

Portraits Of Jesus The Messiah

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Ed Horak

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Chapter 1

**God Has Spoken...
...Through His Son**

Hebrews 1:1-2

1:1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son,...

Many people feel that God is silent today. He may have spoken in times past through great and godly people, but today we have to sort of 'get along' in life with a distant God, somewhere out there. The degree of uncertainty about His love for us varies from individual to individual. Or some may say that because you can never be absolutely sure about things, just hope for the best. This falls far short of a rich relationship with the personal God who knows us by name.

God is here, with us, intimately involved and He cares about you and me more than we realize. He has spoken and continues to speak through His Son – the Lord Jesus Christ - who came to dwell among us, died on the cross for the

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forgiveness of our sins, was raised from the dead on the third day and who sent the Holy Spirit as our divine advantage to live in our hearts. This same Jesus, now in His resurrected form, is coming back soon to a world that is trembling from the shaking taking place in these troubled last days.

In the past, God reached out to our forefathers in a variety of ways by means of His spokespeople the patriarchal forefathers of the faith and the prophets. Godly as these people were: think of Abraham, Moses, Elijah, they are no match for the majesty of God's own Son who now speaks through His Word and Spirit.

Today, God's focus is on what He has and is saying through His Son, Jesus. Sadly many post modern preachers pay only lip service to the centrality of Christ's work on the cross, focusing mostly on motivational messages that often place an imbalanced emphasis on our responsibilities and efforts. Responsibilities are fine, when we see what we are to do as a 'response to His abilities' in us and not a complicated and never-ending 'works' program of Christian do's and don'ts.

Thankfully, Jesus came and lived among us, showing us that the way to God was through Him, and Him alone. He is **the** way, and His wisdom has invaded every aspect of daily life. He did not lean over the balcony of heaven and say: 'Read this book, flow with this or that set of principles'. No, He came to mankind in our need, rubbed shoulders with us, and was full of grace and truth. He told us to follow Him personally (Matthew 4:19).

The Old Testament is mainly a record of God's dealings with His chosen people, the Jews: how they were called to

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be the witness of His goodness in the world. They were to be holy or separated out to be His people in order to bring forth the world's Messiah and savior at the prophesied time according to the scriptures.

Unfortunately history records a series of failures that befell God's people. Nevertheless, God in His mercy and patience was always able to find a faithful covenant keeping remnant whose history eventually culminated in the birth of Jesus the awaited Messiah to the Virgin Mary.

What are commonly called 'The Gospels', record Jesus birth, growth, life, ministry and death and resurrection in such rich depth that men have been inspired to change their lives for two thousand years since. No one else in history has had such a profound impact on mankind as Jesus Christ, God's own Son. The book of Acts goes on to show the dramatic growth of the newly launched church operating in the supernaturally manifest power of the Holy Spirit.

Then the Epistles and Revelation record the ups and downs of the challenges that faced the early church, as well as the prophetically revealed future currently unfolding in the 'end times'. In total, they bring to us a revelation of all that Jesus accomplished on the cross pointing us to our secure position in Him. The New Testament is thus a complete whole: Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Revelation. These books of the Bible all speak of and point to the person and plan of Christ, and we are well served to read these scriptures not so much to find out what to do on a day to day basis (important as that is), but rather to encounter Him personally as the risen savior and what He has already done on our behalf on the cross. (The theological explanation of Jesus life and ministry is really only found in the New

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Testament scripture **apart** from what most call the ‘Gospels’).

Although this book will concentrate on the ‘Gospels’, at times it draws on the special revelation of righteousness given mainly to the apostle Paul from the Lord Jesus Himself.

First, let’s continue to lay a foundation of Christ’s centrality in the fascinating account of what is commonly called the Mount of Transfiguration encounter.

The story involves Jesus, and His three closest disciples: Peter, James and John. They accompanied Him up the mountain, leaving the rest of the disciples behind in what was to be a life changing encounter.

God Firmly Puts The Spotlight On Jesus

It was six days after Peter had received a profound revelation of Jesus’ divine identity from God in heaven that the group of four ascended the mountain. Peter had gloriously discovered that Jesus was no ordinary man, but that he was indeed the Christ or Messiah – the anointed one (Matthew 16:13-20). This revelation has been the foundation upon which Jesus has built His church throughout modern history.

On the Mount Jesus was transfigured or ‘transformed into another form’ before their very eyes. The glory of God was so strong upon Him that everything was different.

This amazing manifestation of God’s glory on Jesus along with the miraculous appearance of Moses and Elijah so

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impressed Peter that he felt obliged to say something. He was not asked to contribute at this point, yet he did so anyway. Perhaps he was nervous, and it just came out. Whatever the case, what he said and did was completely inappropriate. Perhaps we can learn a lesson: to keep silent when God is moving is a good thing. No need to fill up space!

In effect Peter placed Jesus on the same level as Moses, who represents the Law, and Elijah who represents the Prophets of the Old Testament. So significant was Peter's presumption that God the Father had to rebuke (correct in love) him and focus his attention on the preeminence of Jesus over these undoubtedly venerable Old Testament characters. He repeated the powerful fact that He was 'well pleased' with Jesus His Son, and that they (Peter, James and John) were to 'hear Him'! They were not to lose their focus on Jesus, the one that God had chosen to speak to man in these last days (Hebrews 1:1-2 – our opening scripture in this chapter).

We know that Moses and Elijah both pointed the way to Jesus through their lives and ministries as well as their prophecies. This was good and always God's intent. Peter's ill considered suggestion effectively detracted from Jesus' supremacy and this got God's attention in a dramatic way.

Jesus had invited them to follow Him (and Him alone), so the disciples were to keep their eyes on His glory, not the lesser and faded glory of these Old Testament representatives.

Matthew 17:4-9

4 Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make

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here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" 6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. 7 But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." 8 When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

Notably, Jesus came to the now fearful disciples lying flat on their faces, touched and encouraged them to arise and not be fearful. When they arose they saw **Jesus only**. This is significant. Moses and Elijah had retreated leaving Jesus in His rightful place of preeminence. They had just learned a great life changing lesson.

I believe this still holds true for us today. When we read the Bible or listen to any sermon or teaching on TV or study a book we should be looking for the centrality of Jesus' person and work. God has spoken in these times through His Son and if we are taken up with so called revelations that detract from Jesus in any way either by design or default, we are missing God's emphasis.

Only in Jesus are found all the treasures of divine wisdom (Colossians 1:3) – why would you want to look any where else?

In my experience much so called 'Gospel' preaching and writing is significantly devoid of the centrality of Jesus. It appears to have degenerated into mostly 'principled centered' motivational talks about the good life. I understand and appreciate that Jesus came to bring us

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‘abundant life’ (John 10:10) but when we neglect to keep our eyes on the author of this good life, we are in danger of perpetuating a ‘Christian version’ of self centeredness. The emphasis in this preaching is more on what we have to do, than on what Jesus has already done. It is ‘performance’ based and not ‘grace’ focused.

This is not to say that the Old Testament does not have many enlightening stories to help us today, (1 Corinthians 10:11) but they only serve their purpose when they point to Jesus in all His glory. The ‘spirit’ or essence of any Old Testament account is that it points to Christ and His finished work. Jesus is the center and pinnacle of all things.

The following scripture repeats the words ‘all things’ no less than five times (five is God’s number of grace).

Colossians 1:16-18

16 For by Him **all things** were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. **All things** were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before **all things**, and in Him **all things** consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in **all things** He may have the preeminence. (Emphasis added).

When God began to refocus my attention on Jesus, I had to go over my teaching and preaching material to see how much I had drifted from the centrality of a vital relationship with Christ into a religious set ‘Christian’ do’s and don’ts, principles and strategies.

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Incidentally, there is an interesting insight gained from the meaning of the three disciples' names who accompanied Jesus up the mountain that day. In the original languages and usage it was understood that John means 'grace', James means 'he who supplants' and Peter means 'rock' or stone. Put together we see that God's **grace** in Jesus (John) **supplants** (James) the stony or **rock like** (Peter), unbending and ultimately condemning requirements of the Law (the law was engraved on stone on Mt Sinai). Hidden in the choice of the three disciples that day is God's plan to 'exalt' Jesus above the Law which the Jews were so preoccupied with.

Jesus Early Life And Start Of Ministry

There is something about Jesus that stands out in the account of His early life with Joseph and Mary as well as His baptism at age thirty in the Jordan River under John the Baptist's ministry.

Jesus grew up in Mary and Joseph's household, increasing in wisdom and stature, at least as it pertained to His humanity.

Luke 2:51-52

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

I believe He must have lived and walked by faith in those growing years, otherwise how could He have 'pleased' God as the baptism account highlights.

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Luke 3:21-22

21 When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. 22 And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

Never before had anyone, whether they are a prophet, priest or even a king, heard these special words from God.

“You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased” (Vs 22).

First, God focused on Jesus’ sonship. Jesus was His ‘beloved Son’ a – covenant term of endearment. Then He went on to say that He was ‘well pleased’ with Jesus! Notice this was before Jesus had even begun His ministry. He had not performed any miracles – His first was to come later at the Cana wedding where He turned the water into wine. He had not called any disciples, nor had He faced any of the temptations in the wilderness. He was in the starting blocks of His public ministry, yet God was already well pleased. How so?

Jesus had pleased God because of His faith. The book of Hebrews teaches us that without faith it is impossible to please God.

