintive tones to herself as she went about her duties, "There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the wounded soul." We almost wept for these dear ones who knew not of this balm, from the apothecary of heaven. Jesus can make a heaven out of a hovel, but without Him a castle is a lonely place.

Recently, we conversed with a dear woman living in a home approximately 50 by 100 feet. Joy had departed. "It could burn," she exclaimed as she sadly related that her husband had left her for another.

While writing this, we have received our mail. Among the letters is one from a young woman who pleaded with us to make a long distance call immediately at her own expense.

Her brother, Jim, as we shall call him, an ordained minister, had taken over a district of churches in a State a thousand miles away, He had returned home for his wife and children, only to receive a shock. His wife, she reported, had stripped the house of everything except the stove, one bed, and the refrigerator. When the husband arrived, his wife pulled out a butcher knife, while her three children stood by, watching. Though he was not murdered, the love of the home was killed. Wretchedness followed. Many letters came to our desk pleading for our prayers. So we know where Paradise is not found. Where peace and happiness do not dwell. Where joy sings no song of peace to aching hearts.

Paradise on Earth

There was once a Paradise on earth. Let us read about it in the second chapter of the first book of the Bible. "And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden." Gen. 2:8. "God created man in his own image." Gen. 1:27. He "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Gen. 2:7. The Lord placed man in the Garden He had planted. In the Septuagint it says, "And God planted a paradise." In many places where the King James says "garden," the Septuagint word used is "paradise." There are people who think that a beautiful garden in itself constitutes Paradise because of its fragrant flowers, its many-colored birds, bees, butterflies, and the vegetation with its exhilarating freshness.

But the Garden that our Lord made in the beginning of time was the most beautiful place the human eye has ever beheld on this planet. The trees were good for food. The ninth verse of the second chapter of Genesis says that in the midst of the garden God placed the tree of life. The tenth verse pictures a river. So there was a garden called Paradise. God was there. The tree of life was there. The river of life was there. Adam and Eve were there. The animals were all pets. The flowers were the never-fading variety. The color of shrubs and grasses was a living green. Pain, sorrow, and death were unknown. God was there.

Then man sinned. His guilty soul hid from God, This is pictured in the third chapter of the book of Genesis--God walked in the garden in the cool of the day calling, "Adam, . . . where art thou?" But Adam hid himself, because he was naked. The Lord God made clear to Adam that He understood the problem. Man had eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and evil that God had forbidden. Now Adam no longer craved the presence of his Maker. The whole atmosphere of the garden changed because man was changed. The most beautiful garden in all the world does not mean much when man changes his relationship to God, and turns from Him.

When man disobeyed God he didn't want to see Him anymore. He even hid from the Lord of love. Then the Lord began searching for man. People sometimes say, "It is so hard to find the Lord!" My friends, God is looking for us! He will find us if we don't keep running from Him. For six thousand long years the Lord has been searching for man. The picture of sin is not one of God hiding from man, but man running from God. Why does man hide from God? The Bible answers: "For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" 2 Cor. 6:14. People cannot engage in sin, they cannot love sin, they cannot fondle sin and still enjoy the presence of Jesus. (See 1 John 2:15.)

Lest man should partake of the tree of life and thus live forever, the Lord was forced to exclude Adam and Eve from their Paradise home. So they were sent out into the sin-cursed world. An angel stood by the gate of the Eden home with a "flaming sword." It was so no one might pass through that gate and partake of the tree of life and "live forever." Gen. 3:22, 23. But God promises that redeemed man will one day pass through that gate again, nevermore to be banished. (Nahum 1:9; Rev. 22:3, 4.)

Paradise Now in Heaven

Sometime after sin entered, Paradise was taken up into heaven. We read of it with its tree, its river, and its God, all up in the third heaven. This revelation is from the pen of a man who lived so close to the Lord that God could reveal to him this wonderful truth. Here it is, in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4: "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, ... caught up to the third heaven.... He was caught up into paradise."

I am so glad that the apostle Paul was willing to forsake sin and follow the vision that he had of Christ, and be so completely saturated with the presence of Jesus that Christ could reveal to him where Paradise went, aren't you? It went up into the third heaven. The first heaven is the atmospheric heaven. (Gen. 1:15, 20.) The second heaven is the stellar heaven where we see the sun, moon, and stars. (Ps. 19:1.) The third heaven is the place to which God took the Garden of Eden, the Paradise of God. (2 Cor. 12:2-4)

Paul said that he did not merely see Paradise there, he saw Jesus there. Let us repeat, it is Christ that makes a garden a paradise, and if you take Him out of the garden, or if you take Him out of the home, or if you take Him out of the heart, or if you put Him out of your life, eventually all happiness, joy, and peace will go. But the apostle Paul put Christ into his life, into his thinking, deep into his heart. So the Lord, in vision, took him right up into Paradise. He wrote that he did not know whether God took him bodily or whether it was in vision, but up there he saw Paradise in the third heaven, and Christ Jesus was there.

Paradise Will Return to Earth

Now the Bible declares that the day is coming when Paradise will be brought back to earth again. "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life," Rev, 22:1, 2. There is the tree of life again! We know it is in Paradise. It is the same tree of life "which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

Chapters 21 and 22 of Revelation give us a picture of the new earth. Paradise is pictured as being inside the Holy City. Let us read Revelation 21:1, 2: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." So he pictures the beautiful city coming down from the third heaven. Inside this city is the throne of our Father, God, and the river is gushing splendidly from that majestic throne. On either side of the river is the tree of life.

Let us repeat the text in connection with this that we quoted earlier. It is Revelation 2:7: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." That's what I'm interested in, aren't you?

But most of all, I want to see Jesus! It must have been a wonderful love on the part of God to first prepare that Garden in all of its glory back in Eden. O my! I've seen people who have been preparing for their loved one's return. Maybe it was a son who had been away to college, or perhaps he was returning home from the service of his country. The mother dreams of his return. She puts everything in readiness. Every bouquet stands for love. So do the cookies in the old familiar cookie jar. But it is not the bouquet or cookies that count most. It is Mother that counts. Paradise will have Jesus. We have had so much evidence of His love it makes us yearn for the day when we may see His face and hear His wonderful voice welcoming us home!

We Will Go Up to Paradise First

The Bible makes plain how we will go up into heaven, or Paradise, before it comes down to earth. Jesus will come again for all that have overcome, The Bible pictures His feet as not so much as touching the earth when He comes for His people. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." 1 Thess. 4:16, 17.