Hebrews 11:6

6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

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This applied to Jesus too. He obviously lived by faith all these years as He was being prepared to launch into public ministry.

It was not Jesus determination, talent, obedience to His parents or even His regular synagogue and temple attendance as He grew up that pleased God, good as all these were. No, it was His simple faith or trust in God's goodness towards Him that pleased His heavenly Father, and which precipitated the favorable public endorsement He received at His baptism in the Jordan.

Likewise, in our own walk with God, we ought to be encouraged that He is pleased with our faith when it is rooted in what Jesus has done for us at the cross, and not in our own efforts. It was at the cross that Jesus paid the price for the total forgiveness of our sin. No amount of obedience to the Ten Commandments, hard work, witnessing, church attendance and service can ever measure up to what Jesus has purchased for us at the cross. We enjoy all that Jesus accomplished by simply receiving His gift by faith.

When we seek Him, we will be greatly rewarded for our faith. He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Nothing has changed since those early days.

As children of God born again of His Spirit let's keep our eyes on Jesus and His completed work, and not 'fall from grace' by relying on our own efforts to try to please God in some sort of Christianized works or behavior modification program. We live and grow in Him by faith and faith alone.

He knows we will fall short of His glory every time, so has provided a way out of this dilemma of sin through His Son. Jesus came as our perfect sacrificial substitute who fulfilled

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all the Law requirements on our behalf. This is grace: the unmerited favor of God.

Let us gratefully receive the abundance of this grace and the gift of righteousness so that we can reign in the realm of life.

Romans 5:16-17

17 For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

Very importantly, the works we 'do' therefore, are the natural fruit that spring from our abiding relationship with Him. They do not make our faith alive (this would negate Jesus' role), they merely **express** His life within (James 2:20).

In the next chapter we look into the face of God who has spoken to us through His Son in this profoundly intimate way.

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Chapter 2

In Your Face

Exodus 33:10-11

11 So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.

2 Corinthians 4:5-6

6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

More than any other part of your body your face communicates who you are. We don't say about people, 'Oh what interesting elbows they have'. No, we focus on describing their face! A person's face gives you a window into a person's inner man, especially when you look into their eyes. Some cultures hide their faces, leaving only the eyes uncovered, whilst others go to great advertizing lengths to focus huge attention on the face.

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Then some people have a nervous habit when spoken to: they hide their face (especially their mouth) in some way with a hand gesture. Magazines mostly put people's faces on their covers. Plastic Surgeons sculpt faces more than any other part of the body, and people put softening cream on their faces more than on any other part of their bodies.

Faces speak volumes about what is going on in people's hearts: Cain's 'countenance fell' when he sinned, Moses' face shone when he came from the presence of the Lord and Jesus' face shone 'brighter than the sun' when He was transfigured on the mountain.

In the following prophetic account Isaiah speaks of the depth and intensity of our sin when it was laid on Jesus. The result was to dramatically mar the 'visage' or face of Jesus on the cross. Yes, He was brutally battered about the face by His captors all through the night, yet it was when He took our sin upon Himself that He (and His face) was most affected.

The onlookers were greatly astonished at the gross deformation of Jesus' face when He suffered for us as He was pinned to the cross. Just as our faces are visibly twisted by physical pain and even emotional anguish, Jesus' face was grossly deformed when the sin of the world was laid on Him. It affected Him spirit, soul and body.

Isaiah 52:14

14 Just as many were astonished at you,
So His visage (face) was marred more than any
man, And His form more than the sons of men; ...

This gives us just a glimpse of how God went to great depths to bring us up to His great heights. He exchanged

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our spiritual darkness for His spiritual light at the cross. The record shows that even the natural light of the physical world fled as a literal darkness fell over the whole earth for approximately three hours – from noon to three pm.

Matthew 27:45-46

45 Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.

46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

It was towards the end of this period of darkness, when our sin was laid on Jesus, that He cried out in despair to the now more distant ‘God’, addressing Him no longer as His ‘Father’ (the intimate relational term He mostly used up till this point).

To me it is clear that there is a connection between the spiritual and the physical realms that only God’s Word can explain. You could say that even the greatest scientists outside of Christ are still ‘groping in the dark’ to understand the true nature of light, the cosmos and life itself.

Personally, I was trained at university to think about life with its meaning and mechanics outside of Christ. This led me nowhere fast. Eventually I ‘saw the light’ and my understanding was ‘enlightened’ by the truth of the Gospel when it was boldly and lovingly presented by an anointed minister. Far from becoming ‘narrow minded’, as some of my unbelieving friends claimed, my mind was expanded along with my heart, or so my wife says. I began to see things in a new light, and the Lord through His Word and

by His Spirit helped me love my wife, family, friends in a better way. Coming face to face with Jesus was a life transforming experience for me.

Does God Still Turn His Face From Us When We Sin?

Isaiah 59:2

2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.

This scripture sure seems to say that God turns his face from us when we sin.

God is holy, separate from all sin and evil, yet when the issue of sin is seen in the light of what Jesus has done on our behalf, things look quite different. At this point we must note that God's revelation has been progressive in that we (as New Testament believers) know more of His plan for man than the saints of old did in the Old Testament. Christ most accurately and completely reflects the Father's person, nature and will. He taught us that if you have seen Him (Jesus) you have seen the Father (John 14:9). Jesus was the total fulfillment of all that the Law and the Prophets (including Isaiah) ever spoke of.

Isaiah prophesied approximately seven hundred years before Jesus completed His work on the cross, and we now live under the better covenant He established upon better promises. Grace and truth has come in the person of Jesus, whereas Isaiah and the prophets lived under the

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dispensation of Law which could only minister death and condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:7).

The prophets of the Old Testament were waiting for the glorious day when Jesus would consume sin in Himself, and open up the way to a free and unhindered relationship with God through His blood.

Sin, and the separation (death) it brings, has always been a problem to mankind, but never to God. He has always had a plan to first cover it, then later to completely eradicate it.

He made a series of covenants with man beginning in Eden when He clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins (thus shedding blood) right through to Noah, Abraham, Moses and the Israelite law covenant to Jesus and the New Covenant. These covenants all progressively speak of His grand plan to restore mankind to a close face to face fellowship with Him as 'Our Father'.

The plan culminated in Jesus work on the cross. His act of supreme sacrifice changed everything. His sacrifice was not some latest 'version' of forgiveness that had evolved through the years. It was not like some divine relational software program we could call 'Covenant 7.0', but was the grand consummation of God's eternal plan, and it cut to the very root of sin: it dealt with fallen human nature. The problem of sin and its consequences was 'once and for all' solved by the shedding of Jesus life blood for humanity (Hebrews 7:27). Those that accept Christ's cleansing sacrifice would receive a new heart nature and be made brand new creatures (Jeremiah 31:31-34 / Ezekiel 36:26-27 / 2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

When Jesus was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, He took them **completely away**

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in Himself so that they would no longer be an issue between us and God.

Isaiah 53:5-6

But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us
all.

Psalms 103:12

12 As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

Religious teaching will have you believe we are still sinners at heart, and this error keeps you focused on sin. In this scheme of things you remain 'sin' conscious and not 'son' conscious! God wants us to enjoy a relationship with Him where we have a 'good conscience' (1 Timothy 1:5), our hearts being 'sprinkled from an evil conscience' (Hebrews 10:22) by His blood. Yet many Christians are plagued with a nagging sense of guilt and condemnation that is not from God but rather from the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10) who exploits this sad state of confusion.

The above two scriptures make it clear that Jesus' perfect sacrifice satisfied God's justice completely, leaving only the issue of trusting in Jesus alone as the deciding factor in a relationship with God. Sin has no place here at the mercy seat of God, nor was our sin conveniently swept 'under the

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carpet' (covered), but was justly judged by the righteous God when it was laid on Christ and removed away from us. God is no longer keeping a daily spreadsheet account of our sins, chalking them up against us, pending some later judgment. There will **not** be some frightening video shown when we get to heaven showing out in the open all that was hidden in our lives! The Psalmist prophesied of a blessed state of the forgiven life as follows:

Psalm 32:2

2 Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit.

Later, the apostle Paul makes the New Testament declaration of freedom as follows:

Romans 4:7-8

7 "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered (forgiven);
8 Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin."

This speaks of God's grace apart from human self effort or religious works which amount to an attempt to earn God's favor and blessing. Today we are truly blessed by God and not cursed in any way. In fact we are redeemed from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13). In the context the 'curse of the Law' involves the requirement to keep every detail of it to the 'nth degree. If you did not, a curse was invoked on you.

This kind of absolute obedience was impossible for fallen mankind, and only the Lord Jesus, the sinless Son of God

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was able to fulfill all the Law requirements and thus qualify to be our perfect representative and substitute.

By His perfect blood we are ‘bought back’ or redeemed from slavery to sin, and also the condemnation that is a product of the Law. In Christ we are empowered to live under and in the realm of God’s grace (favor and empowerment) by faith.

As we saw in Chapter One, we now rule and reign (as kings) in the realm of life through the abundance of God’s grace and the gift of righteousness we receive in Christ.

Romans 5:17

17 For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

Of course when anyone refuses to accept God’s grace in Christ they confine themselves to the realm of the ‘god of this age’ or world system (2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan exploits man’s rebellion and ignorance, and is therefore the one who comes to ‘steal, kill and destroy’ according to John 10:10. In great contrast, Jesus comes to impart His life to willing subjects who confess His Lordship. These blessed souls place themselves under His special covenant protection, provision and purpose. The rest of mankind is left to their own devices and the ‘common grace’ of God to all men who rains on both the just and unjust (Matthew 5:45). These hapless souls stumble along in varying degrees of confusion not quite knowing what is ‘hitting’ them from day to day. This need not be so when you know what Christ has done for you and simply agree with Him.

How We Are Changed

Thankfully, when we continually ‘behold’ Jesus’ face we are changed from glory to glory, and enjoy the multiple benefits of such change. As we grow in God’s grace, favor and wisdom, not only does our life make more sense, but we become more fruitful in furthering God’s plan through us to the benefit of others around us in our sphere of influence. Discovering the true meaning of your life always produces fruit.

2 Corinthians 3:18

18 But we all, with unveiled face , beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Some argue that we grow spiritually by enduring suffering with an attitude of faith and patience. Endurance is no doubt a strong character quality, but it is not the source of our growth, no more than the cold and wind are the catalyst for a plant’s growth. Like plants grow by being rooted and grounded in life giving soil and moisture, we grow by being rooted and grounded in God’s love for us.

The Bible teaches that spiritual growth and transformation comes by beholding the face of the Lord – by being in His presence. When our faces are ‘unveiled’ we see Jesus for He truly is. Our minds are renewed and we begin to think and believe in line with God’s truth. This produces transformation, and not some set of difficult circumstances.

We come to see that all things are **of** Him, **through** Him and **to** Him (Romans 11:36). Notice the all important ‘all things’. A personal relationship with Jesus is thus the

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source, process and goal of our lives: its nature, essence and growth. Suffering, persecution, or difficulty is common in the world in which we live in, but as Christians we are not **of** it. We are now **of** Christ. He is now our all in all, and we must not be confused as to the mechanics of spiritual growth (1 Corinthians 15:28).

When we encounter God's goodness as we look into the face of Jesus we are changed. Our heart beliefs and manner of thinking are impacted, and we begin to make decisions that produce change or transformation in our lifestyle (fruit begins to show).

Very importantly, only when we see Jesus face from a position of righteousness, can we become satisfied as we 'awaken' in His likeness. Nothing else suffices.

Psalm 17:15

15 As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness;
I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.

The wine of God's kingdom or joy makes us truly glad, our faces shine with the glory of the Holy Spirit (oil) and the heavenly bread or spiritual food (manna) of the Word of life (Jesus) strengthens us.

Psalm 104:15

5 And wine that makes glad the heart of man,
Oil to make his face shine,
And bread which strengthens man's heart.

These then are the means by which we grow spiritually. As we meditate on His Word, yield to His Spirit and revel in the freedom we have in Christ, will we grow into fruitful, secure and strong vines producing the fruits of

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righteousness (Philippians 1:11) that God has called us to manifest.

Through the rebirth, we now bear His ‘spiritual genes’ and are thus divinely ‘programmed’ for fruit bearing. Our completely new natures are regenerated and renewed in Christ by the Holy Spirit according to Titus 3:5.

Titus 3:4-5

4 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the **washing of regeneration** and **renewing** of the Holy Spirit,...
(Emphasis added)

This is change (and resultant growth) from the inside out, not through our own diligence in enduring externally difficult circumstances.

Examples Of God’s Glory On People’s Faces

First, Moses’ skin on his face shone with God’s glory when he came down the mountain after being in God’s presence.

Exodus 34:29-30

29 Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses' hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him.

There was a level of glory that was evident in Moses time when the Law was given on Mt Sinai.

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Later we see Jesus face shining with a greater level of God's glory as He was transfigured on another mountain.

Matthew 17:2

His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.

Jesus ministry brought a far greater glory than Moses ever did. Today the ministry we have according to the Spirit surpasses that which Moses had (as great as he was). This is the power of Jesus blood that paved the way for a ministry of perfect righteousness.

2 Corinthians 3:7-9

7 But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? 9 For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.

In my own life, I recall an incident in a small town in Washington State USA where I was at a coffee / bakery shop with my wife. An older lady happened to look at me and after an introduction by the shop owner that we knew, was forward enough to remark that my face was shining. I had no idea (like Moses) that my relationship with Jesus showed in this way to her.

Then I heard a testimony of someone seeing a light moving around in a grocery store. When they tracked the light source down it was coming from a preacher who was

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simply doing some shopping that day. The glory of the Lord rested upon him.

Really, this ought not to so remarkable as Jesus Himself said that we as believers are the 'light of the world' (Matthew 5:14). Light always shines from a source or is reflected by some surface. The source of our 'light' is our relationship with Jesus. Be sure to 'cultivate' your relationship with Jesus and your face will shine brightly unhindered by sin or religiosity.

As we 'run our race' be sure to 'look' to Jesus who originates and completes our faith.

Hebrews 12:2

2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith,

As we make it our focus to continually seek His 'face', we enjoy the life that He ('the King') has intended for us.

Proverbs 16:15

15 In the light of the king's face is life,

Psalms 27:8

8 When You said, "Seek My face,"
My heart said to You, "Your face, LORD, I will seek."

In conclusion, our loving heavenly Father has an engaging 'face' that is turned towards us with grace and mercy. He has **ears to listen** to our prayers (Psalm 5:3), **eyes to see** all our needs and desires (2 Chronicles 16:9), a **nose to smell** the fragrance of our worship (2 Corinthians 2:15), and a **mouth that speaks life** and blessing (Deuteronomy 8:3)

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over us. When we ‘see’ God in all His magnanimous kindness or goodness manifest towards us in Christ, we are moved to repent or change our way of thinking (Romans 2:4).

The cross is the intimate place where God’s righteous fiery judgment fell and produced the ultimate peace between God and man. They ‘kissed’ – or were harmonized at the cross.

Psalm 85:10

10 Mercy and truth have met together;
Righteousness and peace have kissed.

The ‘truth’, that yes our sin had to be judged, and the ‘mercy’ of our savior’s sacrifice met in that moment of intimacy. Selah.

In the next chapter we begin examining the power of four as it pertains to God’s revelation to us through His face.

Chapter 3

The Power Of Four

Ezekiel 1:10-11

10 As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man, each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle. 11 Thus were their faces.

Revelation 4:7-8

7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle.

If you have two or three witnesses testifying to the veracity or truth of a matter, then to most that is usually sufficient. However, if you have four witnesses you settle any matter without any doubt whatsoever. God is the great communicator and knows how to get through to us no matter where we stand. The Bible is full of a variety of ways in which He has spoken to mankind through the ages.

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Not only has He spoken through His creative genius which we see all around us on Earth and in the heavens (Romans 1:20), but He has spoken to us personally through His Son in these times. Today He even speaks through His people who serve as witnesses to the completed work of Christ at the cross.

In the two scriptures cited above at the head of the chapter we have a picture of four living creatures that graphically reflect the person, nature and will of God with faces first of a lion, then a calf or ox, a man and finally an eagle.

Of course God created these beings and is thus not solely confined to their characteristics. Nevertheless they provide a fascinating platform of revelation especially when you look into the four Gospels in terms of these magnificent creatures. We propose to do this in the following chapters.

But first we explore God's use of 'four' in the scriptures.

The Power Of Four Portraits

A table with three legs is quite stable, but when you add a fourth leg it becomes very stable, there really is no need for a fifth leg. When we receive God's revelation of Himself in fours we take on the inclusive, unshakeable stability and symmetry He has prepared for us. Although there are seeming opposites like a 'lion' and a 'calf' or a 'man' and an 'eagle', the opposites carry deeper understanding by means of contrast. For example:

The lion – the wild hunter is contrasted with the calf or ox which is a domesticated animal.

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The man - is earth attached, whereas the eagle is naturally free to fly the air.

North only makes sense in contrast to South, and large in contrast to small, and so on.

We learn a lot through contrasts.

The four ‘corners’ of the earth speak of God’s inclusive salvation for all, and so in this chapter a number of examples are briefly covered that will bless you as you meditate on God’s wisdom and grandeur. Then in the next chapter we specifically examine the four Gospels in some detail.

1. In The Beginning:

Genesis 1:14-19

14 Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; 15 and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. 16 Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. 17 God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, 18 and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 So the evening and the morning were the **fourth** day. (Emphasis added).

God created the sun and moon – the two great ‘lights’, one to rule by day and the other by night. They also served to

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divide the day from night, giving us a definite framework with which to order our lives. Two lights, two segments of the daily cycle. Everything in life fits into this time framework which is definite and unchanging bringing with it a measure of predictability and security.

In short, even what God's created on the **fourth day** speaks of order and certainty when we cooperate with it (Him).

He goes further and defines annual seasons within which we live and produce.

Genesis 8:22

22 "While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Winter and summer,
And day and night
Shall not cease."

Spring for planting, Summer for growth, Fall or Autumn for reaping and Winter for rest and preparation. Really, two main categories summarize this annual cycle: 'seedtime and harvest'. These processes define our lives. God has called us to function within these **four** seasons. When we cooperate with His seasons we enjoy success, when we don't, we experience only frustration.

2. In The Tabernacle of Moses:

When the Israelites camped they were to pitch their tents in a definite pattern around the specially constructed tabernacle. The twelve tribes were divided up into threes facing each of the **four** compass directions. Amazingly

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when you see the plan from an aerial perspective it shows the outline of the cross with its four points.