So we are going to meet the Lord, not down on the earth, but up in the air, And "so shall we ever be with the Lord." It does not say at this point that the Lord will be with us, but we shall be with Him. Where is He going to take us? To Paradise. (Rev. 2:7.) Repeating the blessed assurance once again, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." Rev. 3:21. The dead will be raised. The righteous will be changed. We will all meet together up there in the clouds. And so ever be with the Lord. He will take us back to His Father's throne. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." Rev. 2:7.

I have never yet received an invitation from the President of the United States to share the White House. I am quite sure that I never shall. Neither have I received an invitation from the Queen of England to join her royal entourage, and I feel confident that I never shall. But I have received an invitation to meet Jesus and to sit with Him in His throne. I cannot fathom it. It just doesn't seem possible!

But the Bible is true. Of its 1,335 prophecies, 1,000 have already met their point of fulfillment. So we know the Book is true. Therefore, when Jesus says that if we overcome, we may sit with Him in His throne, it is true,

When He promised it if we overcome, we may partake of the tree of life; that is a "for certain" invitation to you and to me to be with Jesus—to be with Him through the ever-revolving cycles of long, unending eternity. It will be in the Paradise of God restored. Jesus came "to seek and to save that which was lost." Luke 19:10.

A Painless Paradise

Oh, it will be a wonderful day when we arrive there at last! Not an ache! Not a pain! No headaches! No stomach aches! No ulcers! No deaths! No funeral processions! No cemeteries! It doesn't seem possible, does it? We all have known heartaches, tears, sorrow, crying, But there will be none there. Let us read about it in Revelation 22:3: "There shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him." And then we read, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new... These words are true and faithful." Rev. 21:4, 5.

It was to be in Christ's wonderful kingdom of life, of peace, and of joy that the repentant thief on the cross made the request when he pleaded, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Luke 23:42. That dying convict saw in Jesus a King. The Holy Spirit illumined his heart to believe that this Man, being crucified between him and his fellow convict, was actually the King of a kingdom. He believed that someday he would come into that kingdom. Jesus told Pilate, the Roman governor, He had a kingdom "not of this world," John 18:36.

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But Christ is coming again as "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." Rev. 19:16. The Holy Spirit caused the dying thief to behold the possibility that Christ would admit him. Vile though he was, crimson-stained with sin as his garments of life had become, Jesus would be willing to forgive and cleanse him. He believed that when Christ should come into His kingdom, He would "remember" him.

Because Paradise is at the very center of Christ's kingdom, Jesus, on that cruel cross, could promise the repentant thief, "You will be with me in Paradise."

That was one great day! The thief had heard of Jesus before, but had been turned from Him by the scowling Pharisees and the agnostic Sadducees, the priests and the teachers of his day. But as he hung there on the cross, he heard people below the cross relating to one another the wonderful works of Jesus. He had forgiven them their sins and healed their diseases. Memories crowded upon memories in the thief's mind. The Holy Spirit sent conviction to his soul. "Truly this is the Son of God." There was still hope for him! There was a chance for forgiveness.

The Holy Spirit pieced things together as the thief thought of the ministry of Christ and heard people continue to relate their experiences as they stood below the cross. The thief's conscience told him that this truly was the Son of the living God. He heard Jesus cry out, "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do." He saw in the face of Christ infinite love and tender compassion. He saw there a grace that no face but the face of God could possibly reveal. He knew then and there that Jesus was God.

The Holy Spirit told him that Jesus was the Saviour of the world. So he looked toward Jesus Christ and pleaded "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Jesus replied to him, "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Luke 23:43. There were no commas or other punctuation when Luke wrote his Gospel. Punctuation did not exist when it was penned. The translators put the comma in. Jaw did not go to Paradise that day. Three days later, when He met Mary at the sepulcher, He said, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father." John 20:17. So it was not that He was to meet the thief in the location of Paradise that particular day; but it was rather that He promised him on that particular day that He would remember him when He should come into His kingdom.

So, when Jesus takes us all back to gloryland, the repentant thief will be among the crowd going to heaven; the third heaven, the Paradise of God. Thus the Bible says we will live and reign with Christ a thousand years. (Rev. 20:4.) At the end of the millennium, that wonderful city will descend to earth. (Rev. 21:2.) Zechariah says Christ's feet will touch the Mount of Olives and it will spread out into a mighty valley. It will be a place on which the New Jerusalem will rest. (Zech. 14:4.)

A New Earth

When the thousand years have passed, all the wicked will be raised from the dead. (Rev. 20:6; John 5:28, 29.) With Satan as their commander in chief, they will come up around that city and attempt to take it. Then fire will come down from God out of heaven and destroy them. (Rev. 20:9.) After the fire has destroyed them, the apostle Peter says there will be new heavens and a new earth. (2 Peter 3:12, 13.)

The whole earth will be purified. No sin and no sinner will remain. Matthew 5:5 will be fulfilled: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." Isaiah 65:21 will be fulfilled: "They shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them." Philippians 3:20, 21 will be fulfilled: We shall "be fashioned like unto his glorious body." We shall be real people. Our bodies will be like the body of Christ. We will be like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God will restore all that was lost. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Luke 19:10. Through the ever-

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revolving cycles of eternity "the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." Ps. 37:11. There will be no more sickness, no more pain, and no more sorrow. And the Lord Himself will dwell among us and be our God, world without end.

Summary

A man whom we shall call Tom Griswold was recently convicted in the slaying of his 3-year-old stepchild. He whipped the child so hard it fell backward against the bath tub and fractured its skull. Neither Tom nor his wife knew God. They had no hope beyond the grave. A Christian attorney and his wife came into their lives. Not long afterward, Mrs. Griswold was converted and today a rejoicing Christian. As we are writing this, Tom is searching desperately for something better than the prison house of sin.

The God who converted a thief beside Jesus Christ on an old rugged cross, reaches out in love for Tom Griswold, and for every other sin-burdened soul who will cry out, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Luke 18:13.

In place of the pain of carnal pleasure, Jesus offers the peace of Paradise. Instead of a life of guilt, He offers God. He promises the repentant, instead of hell, heaven. Instead of the lake of fire, the water of life. Dear sinner, you too may exclaim with the poet:

"The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day;
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away."

And this is the God I love!

Prayer

Dear Sinner, would you like to offer this prayer?

Dear Lord in heaven, I have sinned and done wickedly. I do not deserve Your forgiveness, yet You have promised, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him." Hosea 14:4. I ask you, dear Lord, to fulfill this promise to my guilty soul. Because it is "impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18), I believe You have healed my sinful heart. I thank You I have received Your pardoning grace, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Review

1. Paradise is in the third heaven where Jesus is. 2 Cor. 12:1-4. "I knew a man in Christ ... such an one caught up to the third heaven. . . . He was caught up into paradise."
2. The tree of life is there, and the river of life, and the throne of God. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." Rev. 2:7. "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life." Rev. 22:1, 2.
3. God promises to take His faithful to be with Him there. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." Rev. 3:21.
4. He promises to do this at His coming. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14:3.
5. The joy of Paradise is Jesus. "In thy presence is fulness of joy." Ps. 16:11.

6. Christ promised the dying thief Paradise. "Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. . . . Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Luke 23:42, 43.

7. The thief did not meet Christ in Paradise that day, but asked to be with Him when He comes again. Jesus had not yet gone to His Father even three days later. "The first day of the week cometh Mary." "Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father." John 20:1, 17.

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CHAPTER SIX

HOW TO AVOID THE EGO TRIP

HOW WOULD YOU like to take a little ride to Gowin Park?" a friend suggested. "On the way we can pass the home of Mr. Blank, who is on an ego trip." I was very weary of writing anyway, so was grateful for the opportunity to get some fresh air and take in two sights in one trip.

We went up the road, wound around onto gravel, then up again and around, and up until we passed Mr. Blank's \$150,000 home. To carry him on his ego trip he had the latest model Cadillac. To house his ego trip he had enough space in his home for four families the size of his own. Everything about the place--the spacious garden, the swimming pool, the furnishings, indicated that Mr. Blank was out to impress.

"Did you hear what has happened to Mr. Blank?" my friend asked, a little later. "No, what?" I asked interestedly. "He is involved with the Federal Government over the latest business deal he recently pulled. I think," my friend added, "he will be in jail in a matter of weeks that is, unless he thinks fast. He has thought fast before, and he just might come up with something again!"

People all around us find it an almost irresistible temptation to go on an ego trip. Perhaps it is not on as large a scale as Mr. Blank's. It may not be in owning large buildings, expensive cars, or spacious gardens. It may be in search of fame, or influence, or sensual pleasure. Our generation is not the first to fall prey to this deadly philosophy. It is an old story--about as old as the human race. Let us observe just a few of the men of Bible times who started on the ego trip only to find its end was torment.

The Skull-Fractured End

Abimelech, son of Gideon, was a bramble, according to Jotham's parable, (See Judges, chapter 9.) This wretch persuaded the men of Shechem to give him 70 pieces of silver with which "he hired vain and light persons" to slay 70 of his father's sons on one stone. Jotham, the one lone son to escape death, ran up on a hill and cried to Abimelech and his supporters. He likened Abimelech to a bramble being anointed king over the olive, the fig tree, and the vine--the three most useful growing things known in Israel. But the end of Abimelech's ego trip was death at the hand of a woman who cast a piece of a millstone to break his skull. Then his armorbearer finished him off with his own sword. A sad ego trip ending.

Man With Bird's Claws

Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, pursued his own trip. He cried boastfully, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee."

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Then God declared: "And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will."

And so it was that, "the same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws." Dan. 4:30-33.

The Would-Be Suicide

King Solomon early in his reign asked God, not for riches or fame, but wisdom to order his kingdom aright, But as he became strong, he started on an exalted ego trip. He says, "I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: I gathered me also silver and gold and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem.... And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy." Eccl. 2:4-10.

But listen to how it affected him: "Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me.... Therefore I hated life.... Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun." Verses 15-18.

The Fastened Body

King Saul was another who went on his own trip. He ended up one night in a witch's cave, and the next day died on the battlefield. His enemies placed his severed head in the palace of their idol, Dagon, and fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan.

The Trickster's Death

Balaam, once a prophet of God, went on his ego trip also. He ended his journey as a soothsayer. He was slain with the enemies of the people whom he had betrayed. (See Num. 22-24; Joshua 13:22.)

From Egotist to Leper

Gehazi, servant of Elisha the prophet, who was privileged to witness the power of God, launched out on his ego trip and became "a leper as white as snow." 2 Kings 5:20-27.

Drunken Incest

Abraham's nephew, Lot, went on his ego trip and "pitched his tent toward Sodom." (See Gen. 13:10-13.) At the end he left Sodom homeless, wifeless, and was duped into having sexual relations with his own daughters. He became the progenitor of Moab and Ammon, two of the most bitter enemies of God's chosen people. (See Gen. 19:15-38.)

From Boaster to Corpse

Sennacherib, king of Assyria, took a belligerent ego trip, crying against God's people saying, "Know ye not what I and my fathers have done unto all the people of other lands? Were the gods of the nations of those lands any ways able to deliver their lands out of mine hand? ... How much less shall your God deliver you out of mine hand?" 2 Chron. 32:13-15. His end came when one angel of the Lord slew in one night 185,000 of his soldiers. (2 Kings 19:35.) "And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels slew him there with the sword." 2 Chron, 32:21.

From Disciple to Suicide

Judas, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, in spite of his contacts with the Son of God, decided on his self-centered ego trip. "And falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out." Acts 1:18; Matt. 27:5.

Worm-eaten Egotist

King Herod, of the days of the apostles, had his own brand of self glory when "arrayed in royal apparel," he sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost." Acts 12: 21-23.

Humble Successor

There were others down through the ages who chose the Christ-centered journey. Among them we find Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and Daniel in the Old Testament. And John the Baptist, Stephen, and Philip in the New Testament, just to mention a few. Many are the promises to humble servants of God who acknowledge their helplessness, their unworthiness. Here is one of these wonderful promises: "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way." Ps 25:9.

Now observe another: "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." Isa. 57:15.

The Ego Trip of Christ's Day

In Christ's day, practically the entire religious leadership was bent on the hellish ego trip. Jesus described it this way: "But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi." Matt. 23:5-7.

Speaking directly to these egocentrics, He continued, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation." Verse 14. Then Christ spoke, further, words that left no doubt in anyone's mind as to whom He meant: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." Verses 27, 28.

Disciples Had the Same Spirit

Schooled in the religious philosophy of the day, the disciples of Christ themselves had the impression that a sign of God's favor was wealth. So when Jesus declared, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God," His disciples were exceedingly amazed, saying, "Who then can be saved?" Matt. 19:24, 25.

There was strife among them as to who would be the greatest. Even on the way to Gethsemane and that awful night of agony, they were hassling over who should have first place. (Luke 22:24.) Jesus had told the parable of the rich fool, who decided to pull down his barns and build greater. (Luke 12:16-21.) He had blessed the "poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3), and had given Himself and ministry to "the common people [who] heard him gladly." Mark 12:37. Yet the disciples, so long leavened in the philosophy of the ego trip, were very slow to perceive that he who pursues that path is not "rich toward God," but in God's sight is actually a "fool." Luke 12:20, 21.