The tabernacle arrangement was therefore a type of the redemptive ministry of Jesus, and it went further to even pointed to four levels or degrees of access to God's central presence.

First, the Gate to the tabernacle is where '**inspection**' took place which speaks of recognizing our need to draw near to God. In ourselves we are found wanting, that is why we need to draw near, entering through the 'door' (Jesus) and receive God's grace and mercy. God's provision is only found in proper relationship with Jesus as savior as we enter through the 'door' (John 10:9).

Next, the Outer Court involved '**introspection**' - looking within to see our need for cleansing. The laver of water and altar of sacrifice point to Jesus completed work of sacrifice on our behalf.

Third, the Holy Place is where '**identification**' takes place. We Identify with God's provision through the Table of Showbread and Candelabra - the source of our needs being met.

Fourth, the Holy of Holies speaks of '**intimacy**' – what we were created for, to walk in close fellowship with God. Here we find the ark of God's presence covered by the mercy seat sprinkled with cleansing blood. Once here, who would want to go back for anything else?

Then, the High Priest who officiated in the tabernacle wore an ephod or special garment woven and threaded with **four** colors.

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Exodus 28:5-9

5 "They shall take the gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine linen, 6 and they shall make the ephod of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, artistically worked. 7 It shall have two shoulder straps joined at its two edges, and so it shall be joined together. 8 And the intricately woven band of the ephod, which is on it, shall be of the same workmanship, made of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen.

The Old Testament High Priest of Moses' tabernacle was a type of Christ. Today, Jesus is the High Priest of our confession (Hebrews 3:1).

Each color of the garments has meaning: the gold and blue speak of Christ's heavenly origin (from above); the scarlet points to the sacrificial nature of Christ's priesthood where He laid down His life for us; and the purple is a mixture of His heavenly and earthly natures (God and man / blue and scarlet). It is at the cross that the 'mystical union' of God and man is consummated. The bonding agent was Jesus blood. Purple also speaks of our royalty in Christ as a blended 'kingdom of priests'.

Revelation 1:5-6

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, 6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father,

The High Priest's breastplate (which covers and is close to the heart) also had four colors: gold, blue, purple and scarlet. It was folded into four equal sides, a square and there were four rows of stones with three across totaling twelve – a representation of the twelve tribes of Israel

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(Exodus 28:15-21). The linen base cloth here, as in the ephod above, represents the purity of God's underlying righteousness available to all who put their trust in Him.

Twelve speaks of divine order: government and inclusion. The various stones within this framework point to the colorful variety God intends each of us to brilliantly display as His light falls on us from His presence in the Holy of Holies.

3. The Four Colors Of The Priestly Garments:

Exodus 39:1

39:1 Of the blue, purple, and scarlet thread they made garments of ministry, for ministering in the holy place, and made the holy garments for Aaron, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

God had instructed the children of Israel to make available to the craftsmen of Moses' tabernacle blue, purple, and scarlet (red) thread for the priestly garments. This thread along with fine woven linen colored white was also to be worked into the High Priest's (Aaron's) holy garments.

In addition, there was a separating veil in the tabernacle as well as a screen for the tabernacle door that were to be made of the same colors in the thread and linen (Exodus 36:25-37).

These four colors (white linen included) speak of the four faceted person of Christ in the following ways:

First, the blue color points to Christ's heavenly origin as the Son of God present in the beginning (John 1:1).

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Second, the purple (red and blue mixed) signifies royalty. Christ came as the prophesied King of the Jews to save man (red: 'Adam' of the red earth).

Third, scarlet, crimson (or red) speaks of the blood of Jesus that was shed to redeem man whose body was formed from the red dust of the earth.

The fine worked or woven linen (white color) points to the perfection or purity that Jesus displayed when He lived as the perfect sinless 'savior man' as described in Luke's Gospel (more on this, and the other Gospels later in Chapters 5 - 8).

Every detail in the tabernacle descriptions have deeper meaning, and most often point either to the all encompassing person and work of Christ.

4. Four Illustrations Of Wisdom:

Proverbs 30:24-28

24 There are four things which are little on the earth,

But they are exceedingly wise:

25 The ants are a people not strong,

Yet they prepare their food in the summer;

26 The rock badgers are a feeble folk,

Yet they make their homes in the crags;

27 The locusts have no king,

Yet they all advance in ranks;

28 The spider skillfully grasps with its hands,

And it is in kings' palaces.

We know from Proverbs that wisdom is our principal pursuit (Proverbs 4:7), and also from Colossians 2:3 that all

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wisdom is wrapped up in the person of Jesus. Yet He is secure enough in His identity as the Son of God to illustrate His wisdom by means of the animal kingdom specifically the ant, rock badger, locust and spider.

Ants are noted for their preparation in a season of growth and also their efficient productive abilities: thus they illustrate the value of timing in any pursuit.

Rock badgers are smart enough to take refuge or 'hide' their weakness in a place of strength. It is like us (in our weakness) getting really close to the Lord (the Rock) in His strength.

Locusts are 'self' motivated and disciplined creatures which advance in ranks along with their peers. They are able to 'advance' greatly because of this.

Spiders are noted for their skillful movements: light and usually unnoticed, yet they are found in high places: even the king's palaces. Wisdom takes us to royal places we could never have dreamed of before.

5. Four Faces In Ezekiel's Vision:

Ezekiel 1:5-12

5 Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. 6 Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings. 7 Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of calves' feet. They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze. 8 The hands of a man were under their wings on their four sides; and each of the four had faces and wings. 9 Their wings touched

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one another. The creatures did not turn when they went, but each one went straight forward. 10 As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man, each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle. 11 Thus were their faces. Their wings were stretched upward; two wings of each one touched one another, and two covered their bodies. 12 And each one went straight forward; they went wherever the spirit wanted to go, and they did not turn when they went.

In this dramatic prophetic vision Ezekiel describes four creatures proceeding out of a whirlwind each with four wings and four faces. Their wings touched each other speaking of continuity and connection. They also all had elements of each other (Vs 10). When you read the four Gospels there is obvious continuity, connection, overlap and correspondence. They witness to one another as God intended. He wants us to be sure of what we believe. Then Vs 12 speaks of harmony, obedience, agreement and submission to the Holy Spirit's oversight: 'they went wherever the spirit wanted to go'.

When you read further, the 'wheel within the wheel' in Vs 15-16 speaks of motion, synchronization, cooperation and synergy in God's kingdom. God wants us to fit into what He is already doing. He is always on the move and is doing something great in these days and invites you to play your part as you engage with Him in faith.

Another interesting revelation from Ezekiel's visions is found in chapter forty seven where the prophet describes the river that flows out from underneath the door of the

temple. In the Bible, rivers usually symbolize God's flowing blessing and life. Here the 'man', probably an angel (angels most often appear in the likeness of men), takes Ezekiel through the waters in a progression from the ankles to the knees, the waist and then completely immersed as he was obliged to swim.

Ezekiel 47:3-5

3 And when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the water came up to my ankles. 4 Again he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water came up to my knees. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water came up to my waist. 5 Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed.

This passage speaks of the four aspects of our commitment to the Lord and His purposes. The Lord is totally committed to us: His river of blessing and favor is already flowing with all its provision and energy.

Yet our response to His Holy Spirit's invitation is often progressive: from the ankles which speak of our initial change in direction as we begin to walk with the Lord; to our knees which point our devotional life of prayer and worship. We change from glory to glory as we behold His face in adoration and praise (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The waters rising to our waist address the deepest (belly) motivations of our total being becoming in tune with His. We begin to be moved with mercy (bowels of compassion)

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as we see people in their need as He sees them (Matthew 14:14).

Finally, total abandonment to His ways and will in everything is represented by the waters that cover everything. We are buoyed up in the waters by the air (Spirit) within us.

Put another way, the waters of life spring up first as a well that meets our needs, and then the water develops into a river of blessing for the benefit of others. Jesus spoke of this in John 4:14 and then again in John 7:37-39 where He focused on the ministry of the Holy Spirit in and through the believer.

The imagery portrayed to Ezekiel in his temple vision may also speak of the growth of God's kingdom spreading out from its small beginnings from the 'temple' in Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and then to the uttermost parts of the Earth as the Gospel was preached to all men through the apostles' ministry in the first century and later years.

God is revealed as the God of increase, and despite the enemy's last desperate death gasps to deceive in these end times, God's truth will continue to spread and grow throughout the whole Earth.

Isaiah 9:7

7 Of the **increase** of His government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and
justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

(Emphasis added).

6. The Four ‘Soil’ Types Of People’s Hearts:

Mark 4:3-5

3 "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it...

When Jesus taught on the human heart He used four categories of ‘soil’ that received the ‘seed’ of the Word.

First, those hearts are likened to the ground of the wayside where the seed of God’s Word fell yet the birds of the air (satan’s evil representatives) came immediately to steal the exposed seed on this uncultivated ground.

Second, the seed fell on stony hearts which although showing quick initial growth had no depth and thus stumble when persecution came.

Third, the thorny ground represents those who have not dealt with the weeds (deceits, cares and alternate desires) in their life which eventually choke the crop and they do not produce.