It is not riches per se that bring a curse on the human heart. Abraham, the friend of God, was "very rich." Gen. 13:2. It is rather the accumulation of things for one's own satisfaction and pleasure that brings God's disfavor. It is seeking honor, glory, and fame belonging to God alone. It is when men think that life consists "in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" that they are on the wrong road. Luke 12:15.

Spiritual Pride Too

The religious leaders of Christ's day were not merely proud of their financial wealth, but of the wealth of their spiritual heritage as well. They boasted, "We be Abraham's seed." John 8:33. The Israelites were rich in God's favor. They had the riches of "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came." Rom. 9:4, 5. One of them could pray, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess," Luke 18:11, 12. They knew not that they were "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Rev. 3:17. Unless they repented and accepted Jesus, who stood at the door of their hearts and knocked, He would "spue" them "out of" His "mouth." Rev. 3:20, 16.

Jesus said, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." Luke 16:15. When Jesus expounded the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in the nineteenth verse, His words were far from complimentary of the rich man who had been "clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day."

Gentiles in the Dog Class

In the parable of the good Samaritan, given at another time, Jesus showed how an ostracized Samaritan cared for a Jew, half dead, wounded by robbers. That total stranger showed more kindness to men of another race than the professed people of God showed for that despised people. Had a Jew seen a Samaritan wounded, lying by the way, he would, if he took time to look at him at all, likely have spat in his face. The disciples considered, as did also their Jewish teachers, that such people as the woman of Canaan were in the dog class. They besought Jesus, "saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us." Matt. 15:23.

In the conversation that followed, Jesus used the expression of the day, "dogs." She freely acknowledged that she was considered in this class. (See Matt. 15:21-28.) But Christ's healing of her daughter exemplified His high regard and tender love for all. So Lazarus, in the parable, full of sores, was laid at the rich man's gate. He begged "the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table:" and "the dogs came and licked his sores." Luke 16:20, 21.

Respecting Persons

James, author of the book that bears his name, captured the lesson Jesus was teaching. He wrote: "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel. and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" James 2:1-5.

Testing It Out

We have a friend of some financial means who shared with us an experience he had. A leader of a certain denominational church came to see his industrial plant, since it was giving employment to some of his church members. The occasion was a potluck gathering. My friend, who did not dress ostentatiously, walked up to the religious leader, but found it difficult to engage him in conversation. It was evident to my friend that the man was searching for someone, a person of wealth and one who could employ many of his church members. As my friend went over to the other side of the room, he overheard the leader asking one of his church flock who was the man who controlled this moneyed industry. When the church leader's member pointed in the direction of my friend, you should have seen that leader make a beeline to my friend. What a hand pumping followed! But it left my friend disgusted.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus shows God's attitude toward men on the ego journey, James, the writer of the Epistle bearing his name, learned the lesson well, Have we Christians learned it too?

The experience of my wealthy friend has been repeated many times. On the other hand, there are those who go to the other extreme and despise any man who has means. They forget that many wealthy men, many men of God, who have been leaders of nations, such as Joseph, Moses, Nehemiah, et cetera, were completely dedicated to the cause of God and humanity.

A leader of men, also a friend of mine, recently confided in me that he was not good at remembering names and faces. But added, "Anyone who gives a large donation to my charitable cause I never forget!" Let none look down on others who seem to succumb to this temptation, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." 1 Cor. 10:1.2. The Bible says, "There bath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man." Verse 13. "He fashioneth their hearts alike." Ps. 33:15. None of us are immune to walking in the very steps we despise in another. In fact, if we take too much of our time meditating on the weaknesses of others, by "beholding" we "are changed into the same image." 2 Cor. 3:18.

So the next time you pass the \$150,000 home of Mr. Blank, beware! He may have more space than three families his size needs. He may have a Cadillac car of the latest year and model to carry him on his self-centered tour of pleasure and egoism. But you beware! Keep looking in the direction of Him who had no place to lay His head. For by beholding Him we are changed into His image.

Our Team

Repeatedly the members of our soul-winning team discuss the horror and fear of taking glory to self which belongs solely to God. Our Lord declares, "My glory will I not give to another." Isa. 42:8, "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord," Jer. 17:5. "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass." Isa. 40:6, 7.

We challenge ourselves never to permit Satan to charm us into thinking we are other than unworthy instruments of God. We are the water hose--not the water supply. We are the electric cord--not the dynamo. We are witnesses--not the Lord. Satan speaks to every heart, enticing it to accept glory due to God alone, Even as we pray, Satan is at hand, close beside us at the pulpit suggesting, "That was a pretty good prayer. You are doing real well. You are really IT." Therefore our prayer should be:

"Lord, make me a nail upon the wall,
Fastened securely in its place.
Then from this thing, so common and so small,
Hang a bright picture of Thy face."
-Mildred Hill

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Let us take another look at the egocentric. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Christ points out that men on an ego trip end in torment. "There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.... And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments." Luke 16:19, 23.

In the parable of the trees, Jotham, son of Gideon, points out that Abimelech's ego trip ended up with a piece of mill stone on his head and a sword through his body. "The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them." "Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us." "And a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his skull. Then he called hastily unto the young man his armourbearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died," Judges 9:8, 14, 53, 54,

That the end of the ego trip is certain death, unless repented of, Paul wrote: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." Gal. 6:7, 8. "For the wages of sin is death." Rom. 6:23, "In Adam all die." 1 Cor. 15:22.

Because the pleasures of the ego trip are short, seasonal, there are those who choose early in life to take the route of Christ. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." Heb. 11:24-26.

Others, who have backslidden and entered on the ego trip, only to have been sadly disappointed, have turned from it in disgust. Later in life they have made a complete right-about-face. They have left their message for the benefit of others. "I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?" "Therefore I hated life. . . . Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun." "I

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know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him." Eccl. 2:1, 2, 17, 18; 3:14.

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Eccl. 12:13, 14.

A decision to change from the ego trip to the Christ-centered journey must be made during this short span of life. There is no second probation after Christ comes. "And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence." Luke 16:26, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Rev. 22:11, 12.

During this life men and women, completely saturated with ego sins, may find complete forgiveness and stand before God as if they had never sinned. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Isa. 55:6, 7.