Fourth, the good soil received the same seed as the others but because it was first tilled and then tendered afterward it produced up to an hundred fold. Obviously this is God’s best for our lives, and this parable should encourage us to be aware of satan’s devices for stealing the Word before it takes root and begins to produce fruit in our lives.

I believe the parable ought not to be seen in fatalistic terms where we have no responsibility, but rather that we can have understanding of the process whereby the Word can either be of no effect or of great effect and fruitfulness. It is my conviction that intercessory prayer properly prepares the hearts of the hearers before the Word is sown. Then continuing prayer for enlightenment and strength (Colossians 1:9-11) helps in the proper rooting and growth of the Word in someone's life.

7. The Four Purposes Of God's Word:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

When it came to ministry, this passage shows four key areas by which the man of God is made complete (or mature) and 'thoroughly' equipped for every good work.

Many ministers often feel inadequate when it comes to ministry, and of course in ourselves we certainly are. Yet in the Lord, and through His Word we can be prepared for every good work. We need never 'come up short' in ministry for the greater one in us (the Holy Spirit) will give us what we need to speak and minister as we yield to Him and undergo the fourfold process of preparation outlined below.

First, the Word is given to teach us (doctrine). It profits us greatly to be properly taught by the great teacher the Holy Spirit. Proper teaching leads to proper believing, and proper

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believing produces proper or sound practice. The contrary is also true. Blessed are the meek or teachable (Matthew 5:5).

Then second, the Word is given to the man of God for his own reproof. Notice God deals with His leaders first. A minister is not given the Word to beat the sheep with, but first for His own growth. Then out of that position of integrity do we live and speak with authority. Remember the contrast between Jesus who spoke with authority and the self satisfied and hypocritical Pharisees who did not? (Luke 4:32) Jesus had credibility, they did not. So they had to trade on their appearances and positions of status.

‘Reproof’ simply put is ‘to test’ or in more severe cases ‘to rebuke’ so as to lovingly bring a person to a point of sober clarity in a matter. God will not let His leaders continue in deception. He will give them time to repent or change their way of thinking, but will begin by using His Word to bring reproof. Any reproof ought to be seen in terms of a Father totally committed His loving and protective purposes for His people, and not in terms of harshness.

Then third, God prepares His ministers through ‘correction’ where they simply may be off target through inexperience or immaturity. Much like a teacher will correct a mathematical sum incorrectly computed by a willing student, God will also correct us when we make mistakes. Once again, He uses His Word to bring our errors to our attention. He does not initiate adverse and harmful circumstances to correct us. Sadly, some teach that God ‘uses’ accidents and disasters to get our attention. These get anyone’s attention, but God is not in the business of breaking a person’s leg to correct them.

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The point here is: He will always speak to someone who is listening. May I encourage you to listen to Him through His Word which He has sent to heal and equip!

Look at how Jesus lovingly brought correction to His disciples. Take Peter and all his mistakes as case in point. Jesus always meant the best for Peter and always accepted him back when he wandered.

Fourth, the Word is given to ‘instruct’ us in righteousness. Many ministers I know are not very well instructed in righteousness. Sure they talk about it at times, but really when the rubber hits the road they rely more on a mixture of Law and Grace than on a pure revelation of Jesus righteousness in us.

The righteousness that produces lasting fruit to God’s glory must be solely rooted in the completed work of Jesus at the cross, and not on our own efforts, discipline, commitment, zeal, character etc... I believe God is today restoring to His church a vital understanding of the total efficacy of His righteousness in us through Christ alone.

We need to be firmly rooted and grounded in His love for us. Then any response we have will be a fruit of that relationship. Our walk and ministry for Him is not so much a matter of how much we love and serve Him, but rather a response to the realization of how much He loves and serves us.

1 John 4:19

19 We love Him because He first loved us.

Let God instruct you in His righteousness. He is pleased when we live our lives from a position of security founded

on His eternal love for us. Because of Christ's sacrifice we are made righteous and He wants us to rest in that knowledge.

8. Four Dimensions To His Love

Ephesians 3:17-19

...that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the **width** and **length** and **depth** and **height**-- 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Emphasis added).

Paul describes four dimensions to Jesus love: width, length, depth, and height. I suppose depth is the space between the other three more typical dimensions. In other words Jesus' love has you covered no matter which way you turn. It is as if you are totally surrounded or 'imprisoned' by His love! As far as He is concerned you cannot escape in any direction from His grace, even in the dimension of time. When we catch sight of this wonderful revelation of His love and surrender to this blessed condition, we are truly filled with 'all the fullness of God' (Vs 19). No striving needed here. We can rest in His love for us, through all time.

After all, God is love itself, and so when we come to know the four dimensions of His unconditional love we can only be full of it!

These dimensions are portrayed in the four Gospels which in turn focus on: His plan to restore us to royalty - our place of dominion (Matthew); His love through a life of service (Mark); His identification with our humanity (Luke) and

His desire to see us live the ‘high life’ in Him (John). You could say this fourfold outline is a picture of ‘love summarized’. I will explain more on this in later chapters.

9. The Four Pillars Of Church Life:

Acts 2:42

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' **doctrine and fellowship**, in the **breaking of bread**, and in **prayers**.

The principle of four is further illustrated in early church life and practice. The early church's effectiveness was firmly rooted in the presence of the Lord in their midst. God was powerfully with them and the fruit of that blessed state was that they were characterized by four recognizable practices.

First, they continued sitting under the apostles teaching or ‘doctrine’. This was their lifestyle, not a mere once a week practice. Their hunger was steadfast and expressed itself in receiving freshly baked ‘manna’ from heaven as the apostles devoted themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

Second, they participated in the ‘koinonia’ fellowship or common purpose to which the apostles’ were called. This was no coffee and donuts type of fellowship but a total identification with the calling and purpose of the church to preach the gospel to every creature and make disciples of every ‘people group’ or nation. They threw their ‘weight’ (talents, gifts, resources and time) in behind what God was doing through the apostles. This was no part time ‘toe in the water’ type Christianity, but a full out commitment to Biblical participation in the common cause of Christ.

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Third, they practiced the breaking of bread or communion on a regular basis according to the Lord's ordinance. They were keenly aware that everything they believed in and experienced was rooted in what Jesus had already done for them on the cross at Passover. They therefore celebrated His victory as a lifestyle, bringing to remembrance the New Covenant God had initiated at what has come to be known as the Last Supper. This covenant meal continually highlighted for them God's provision for their total well being of both their inner and outer man (the broken body for physical healing and the blood shed for forgiveness and cleansing.)

Fourth, they continued in a lifestyle of 'prayers'. They learnt the three different categories of prayer: adoration, petition and intercession. By God's grace through their faith they accessed and enjoyed heaven's presence, provision and protection as they worshipped God and prayed effectively for themselves and the needs of others.

The four practices that characterized the early church are not some formula for invoking God's blessing. Rather, they represent their response to His overwhelming love. Today our devotion to God does not initiate His love and favor, it merely acknowledges and enjoys it. It is not that we need to get closer to God through some formula, He is already as close as He can get – He's already inside every believer (Colossians 1:27)! Really, what is needed is an ongoing and expanding realization of this reality.

10. Four Living Creatures In The Eternal Heaven:

Revelation 4:6-8

6 Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around

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the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. 7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. 8 The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying:
"Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!"

In this passage the four creatures are described again, this time with a worship focus. Worship is the most recognizable language of heaven, and this passage shows the four creatures reflecting their Creator's nature and also something fresh about worship.

First, the lion speaks of a strong, aggressive, bold declaration of faith in worship of who God is as King of Kings. This kind of worship on earth is accompanied and characterized by bold shouts and clapping. The righteous are bold in their praise and worship (Proverbs 28:1 / Psalm 149). God is pleased when we take Him at His Word and approach Him with confidence based on a secure faith in what Jesus has done for us.

Our lifestyle of worship should reflect the same intensity of devotion as the four creatures which blended their devotion together in unison to life up the Lord God Almighty.

Second, the creature with a calf like face speaks of joy and celebration. You may have seen a young calf skip in a field with joy (Proverbs 29:6). It is as if it is glad to be alive, and so it skips without warning to the surprise and delight on

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any onlooker. God rejoices when we are spontaneous in our rejoicing. Like any lover, He is not pleased with a relationship characterized by mechanical worship. He Himself even rejoices over us with great exuberance.

Zephaniah 3:17

17 The LORD your God in your midst,
The Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness,
He will quiet you with His love,
He will rejoice over you with singing ."

In fact the original language describes the powerful emotion God feels about us as He rejoices over us. The Hebrew word for 'rejoice' in this verse is to:

'to spin round' (under the influence of any violent emotion).

(Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.)

God gets involved when we worship. He is neither distant nor disengaged. On the contrary, He is deeply moved by our worship.

I remember one occasion when I was leading a communion service with about three hundred Bible School students in a chapel service when I was in South Africa. One of the students on the platform began worshipping God in a most unusual way (for me at that time at least). Along with another exuberant worshipper he jumped up around that person's waist and the two began spinning around together

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in total abandon in their praise to God. The rest of the student body were also very animated in their worship at this time, but this spinning action really caught my attention as it seemed as if God was right there in and among us as we all rejoiced to the glory of Jesus in loud shouting, dancing and praise. The student body as a whole was inspired to new levels of freedom in worship that they had never experienced before. We certainly felt and experienced God's presence in a special way that day.