A Reward Awaits Self-effacement

There is a reward in humbling self, in recognizing in every man infinite possibilities. Let us give one example:

Several months ago I met two men with long hair and beards. They came into the church where I was preaching. They sat at the front of the church with their relatives. Before meeting them, my reactions concerning such an appearance were anything but complimentary. But I had been praying that God would help me to make a stronger breakthrough with young people in our travels across America, and in other lands.

The Holy Spirit helped me to look beyond the long hair, the beards and the Levis. Looking into their faces, the Holy Spirit seemed to tell me, "Love these men. Love them sincerely." As I looked in their direction, my love went out to them. I seemed to feel a bond between us.

A week later I had the honor of baptizing both of them. Not many weeks afterward, they started attending youth meetings that we were holding. At the very first gathering, they led souls to Jesus Christ, right there, wearing their Levis. Again and again I contacted them at their residence, requesting them, if possible, to accompany me on a similar series of meetings. And in each place there was a dramatic change in the hearts and lives of some of the youth. Now they have been traveling with us for nearly two years. They were not out for recognition or fame. They were almost penniless. I thank God that He helped me to recognize character--pure, beautiful character! What a reward!

At one place I was invited to conduct a camp meeting series in a very large State which boasts of its size and people. I wrote ahead, informing the leaders of the church that I had recently found a couple, or three (we had three bearded brethren at this time) young men, and would be bringing them with me. Unless I heard from them otherwise, they would attend with me at the camp meeting.

When we arrived, the young brethren with me took a tent as other campers do. They began meeting youth informally on the grounds, on a one-to-one basis. No meetings were scheduled for them, and we were told after the camp meeting was finished that a letter had been sent to me requesting the young

men not accompany me to the encampment. But for some good reason (I believe providentially), I never received the letter,

Now the ten-day camp meeting was more than half over. The character and attitude of the young men was so Christlike that they were invited to give a little talk to the earliteens. After the meeting, some twenty of these young teen-agers came to Christ through our young men's ministry. The conference youth leader was pleased. He had invited me to speak to the senior youth the last Sabbath morning at the eleven o'clock service. But the conversion of the teen-agers was so impressive that he came to me, suggesting that it would be nice for our young men to participate in my morning youth service also. I, in turn, suggested that I would be glad to introduce the young men, then let them take the entire service. He readily agreed. The call to accept Christ given at the close of their talks was so blessed by the Holy Spirit that hundreds of youth gave their hearts to the Lord Jesus either for the first time, or in rededication.

When the morning meeting was over, the conference youth leader approached me with another suggestion. "The service this morning ought to be reproduced tonight at the big auditorium," he suggested, Encouraged, I went to the president of the conference and placed my request before him, praying that he would not turn me down. I said, "Would you object if the young men with me participated in the closing service at the auditorium tonight?" He generously gave his consent.

The Call

That evening I spoke for only about seven minutes. Then the three bearded brethren, each in his turn, spoke. The last one to speak made the appeal for decisions for Christ. While he was yet speaking, and before the call started, the union conference president, who sat on the rostrum near me, bent in my direction. He whispered a compliment, "You had a lot of courage to bring these men to this conservative area."

As he sat there while the call for decisions for Christ was made, imagine his joy as well as that of other leaders. They saw scores coming to the front to give their hearts to the Lord. The union conference president stepped off the rostrum and went down in front to clasp the hands and to pray with those who were responding to the invitation of the Holy Spirit. It was through the bearded young men, from who, but for the grace of God, I might have turned away, only a year before.

These men had been out in the drug world. They had taken their own ego trips on LSD, marijuana, and many evils that go with it. One of the young men discovered that the ego trip was a demon-possessed journey. He related later how he actually became completely taken over by Satan four times before he turned to the Christ centered path that leads to eternal life.

His young friend, an avowed atheist, was not looking for God. He was not interested in God. But he decided that he would follow his friend in his search for God. He did not expect to find God in the Bible. He expected to find something to ridicule. "We have looked into Eastern religions," his buddy told him. "We have read everything to find a solution to life's problems. If we cannot find it in the Bible, then there is no place else to turn." His young atheist friend finally agreed to read only the words of Jesus Christ Himself as found in the New Testament. He testified later that he figured Jesus had been around and might have come in contact with some Oriental wise men. In ten days of reading only the words of our Lord Himself, this young man fell in love with Jesus. The other young man gave his heart to the Lord in four days by merely reading the words of Jesus in the New Testament Scriptures. With moist eyes and quavering voice, the former atheist exclaimed to his friend, "It's true, because it's true, because it's true!"

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So they left their Christless ego trip. God, in His infinite love, found them and revealed to them His love for them personally. Repeatedly they both testify, "We have never been so high on drugs as we are now on the love of our Lord Jesus Christ!" How I thank God that His Holy Spirit helped me to look beyond humble patched Levis and beards, to find sincerity of purpose and beauty of character.

A Real High Trip

The heavenly trip is really high. Saith the Scriptures: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Isa. 55:9-11.

These young men are avid students of the Bible, reading its love story of salvation, and drinking at the fountain of living waters. One day they came across one of our books entitled The ABC's of Bible Prayer. They read our suggestion to open the Bible to 1 John 2:25, place a finger on the verse, then ask, believe, and return thanks for receiving eternal life. This they both did. The next half hour their hearts were so broken up with the love of Jesus that they could scarcely speak. Just to think that eternal life is ours in Jesus Christ! To realize that we can live a life that measures with the life of God! Is it high? It could not be higher! But neither they nor we are secure excepting as we keep looking humbly to Jesus. The moment we lose Him, we go down the drain. He is our only security.

You, my dear friends, may kneel right down where you are and claim God's promise for forgiveness for the world's ego trip you have been on. The promise is: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Isa. 1:18. By confessing your sins, and believing in His forgiveness, you may claim eternal life right now. I invite you to respond by saying Yes to Jesus just now.

And this is the God I love!

Prayer

Would you like to kneel down and claim this promise and pray this prayer?

Dear Lord, You have promised us in Isaiah 55:7: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." I here confess myself a sinner. In my heart I choose to forsake my wicked ways; All my unrighteous thoughts. You have promised to pardon me abundantly. I ask You to do this, and I believe You will keep Your word. Thank you, Lord, for forgiving and cleansing me, and for answering my prayer, in Jesus' name. Amen.

A 30 Point Study on the Rich Man and Lazarus

1. Jotham's parable, recorded in Judges 9, pictures trees talking, walking, and reasoning. Judges 9:7-15.
2. Trees do not talk, walk, and reason. Jer. 10:5.
3. Therefore, he did not intend his parable to give a picture of trees actually doing this, but rather to bring out specific points. Judges 9:14-21.

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4. Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus pictures men after death as talking, reasoning, and arguing. Luke 16: 23-31,
5. Jesus Christ plainly told His disciples that their friend, His disciple, Lazarus, was asleep in death. John 11:11, 14.
6. The dead cannot love, hate, remember, or reason. Eccl. 9:5, 6. Therefore, Jesus was not intending to picture accurately conditions after death, but rather to teach the important lesson that men on the ego trip are an abomination in the sight of God, Luke 16:23, 15.
7. Jotham's parable stated that Abimilech would die in a fire. Judges 9:20. Abimilech did not die in a fire, but by a piece of millstone and a sword. Judges 9:53, 54. Yet the Bible states that his death came as a fulfillment of Jotham's prediction. Verse 57. Therefore, it was parabolic language rather than being intended to give an accurate description of trees in conversation, and so forth.
8. Christ's parable of the rich man and Lazarus speaks of fire into which the rich man was cast. Luke 16:24. But the Bible states specifically that the lake of fire is the SECOND DEATH at the end of the thousand years. Rev. 20:7, 14. Therefore Christ had no intention of picturing the actual conditions after death, but rather to teach:
 - a. Ego trip men are doomed unless they are changed. Luke 16:25.
 - b. That change must take place in this life. Verse 26.
 - c. We must rely on the writings of the Old Testament. Verse 31. (Today we also must have the New Testament.)
9. Jesus said men do not go to heaven or hell at death, but to the grave. John 5:28, 29.
10. Jesus taught that men are not rewarded at death but at His second coming. Matt. 16:27.
11. Jesus taught that good men are not rewarded at death but "at the resurrection of the just." Luke 14:14.
12. Jesus does not teach that men go to hell fire at death, but that all will be punished according to their own sins. Luke 12:47, 48; Rev, 20:12.
13. Were men to go to their rewards at death, there would be no reason for a final day of judgment, the second coming of Christ, or the resurrection. Jesus taught that God loves His enemies. He could not love them if He were to torture them throughout eternity. Matt. 5:44; Eze. 33:11; John 5:28, 29.
14. The Word of God teaches that no wicked person goes to His reward at death, but is reserved to the final judgment day, 2 Peter 3:7.
15. That day was still future in Paul's day. Acts 24:25. 16. The rewards of the good and bad do not take place before Jesus comes. Rev. 22:12.
17. In the grave there is no remembrance of God. Ps. 6:5. 18. The moment a man's breath goes forth, his thoughts perish. Ps. 146:3; 4.
19. When people pass away, they know nothing of their sons' honors or defeats. Job 14:21.
20. The Judge of all the earth will do right. Gen. 18:25. 21. This world will not always be burning. It will give way to a new earth. 2 Peter 3:9-13.
22. The time will come when there will be no more crying, or sorrow. Rev. 21:4.
23. There will be no more pain. Verse 4.

24. All tears will be wiped away. Verse 4.
25. The former things will never be remembered. Verse 4; Isa. 65:17.
26. The final fire will burn up the wicked completely, leaving "them neither root nor branch." Mal. 4:1.
27. Even Satan will eventually come to a complete end. Eze. 28:19.
28. He will be brought to ashes. Verse 18.
29. Affliction will never rise up again. Nahum 1:9.
30. There will then be no evil or uncleanness in existence anywhere. Rev. 21:27.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HOW TO OVERCOME HYPNOTIC TEMPTATION

IN THAT DAY shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem [that is, the church]; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them." Zech, 12:8.

Like Christ

This is the triumphant song of inspiration. This text refers to the closing days of human history. It is a time when many cowards are giving up their faith in Christ. Many weaklings are withering away. There will be a special group of men and women who, while recognizing that they are unworthy, will, nevertheless, be like David, who, in his innocence, was a man after God's own heart. And those who seemed previously to be what we might term "normal" Christians will "be as God."

I read that Scripture several years ago and was thrilled at the picture. I decided to share it immediately. It had set my soul on fire. To think that men and women who have so many inhibitions, weaknesses, and sins may be like David in his strength, yea, even as an angel, was a stupendous challenge to my soul. As I preached, however, I left out the expression they "shall be as God." I only preached on the part that indicates that they shall be "as the angel of the Lord." Since then, however, I find that the term "angel of the Lord" may not reach the height to which this text rises, Being like an angel does not reach the zenith of the promise; that is, unless that Angel be the "Angel of the covenant"--the Son of God. Victorious men may not merely walk up and down the earth like angels of God. Our text declares they "shall be as God."

What a promise! The feeble ones in the church—men and women who recognize that in them dwells no good thing—these men and women may be like the Lord Jesus Christ in character! No wonder the apostle John declared, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." 1 John 3:2, 3.

This is the height to which God calls us. Yet He makes provision for us when we fail! Thank the Lord! But God does not want us to fail. He calls us to be giants for God. To be like our Master. To be like our Saviour. To be like our Lord. This is the ideal to which He calls us, for all God's biddings are enablings. I thank God for it, don't you?

How Sin Entered

Now we wish to notice how sin first came into the world in the Garden of Eden. Then how our Lord met the tempter. And how we may meet the tempter victoriously.

First, we observe how Adam and Eve met the tempter. They had a way by which they could have overcome him. The Lord had given them special ammunition. But instead of using the Lord's method, they used their own. And the foe, the enemy, being stronger than they, brought them into subjection.

The Lord had said, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," (Margin, "dying thou shalt die.") Gen. 2:17. The Lord had cautioned them: "If you partake of the forbidden fruit, you will die." That is plain!

But "the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made." Gen, 3:1. He appeared to Adam and Eve. He began to reason with them. They in turn reasoned. Thus they sinned. The devil began to tell them, "What the Lord has said will not happen. Ye shall not surely die." Eve should have replied, "God has said, Do not eat of it. `Get thee hence, Satan!'" But instead of depending on God's word, Eve listened to the enticing words of the enemy. The result was sin. The Lord Jesus said, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." John 8:34, The apostle Paul declared, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey." Rom. 6:16. In a letter penned in 1903 my favorite author wrote: "Satan tempted the first Adam in Eden, and Adam reasoned with the enemy, thus giving him the advantage. Satan exercised his power of hypnotism over Adam and Eve." 21MR 10.

God had given them a trustworthy antidote for Satanic reasoning. It was a "thus saith the Lord." At first Eve used it. Then she turned from it and started reasoning with Satan. Satan used his hypnotic power over Adam and Eve, and they fell.