Third, the creature with a man like face points to a realization that our worship to God is a very human but no less unique expression of our humanity. We are created to praise the Most High God (Psalm 102:18) and our worth as humans is ultimately wrapped up in our worship. The choices we make in who we worship on earth determine our eternal destiny.

Sadly, many people who do not yet know God through Jesus search for substitutes to pour themselves into, making a mockery of their lives as they give themselves over to the lies, distraction and ultimately destructive diversions of the enemy. Thankfully God is in constant pursuit of our souls as the Holy Spirit seeks to convince us that our humanity can find fulfillment in a saving relationship with Jesus as Lord (John 16:7-11).

The fourth creature with a face like an eagle speaks of soaring 'high' praise and worship where a level of worship is reached that surpasses the norm (Psalm 149:6).

Here 'high' means to mount up with some authority as the rest of the verses in Psalm 149 teach. When we 'mount up with wings like eagles' (Isaiah 40:31) during high praise we begin to 'look down' on the enemy's strategies from a

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perspective of God's strength in us, and we exercise our authority in the spirit realm with a powerful sense of militancy. As God's people we are to wage spiritual war from a high position of victory in Christ – at His right hand of authority! Our eagle like praise and worship on earth ought to be modeled on the powerful worship that characterizes the worship around God's throne in heaven.

There are many more examples of the use that God makes of four, but hopefully these will help you start focusing on Jesus at the center of God's revelation. In the next chapter I want to start focusing on Jesus as He is revealed primarily through the Gospels. I will also look into some interpretive tips in trying to see the Gospels in the context of first, the Bible as a whole and then the New Testament in particular.

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Chapter 4

**More On Four:
Jesus And The Gospels**

**The Gospels In The Context
Of The Whole Bible**

Historically the four Gospels were written at a later stage in the first century AD than were the epistles or letters that Paul and to a lesser degree the others (Peter, James and Jude) wrote. This is important because God primarily revealed the spiritual meanings of what happened at the cross mostly to Paul after the actual event itself, whilst the Gospel writers **confined** their writings to the period up till the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. At the time of their writing, the Gospel writers had indeed been exposed to ‘Paul’s Gospel’ (Romans 16:25 / 2 Timothy 2:8) or teachings, and knew what Jesus’ life and death meant, yet they supernaturally restricted their accounts to His earthly ministry up till the cross, resurrection and ascension into heaven.

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This miraculous separation of what they witnessed when Jesus was on earth walking and what was largely revealed to them later through Paul's ministry could only have been by inspiration and in the providence and wisdom of God.

The significance of this to you and me will become clearer as you continue reading this and the following chapters. Suffice to say at this stage that the 'Gospels' of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John do not take us as far as does the 'Gospel' (Romans 2:16 / 16:25 / 2 Timothy 2:8) revealed to Paul the Apostle in his revelation of our new creation realities in Christ. Of course there is no contradiction, only further or progressive revelation of what Jesus came to do in His earthly ministry followed by His ministry in heaven right now at the Father's right hand.

In short, the four Gospels must be read and understood in their immediate context where Jesus ministered under the **Old Covenant** with its set of provisions, and the letters of Paul (and the other letters & Revelation) in their own context of the **New Covenant** established in Jesus blood. Significantly, only when Jesus' work under the Old Covenant was completed was the church launched, and the Holy Spirit sent to indwell and empower all believers.

In my experience I have found a lot of 'covenantal confusion' where Old Testament revelation and practice 'bleeds' its way through to the New Testament without being 'rightly divided' according to 2 Timothy 2:15. There are many well meaning Christian folk, preachers included, who do not 'filter' many Old Testament passages through the completed work of Christ. In effect they mix law and grace in very often what turns out to be a toxic blend.

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For example, they teach that God's blessing on a nation is dependent on that nation's degree of repentance as 2 Chronicles 7:14 seems to teach. They forget however, that today in Christ, His love for us is not dependent on the 'intensity' and supposed 'sincerity' of our repentance, but on the grace and favor of God Himself that we access by faith. You see, God is not impressed with our efforts to prove to Him that we are sorry for our own sins or that of our nation's, but only by our faith in the completed work of Christ. When we begin to operate in His love and authority over the enemy, the forces of darkness that cause problems in a nation are bound and the nation is 'healed'. In fact Paul teaches that the earth is 'groaning' as it waits for the full manifestation of the sons of God.

Romans 8:18-23

19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

The creation is waiting for us (the sons of God) to manifest the authority delegated to us as sons of God – His ambassadors and representatives on earth right now. The famines, floods and earthquakes some nations seem to be increasingly experiencing are in my view not representative of God's judgment on these 'sinful' nations, but of an earth that is under a curse. It is 'groaning' under the bondage of corruption, and will eventually be renewed by God in the end (Isaiah 6:17 / Revelation 21:1). But right now we are

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not to get confused. God has judged all mankind's sin completely by laying it on Jesus at the cross. He is not 'angry' with man, but deeply in love with us, pleading through the Gospel for all mankind to accept his forgiveness, cleansing and empowerment. Meanwhile, the enemy takes advantage of the confusion, and injects his slander and accusation (Revelation 12:10) against an already acquitted and forgiven) Body of Christ – today's "my people".

We are called to function as 'salt' (a preserving agent) in the earth (Matthew 5:13). Our prayers, witness, wisdom and sacrificial service act to preserve what happens on earth, both in society and in nature. How we respond to God and His mandate on our lives makes a positive difference in the earth even in the natural realm. God is not authoring the destructive forces in nature and society – it is the **enemy** who is in the business of stealing, killing and destroying (John 10:10).

Where there is sin in a society or a nation, our responsibility is to live and proclaim the good news of forgiveness and redemption, and pray for the leaders so that those in authority do not 'facilitate' evil (1 Timothy 2:1-6).

The Big Picture

I always like to see where things fit into the bigger picture or 'context'. Here is a brief overview of the 'Bible Big Picture' that will serve as a backdrop for Jesus' teachings in the four Gospels in particular.

The Bible (a library of 66 books in one) was written by almost 40 inspired authors in 3 languages over a 1400 year

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time span, and is marked by miraculous unity, continuity and harmony of truth. God chose to use fallible man to bring to us infallible truth about His plan to seek and save mankind from itself (sin) through the Jewish Messiah Jesus.

He chose the Jewish people to be the carriers of His revelation not for their numerical size or inherent moral qualities, but rather to show the greatness of His unmerited grace and mercy to an undeserving people. Most of the Old Testament deals with the history of the Jewish people whom He called to be a witness to the world at that time. The Old Testament may be divided up into:

- Law – as recorded by Moses
- History – of primarily the Jewish nation
- Poetry & Wisdom Literature – Psalms of Praise, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes
- Major and Minor Prophets – who spoke God’s plan for His people and the coming Kingdom and Messiah.

The New Testament focuses on the church and its relationship with God, one another and a world in need of Jesus. It is divided up into:

- Gospels – accounts of Jesus life and ministry
- Acts – a history of the early church
- Letters - written to Christ followers to teach / guide
- Revelation – prophetic insights into the future

In short, it is said that the Old Testament **prepares** us for Christ; the Gospels **present** Him to us; and the letters and Revelation **praise** Him for what He has accomplished.

Encountering God Through His Word

John 1:1-2

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God.

John 17:3

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

God can and must be known through Jesus Christ God's son. Jesus is and always will be the living Word revealed and illuminated by the Holy Spirit through the written and spoken Word. God uses the Word (scripture) as His objective reference and daily guide to life and the eternal hereafter. His Word which works in and through you, causes you to grow spiritually (1 Peter 2:2); helps you stand your ground in difficult times (Matthew 7: 24-27); and even strengthens you against temptation (Matthew 4: 10).

Why 'Revelation' Knowledge is Important

Revelation knowledge is the knowledge that only the Holy Spirit can reveal to you. It cannot be gained by mere academic study, mental logic and reasoning apart from God. It is received, not achieved. Faith is thus required to engage with an unseen God to receive revelation knowledge. This faith is God's gift to us and must also be received as such (Ephesians 2:8). Faith starts with God and not with us.

When Jesus approached the two confused disciples on the road to Emmaus shortly after His dramatic and

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unprecedented resurrection, He underlined the importance of scripture (and revelation knowledge) over mental reasoning. Their mental reasoning's had taken them further and further away from God's purposes for their lives as they walked the road that day. Jesus had died and the woman had reported that He had risen from the dead. Yet in their unbelief and resultant depression they had resolved to walk from it all.

In a way, Jesus needed to wean them off their reliance on natural sensory inputs – what they understood through their subjective senses alone, and focus their attention on what the Holy Spirit wanted to reveal to them through the more reliable scripture.

Luke 24:15-16, 25-27, 30-33

So it was, while they conversed and **reasoned**, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. 16 But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him...

...Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all **the Scriptures** the things concerning Himself.

...Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. 32 And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road,

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and while **He opened the Scriptures** to us?" 33 So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem...(Emphasis added)

Jesus had to approach them and work with the Holy Spirit to ‘burn’ the scripture into their hearts and minds. When their (spiritual) eyes were opened, His work was done. They now operated on ‘revelation knowledge’ and returned to Jerusalem where they should have been all the time.

Mental reasoning about the things of God apart from Him (His Word) can be flawed. God expects us to reason with Him using His Word as the medium of exchange.

Isaiah 1:18

"Come now, and let us reason together ,"
Says the LORD,...

God wants our mental faculties to be submitted to His Word, which is truth. (Later in Chapter Six there is more on the vital importance of a ‘renewed mind’ in fulfilling God’s purposes in your life).

Background To Jesus’ Teachings

Matthew 9:35-36

35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

Jesus was born into a world that had years of established religious practice that often did not line up with the

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unadulterated Word of God. He was obliged to speak the truth even if it confronted cherished beliefs and practices or the tradition of the day. He came also to 'lay the ax at the 'root' of the issues (Luke 3:9), not as someone who merely modified external behavior, but did not change the inner sinful nature of fallen man. There are some definite parallels in our times.

For example, He directly challenged the hypocritical and lifeless traditions of the religious leaders of His day. The Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees tended to be fault finders that held to the tradition of their elders more than the Word of God. Jesus called them hypocrites, and declared that their tradition opposed and even invalidated God's Word.

Mark 7:1-13 shows us the interchange with these pompous religionists. Read it for yourself, as it is a lengthy passage to quote here. Here are two key excerpts:

Mark 7:8,13

8 "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men- ...

... 13 making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."

Some definitions may be useful at this stage.

'Tradition' may be defined as the 'handing down of oral beliefs and practices from generation to the next'. These can be good or bad: giving of gifts at Christmas may be a good tradition, whereas getting drunk on New Year's Eve is not a good one.

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‘Tolerance’ or ‘acceptance of others views even when they differ’, in matters that do not tamper with eternal and enduring truth is not necessarily a bad thing. Things like clothing fashion when they do not cross the line of impropriety are not the issue here.

‘Compromise’ in God’s kingdom however, is not good when differences are settled by mutual concession of foundational principles. There is no place for political maneuverings in the things of God.

‘Hypocrisy’ is the worst of the above definitions when applied to living and ministering God’s Word. A hypocrite is ‘someone who creates an appearance of who they actually are not’. This was what Jesus called the religious leaders of his Day. They appeared to be one way on the outside, but actually their external behavior concealed their true inner nature and character. Jesus proved that no one can or should even try to ‘pull the wool’ over God’s eyes at any time (1 Samuel 16:7).

Jesus was God in the flesh and could only be and speak the truth to all men at all times. You knew exactly where He stood on any issue at any time. No shades of gray here...thankfully! As such He would not tolerate ‘mixture’ as did Eli, when he tolerated sin in his own family. As we have seen, Jesus even rebuked His own disciple Peter when he tried to put Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah on the Mt of Transfiguration recorded in Matthew 17.

Jesus was not a ‘rabble rouser’ who stirred trouble for the sake of it. In fact He had quite an orthodox upbringing in the Jewish faith of His day, going to the local synagogue and the national temple regularly. Yet He was intentionally provocative at times when led by the Holy Spirit. He

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challenged accepted dietary laws (John 6:53), challenged the ‘sacred cows’ in the community (John 2:19) as well as the religious superiority and control of hypocritical leaders (Matthew 21:31).

Jesus was also a master communicator, instructor, strategist and teacher. He knew where He came from, what He was to say, where He was going and how to get to get there. He knew the hearts of His hearers, and used a variety of suitable approaches to reach individuals, crowds, religious folk and sinners, even the young and old, not to forget sick and rejected. His motives were pure, He loved people with selfless love, and was teachable preaching what He lived.

He did all this in the power of the Holy Spirit who was given to anoint Him for service.

Luke 4:18-19

8 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,
Because He has anointed me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."

The lesson here is that to be anything like Christ – which we are indeed called to be, we are going to need the same help of the Holy Spirit in all things! He is going to lovingly yet firmly confront in us any and all religious traditions that are contrary to His truth.

In order to build anything of eternal value in our lives, things that are ultimately shaky (not based on the firm

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foundation of eternal truth) have to first ‘fall’, before there is to be a subsequent ‘rising’. Jesus displayed this divine order of change when He systematically confronted everything that quenched God’s life in the life of His hearers.

Luke 2:33-35

33 And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the **fall** and **rising** of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against 35 (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." (Emphasis added).

We must be prepared for the ‘old’ to fall, before the ‘new’ can rise. For the glory of the New Covenant to rise in your heart, the limited glory of the Old Covenant must fall away.

New Covenant Realities

John 1:17-18

17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

There is a great difference between the Law as it was **given** through Moses and the grace and truth that **came** personally through Jesus Christ. Moses was obliged to deliver a set of laws engraved on lifeless stone, whereas Jesus came and dwelt among us in person: alive and engaged.

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Jesus was full of God's grace (the unmerited favor and empowerment to live right) and truth that it literally oozed out from Him wherever He went. When people touched Him or He touched them, their needs were miraculously met. Grace freely flowed out from Him.

He came to put in effect the greatest 'prison break' of all mankind. His shed blood broke mankind free from the prison of sin into the kingdom of God where freedom and liberty reigns. When anyone accepts the good news (Gospel) that they are forgiven in Christ their hearts are made brand new in Him according to 2 Corinthians 5:17-21). The Holy Spirit is given to 'seal the deal' and sets the believer apart for service, equipping him with His fire power and gifts for a lifestyle of witness. He also develops the delicious fruit of love and joy for our fellow travelers to enjoy.

Another new creation reality is that Jesus has made us 'kings and priests' (1 Peter 2:9). God becomes 'Our Father' as we are 'born again' as children of God (John 3:3). Remarkably, we also come into mystical union with Christ: we 'in Him' and He 'in us' (Philippians 3:9 / Colossians 1:27)

Then, in what seems to be too good to be true, we are made alive in Christ, raised up with Him and even seated at God's right hand of favor together with Him!

Ephesians 2:4-6

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised

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us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,...

These powerful realities reveal not only the depth of God's love for us, but also reflect the lengths He has gone to in restoring the losses brought about Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. The position and authority Adam lost there, is restored to us in Christ.

In the New Testament believer God's Law is written on the heart (2 Corinthians 3:3) and not on dead tablets of stone as it was in Moses' case with the children of Israel. Ours is a new and 'living' way energized by the Holy Spirit, not a 'dead letter' way characterized by legalism.

2 Corinthians 3:6

6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Sin is now totally **cleansed** from our hearts, whereas under the Old Law Covenant of Moses it was only **covered** from year to year by the inferior blood of bulls and goats. Jesus blood once and for all removed the sin barrier between man and God. This is good news that some preachers find difficult to communicate. They stop short of this liberating truth, and as a consequence many believers live defeated lives not really sure that they are fully forgiven of all their sins.

As a consequence, they usually slip into some sort of programmed living that relies on a mixture of faith and their own works to stay 'right with God'. Jesus' completed work at the cross is thus watered down, and these people 'fall from grace' back into law based works (Galatians 5:4)

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in an attempt to be justified by what amounts to their own efforts. Yet the Word teaches unequivocally that without faith it is impossible to please God.

Hebrews 11:6

6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

We only enjoy any reward only by faith in Christ, and not through our own righteousness. This much is clear especially when you consider that Jesus established a **better** covenant on **better** promises (Hebrews 8:6-7). Unfortunately, many church goers live way below their privileges in Christ because they fruitlessly try to mix elements of the Old Covenant with the New Covenant.

The Law was ‘added’ to the Abrahmic Covenant because of Israel’s sin in the wilderness. God put it in place just for a season till Christ would come and fulfill it. The Law served to point them to God’s absolute holiness (and thus the fruitlessness of their own efforts) and to Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

Galatians 3:19

19 What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made;...

Jesus is the ‘Seed’ to whom God’s promise to Abraham many years before now applied. He alone fulfilled the Law in every detail, satisfied God’s justice, and purchased our redemption.

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In short, everything that God expects of us today is only to be found in the completed work of Christ and certainly not in any of our own efforts at holiness or good works. Jesus opened the way for the Holy Spirit to 'dwell' or 'tabernacle' or 'take up permanent residence' in our hearts. He, the Holy Spirit is given as a gift to be our 'paraclete' – the one called alongside to help. He is also our teacher, guide, strengthener, and comforter. Because He is the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead (Romans 8:11), He is also to us the 'Spirit of the Lord, wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord' according to:

Isaiah 11:2

The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit of counsel and might,
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the
LORD.

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to indwell and empower us to be witnesses to His completed work (Acts 1:8). The promised Holy Spirit is received by faith and not through a 'works based' program. He is also described as the 'blessing of Abraham'.

Galatians 3:13-14

13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

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The 'curse' we were redeemed from is defined as the need to fulfill every single aspect of the Law – an utter impossibility. Vs 10 of Galatians chapter three teaches that if you start trying to keep the Law you cannot pick and choose the ones you feel you can manage or keep. If you start, you are obliged to keep them all without exception!

Galatians 3:10

10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."

Fortunately, Jesus fulfilled all the moral and ceremonial aspects of the Law on our behalf. Our focus is now not on trying to keep the Ten Commandments for example, but on walking by faith in Christ. His Spirit within us enables us to live righteously, and whenever we stumble, His blood has already cleansed us of that sin. This grace is **not** a license to sin, but rather an empowerment to live condemnation free as we walk in the Spirit.

This is not to say that God has lowered His standards for the New Testament believer. On the contrary, we now live under the highest standards ever: those of Christ. Once again our faith in Christ's completed work at the cross qualifies us to enjoy all of God's promises:

2 Corinthians 1:20-22

20 For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. 21 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, 22 who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

We are blessed because we are in Christ and not because we have met some set of Law based standards.