Christ's Example

Centuries came and went. Our Lord Jesus Christ came to earth. Now we read of Him as He was standing on the mount of temptation. The same tempter, who had thousands of years before approached Adam and Eve, now came to Christ. He said, Now you command the stones to be made bread.

Jesus was hungry! He had fasted for forty days. When Satan approached Him He answered, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Matt. 4:4. When Satan failed with the first temptation, he came with another. Jesus once more replied, "It is written." And on Satan's third attempt, Jesus added, "Get thee hence, Satan." Matt. 4:10. Jesus quoted Scripture each time. That was victory. And it spelled eternal victory for all who would accept the Pattern, Jesus Christ. "Satan exercised his power of hypnotism over Adam and Eve, and this power he strove to exercise over Christ." Ibid. Satan had been using the power of hypnotism on the human race for nearly four thousand years. Mankind had failed to accept the simple program of our Lord; that is, to meet the tempter, not in our own strength, but in God's strength—with His words, in His spirit, and with His ammunition. What happened when He did what Adam and Eve should have done? "But after the word of Scripture was quoted, Satan knew he had no chance of triumphing." Ibid.

We May Follow His Way

Isn't that simple? It is so simple, my friends, that you and I, in the closing days of human history, may follow where Christ pioneered the way. We may gain the victory where Adam and Eve failed. We may be like the angels of God, walking in the darkness of this world with light surrounding each one of us. We may be in character like "the Angel of the covenant"—Jesus Christ.

The God I Love

We speak of hypnotism. Hypnotism takes place when men begin to reason with, and obey the evil one. They pit their will, their reasoning, against his. But humanity's mind is no match for the devil's, It takes Christ's word, Christ's power, to overcome evil.

The Hypnotist

A man attended a hypnotist's meetings. The hypnotist began something like this:

"Do you believe in hypnotism?"

The man replied, "No, sir."

The hypnotist directed, "Then lie down on this couch." The man lay down. The hypnotist continued, "Now do you believe in hypnotism?"

The man answered, "No."

The hypnotist then directed, "Try to get up." He tried repeatedly but could not move from the couch. The hypnotist said, "Do you now believe in hypnotism?"

This man had already twice obeyed Satan in doing what his agent told him to do. When he was told to lie down, he did it. When he was told to try to get up, he tried. That is what mankind has been doing down through the centuries with the devil—reasoning with and obeying him.

And the devil says, "Now see if you can get up." Man has been trying to get up, but all his lifetime he has been subject to bondage. (See Heb. 2:14, 15.) So then the Lord Jesus Christ comes along and says, "I will give you ammunition. You may use it to defeat the devil."

Matching Bible Promises

Dear friend, you and I have been guilty before God in not using the ammunition--3,573 Bible promises, or clusters of promises. We have a promise to match every temptation. We have a promise to match every human weakness. They are spelled out often in monosyllables, simple phrases, and sentences. They are there in the Bible to use in temptation. Every promise is placed in the Bible as subject matter for prayer. (See Mount of Blessing, p. 133.) That is why God penned the promises. He fills these promises with His life. (See John 6:53-63.) Then, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." Isa. 59:19.

In a wonderful book entitled, *The Great Controversy*, page 600, is a choice series of statements which I have thought of for many years. Notice how very simple and concise they are. How scientific also, in the light of what we are studying, "Temptations often appear irresistible because, through neglect of prayer and the study of the Bible, the tempted one cannot readily remember God's promises and meet Satan with the Scripture weapons." Now isn't that simple? These immutable, eternal and life-giving promises, containing the life of Jesus, are for our use in temptation's hour.

Men go into darkness because they take their eyes off Jesus and forget His promises. If I turn from Jesus, the light of the world, I shall sin! But if I keep near Him, then I shall have the light of life. The reason we fail, is the same reason Adam and Eve failed. It is that we do not meet the greatest hypnotist of all ages with the Word of God. We pit our intellect against his. Man is no match for that great angel, though he is fallen. But the Archangel, Jesus Christ, will come and pit His almighty power against that of Satan. Then it becomes the Creator versus the creature—Satan. And Satan has no power against God. We find it here in the Bible, the immutable, eternal Word of the living GOD. Christ commands, "Get thee hence," and Satan is vanquished.

The Bible says that in the last days false men shall arise, and there will be seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. (See 1 Tim. 4:1, 2.) But God's Word "is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword." Heb. 4:12. It is "the sword of the Spirit." Eph. 6:17.

Detecting Satan

Now the devil will come to us in many different ways. He came to Christ as an angel of light. But one day when Christ was in the synagogue, a man possessed of a demon cried out. His was an unclean spirit—an unclean devil. I thought for years that all devils were unclean. The Scripture does not state it was an unclean being. It identified him as an unclean devil. Some devils specialize in uncleanness. There are other devils that specialize in sanctimony. Some get into the church. Some are "holier-than-thou," parading themselves as angels of light. They are the ones who take the attitude that they are better than anyone else. So the devils can come to us in many disguises. I believe that when we get home to glory, and learn the story of the unfallen beings, we shall find that there were many demonic specialists. That demon camp is filled with specialists, training themselves to be more and still more cunning, each in his particular field. They take on various forms as desired. Even humanity, after six thousand years of experience, recognizes the need for specialists. They work on specialized programs. So there are sanctimonious devils, unclean devils, holier-than-thou devils, hypnotic devils, arguing devils, debating devils. All are in the church and out. Some go to church and argue in a Bible class. Thus they divert the hearers from the Word of God.

Specific Promises

God has given us the answers in His wonderful Book. Now wouldn't it be a victorious thing if you and I matched our weaknesses with God's promises? You know, dear friend, for every weakness you and I have, we can find a promise—a solution in the Scriptures.

Someone confesses, "I am greatly worried and troubled with thoughts—impure thoughts." There is a text of Scripture that can put the devil to flight. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Cor. 10:4, 5. No one can sincerely quote that text in faith, centering and saturating his thoughts with the presence of Jesus, and not have deliverance from impure thoughts. We don't need to be hypnotized by evil thoughts. We are not to quote the Scriptures as one would press a button, but in deep dependence on God.

There are many other texts that can be used to put the devil to flight. Yet we move on, year after year, being captives of evil thoughts and bad habits when Jesus has set us the example. He has shown us the way of victory. One text of Scripture will put the devil to flight when we rely on God as we quote it prayerfully, believingly.

Instead of tempting the devil to tempt us, let us keep the weapons that God has given us near at hand to overcome him. Someone says, "My problem is impatience." That is mine too. It belongs to the Coon family. I found the trouble with us was that we were too willing to say this was the Irish in us instead of fleeing to "Christ in you, the hope of glory." You know, it's a shame what the Irish get blamed for, isn't it! Dear friend, there are the simplest of antidotes for impatience. I think of the times I have blown up, and of other times when I have remained calm and peaceful. Do you know what made the difference? When I hurled a text of Scripture at the devil. That made the difference. When I am not victorious, it's because I haven't used God's Word.

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Revelation 14:12 says, "Here is the patience of the saints." You know we usually quote, "here are they that keep the commandments of God," But the verse doesn't start with that. It includes that. But it begins with these words, "Here is the patience of the saints." When the evil one tries to get me to be impatient and I take that promise in the name of Jesus in all true humility, I don't lose my temper. I'm not supposed to. That's why God gave us that promise.

There are many others, like this one: "In your patience possess ye your souls." Luke 21:19. This is a wonderful promise. I am thrilled with that text, and I will tell you why. It is because the context tells us about how people will be betrayed by closest friends. This is most important. Have you had trusted friends betray you? Have you been shocked that people in whom you have placed the greatest confidence have betrayed that faith? Have you experienced individuals for whom you have done much, turn against you at the very time you needed them the most? And the devil says, "If there ever was a time in the world you have a right to lose your patience, it is surely at such a time." But our text says, "In your patience possess ye your souls." Christ's life and victory are in this promise.

Now about criticism. When I start to condemn someone, I should remember, "Thou that judgest doest the same things." Rom. 2:1. The command, "Judge not" (Matt. 7:1), is a promise in a command. Every command is a promise. So every time we are tempted to judge another, let us say, "Lord, send the angels to cluster around me. And may the Holy Spirit bring to my remembrance the promises that You gave for this very time of need." Then the devil is overcome.

If I exclaim, "Oh, why do people act as they do?" The answer may be that they are very much like me. That settles it. Now if I start reasoning with the devil, I shall fail. Let us not reason with the foe or he will hypnotize us with the mistakes of others and make us petty judges. Thousands of Christians are being hypnotized by the weaknesses of others. Satan says, "But look! See what a terrible thing Mrs. Blank did!" We look and reason with the devil when we should have hurled a "Judge not, that ye be not judged" at him. There is a promise for every temptation.

Here is another text to use. "Thou God seest me." Gen. 16:13. My friends let us practice the presence of Jesus and place promises in the setting of His presence. Let us cry out, "Lord, I must draw nearer and still nearer to You to hear You speaking. I hear You giving me deliverance. You are presenting to me the ammunition which I in turn will fire at the enemy, I will use 'It is written.'" The promises are in the Bible. It has been suggested concerning these Bible promises, that we "fix" them "in the mind,"--Steps to Christ, p. 90. "Fill the whole heart with the words of God. Ibid., p. 88. Again; "Those who" have "learned to place their trust in the promises of God" have "found these all-sufficient in every experience through which they were called to pass." Prophets and Kings, p. 428. Men of faith "obtained promises, ... out of weakness were made strong," Heb. 11:33, 34.

The Bible is the rule of faith. The Bible is the guide for the Christian. Victorious men and women have found Bible promises and used them, instead of reasoning with temptation.

Self Must Humble Itself

For many years I have wondered why Elijah, after he had had a glorious day on Mount Carmel had to pray seven times before a cloud appeared. Did you ever wonder? I do not believe the Lord said to Elijah, "Now you go over there and pray seven times, and I will send rain." Elijah had no idea that he would have to pray so many times. He prayed once and sent his servant to look for some sign of rain, but there was none. He prayed again. The servant went again. Still there was not even the slightest cloud in the sky. So he prayed still again and again.

The God I Love

What was Elijah doing? Someone, decades ago, offered an answer. In effect, the writer said: There are important lessons for us in the experience of Elijah when upon Mount Carmel he prayed for promised rain. His faith was severely tested, but he persevered in presenting his request to God. The servant watched while Elijah prayed, Six times he returned from his watching, saying, "There is nothing." No cloud. No sign of rain. But Elijah did not give up in discouragement. He kept reviewing his life to see where he had failed to honor God. "As he searched his heart, he seemed to be less and less, both in his own estimation and in the sight of God. It seemed to him that he was nothing and that God was everything; and when he reached the point of renouncing self, while he clung to the Saviour as his only strength and righteousness, the answer came." Then the servant appeared and said, "Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand." 1 Kings 18:44.

Are we praying to God that He will give us an answer to our prayer on a platter, before we completely renounce self?

A man walked up to a well-known evangelist and started to praise him. The evangelist replied, "Don't praise me. God will withhold His blessing." No human being should accept praise as due him. Only God must be praised. Then we may go to God and receive the answers to our prayers.

But we too often expect to push a button, as it were, and have God answer. Just like we take a pill and expect relief from pain. God wants us to come nearer and still nearer to Him until we can say, "Lord, I would be nothing. Thou shalt be all in all." "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Gal. 2:20.

A Promise for You

"In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them." Zech. 12:8. Take fresh courage, friend. Reach out after God with all your heart and soul. Say, "I have found the secret. I can take these precious promises containing the life of Jesus. I can use these promises saturated with the presence of Jesus. I will look up into the face of Christ. I will see, as it were, His lips moving as He gives me His life in His Word." Then I can say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Phil. 4:13. "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Gal. 6:14.

Right now would you, with me, draw nearer to Jesus? Would you say, "Lord, I have failed to study Your Word as I should"? Would you like to come to the altar and say, "Lord, I come to dedicate myself to a study of the life of Christ and the promises from His lips as I never have before"? Would you like to do that? And if you have slipped a little from the Lord, would you like to come to the altar saying, "Lord, I come as never before, to dedicate myself to Christ and the promises from His lips"? Would you like to return today?

If you have never accepted Christ, would you like to confess your sins to Him and renounce self? Say, "Lord, I accept Jesus." He will cleanse us completely. 1 John 1:9.

And then, when He comes again, we will march through the gates into the wonderful city of God. We will unite in singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Rev. 5:12.

And this is the God I love!

Prayer

Dear Lord, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts." Jer. 15:16,

Review

1. Sin has a hypnotic power. "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." James 1:14.
2. Christ's drawing power is great. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me," John 12:32.
3. Christ's power is all-powerful. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Matt. 28:18.
4. The gospel is Christ's power in action. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation." Rom. 1:16.
5. This great power is in the Word of God. "The word of God is quick, and powerful," Heb. 4:12.
6. His word is living. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life," John 6:63.