Our Liberty In Christ

Again, our liberty is found in the person and work of Christ, not from our obedience to the Law and works. If we step over the line just one little bit and start relying on our own righteousness, we become entangled again with a ‘yoke of bondage’ – not a nice description of the Law observance indeed!

Galatians 5:1-6

5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. 2 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. 3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. 4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

Entangled’, ‘yoke of bondage’, ‘estranged from Christ’, ‘fallen from grace’ are what awaits you when you try to mix ‘Law’ with ‘Grace’. No, we are to hold fast to our liberty in Christ alone, guarding against any wind of doctrine that takes our focus off Christ in us - the hope or ‘confident, you can be sure of it’ glory.

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The following scriptures clearly contrast the lesser glory of the Old Covenant Law ‘route’ that can only produce death and condemnation with the new and living way through Jesus.

2 Corinthians 3:7-9

7 But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? 9 For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.

Hebrews 10:19-20

19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us,...

The life and righteousness we enjoy as our free gift of grace from our loving heavenly Father totally eclipses anything we might hope to enjoy by attempting to keep the ‘letter’ of the Law. The multitude of sacrifices offered over and over again pale against the ‘once and for all’ (Hebrews 7:27) blood sacrifice Jesus made for us at Calvary.

If all this theology is a bit overwhelming, think of how overwhelming it would be to try to fulfill all six hundred plus Mosaic Covenant laws and sub laws that have been codified. That’s what you are supposed to keep if you draw back from simple faith in Christ.

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Thankfully, Jesus burden is ‘easy and light’ not heavy. He wants to give rest to anyone who is finding the burden of their labor in a religious treadmill too much to bear.

Matthew 11:28-30

28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

The critics of grace are always looking for ways to ‘reburden’ the free with their modern brand of legalism, which, to the unsuspecting, seems to be the latest ‘key’ to spiritual breakthrough! The problem is that Jesus has already ‘broken through’, and the heavens are already ‘open’ in Christ. Sadly many believers simply do not know this. Very often they sink back (fall from grace) after their salvation experience into a ‘works program’ of fasting, intercession, warfare prayer, inner healing, and deliverance sessions etc. They begin to put their trust in spiritual techniques or some ‘wind of doctrine’ they happen to be exposed to. Jesus is thus relegated to the sidelines waiting for them to wise up and smell the fragrance of His all redeeming presence and power.

That is why the apostle Paul did not cease praying for believers that they would have their spiritual eyes opened to what they **already** had in Christ.

Ephesians 1:15-19

15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: 17 that the God of our Lord

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Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe,

He knew that when you know where you are seated (in heavenly places in Christ), you will realize that the life of faith is characterized by rest, not human effort no matter how well meaning or religious it might be. Your 'walk' begins from a position of 'Sabbath' rest.

Jesus reestablishes God's pattern of rest introduced to us in the book of Genesis. God made man on the sixth day when everything he would need was already in place. God then let them loose in the garden to live out their lives in the realm of His 'seventh day' or 'Sabbath' rest.

In effect we as believers are not laboring to attain rest for our souls, or for that matter to achieve anything for the Lord. No, only an encounter with the risen savior gives you rest. He is our rest and when we enter His rest we cease from our works as God did from His.

Hebrews 4:10

10 For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.

Even the 'good works' you are called and ordained to do (Ephesians 2:10) as a Christian are already laid out ahead of you, totally provided for. Your responsibility is merely to discover what they are and simply walk into your

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destined fruitfulness and success. We thus serve God **from** a position of rest, and not in order to attain it.

This all amounts to ‘good news’ indeed. God has paid the greatest price in the death of His Son so that we might enjoy the greatest degree of freedom from a life of religious toil.

Now on to the four Gospels beginning with the ‘Lion King’ Jesus!

Chapter 5

**The 'Lion King'
Matthew's Gospel**

Matthew 27:37-44

37 And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: **THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.** 38 Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left. 39 And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." 41 Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, 42 He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. 43 He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.' " 44 Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing (Emphasis added).

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What was intended as an ironical insult placed above Jesus head as He was brutally and shamefully crucified between two thieves, has come to be the title of the Messiah revered and worshipped for almost two thousand years by hundreds and hundreds of millions of believers.

Since God vindicated Jesus by raising Him from the dead, Jesus has increasingly been recognized as not only King of the Jews but also as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Believe it or not, His 'government' over the hearts of men is increasing all the time and the Bible says there shall be no end to it.

Isaiah 9:7

7 Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and
justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Born To Be King

When the Roman governor Pilate questioned Jesus shortly before He was crucified as to whether He was king, Jesus replied that he was born to be king!

John 18:37

This is why I was born.

He had come in fulfillment of over three hundred ancient prophecies, and His royal lineage traced back through His

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mother to King David who was the Old Testament type of the coming Messiah (at that time) - the all in one prophet, priest and king! Of course, a key difference between Jesus and David is that David set up an earthly kingdom through the blood of war, whereas Jesus set up a superior heavenly kingdom on earth through the blood of peace.

In Mathew's Gospel, the phrase 'kingdom of heaven' is used thirty one times, highlighting Jesus mission to introduce us to His kingdom distinctly from and focused on heaven. It could be said that Jesus was truly so heavenly minded that He was of definite earthly good. A number of ministries these days seem to be so 'earthly minded' that they seem to have become of little 'heavenly use'. Don't get me wrong here: I am **not** saying that we are not to make a difference here on earth in meeting the needs of suffering humanity, only that when we have a true encounter with heaven's realities can we be of lasting relevance down here on earth. Jesus showed us the way working in the life of fallen people from the 'inside out'. Their external lives were dramatically changed when their hearts were truly impacted.

The Jewish audience to which Matthew's Gospel was mostly directed was keenly aware of the significance of prophecy. Today this is no less true, as the interest in future events is the subject of so much 'secular' media coverage on topic tags such as 'apocalypse now', 'end times', etc.

Jesus Himself was certainly aware of fulfilling the prophetic scripture as He ministered. (Of course there were so many that He could not have possibly 'self - fulfilled or engineered: like His birth and death, to name just two very important ones).

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He came first to His own (the Jews) and wanted to be sure that they had ample evidence that He was their Messiah: the 'Lion (king) of the tribe of Judah'. He was most certainly of Jewish lineage and thus qualified to be the Messiah.

Revelation 5:5

5 But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."

The Lion - King

A lion is commonly known as the 'king of the jungle' and is often characterized by an air of authority, strength and power. This is a fitting picture of the Lord.

Admittedly the lion is often used to illustrate the work of the enemy who goes about 'as' a roaring lion instilling fear in the unknowing. (1 Peter 5:8). Thankfully when you know that your adversary is but a counterfeiter and really is a toothless and already defeated foe with the capacity to breathe only 'bad breath' on you, you will not be afraid. Like young shepherd boy David who knew his covenant God at an early age, you will not be intimidated by the 'Goliath' like threats, accusations and reproaches of the enemy.

As you learn the king's ways you can easily stop the 'mouth of the lion' that comes against you with accusation, condemnation, guilt and shame. (Hebrews 11:33). As a righteous one, boldly declare who you are in Christ and see

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the false lying poser slink away in fear of the real ‘Lion of the tribe of Judah’ who lives in you.

Proverbs 28:1

The wicked flee when no one pursues,
But the righteous are bold as a lion.

Resist your adversary with God’s Word and rejoice as you see him flee.

James 4:7

7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

A key positive feature of the lion is that it is not afraid of other beasts: it does not turn and run from them as the following scripture states. The King is stately like a lion when His troops are with Him. We can liken this to Jesus whose kingship is amplified and recognized when we are ‘with Him’ in faith and obedience. The world sits up and takes note when we walk in step with the King.

Proverbs 30:29-31

29 There are three things which are majestic in pace,
Yes, four which are stately in walk:
30 A lion, which is mighty among beasts
And does not turn away from any;
31 A greyhound,
A male goat also,
And a king whose troops are with him.

Having grown up in South Africa, I have seen a few lions from up close. I have heard them roar from about ten yards away and also from a mile or two away.

Amos 1:2

'The Lord will roar from Zion'

At one stage we lived about one and a half mile as the crow flies from the city zoo. At night we would often hear the lions roaring from this distance, especially if the wind was blowing right. It was as if they were quite close. This was at a time back in the sixties when traffic noise was less intense and when the shops even closed at 5 pm!

Then, on a school bus excursion to the Kruger National Game Park, a huge wild animal reserve on the Eastern border of South Africa, we made a stop where some lions were lying in the grass literally within ten yards of the road. As a young child I was astounded by how far away the lioness sounded as she roared right next to the bus. It sounded as far away as two miles, yet she was right next to us as we peered wide eyed through the bus windows. Then I thought back to how close the lions sounded as they roared in their dens at the zoo so far away.

The application here I believe is as follows.

The Lord may be close by, yet it often seems as if He is far away. His voice appears to be faint. Then there are times when He is calling us from a far place, and yet it sounds so close, that is how clear and real the future vision to which He is calling us to seems. We must learn to discern His voice as He roars from the place of peace or Zion, and not be confused by our feelings of how close or distant He may seem. After all, He said He would never leave us nor forsake us, ever. We can be sure He is with, for and around us, no matter how close or far away He feels to us.

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In addition, the sound of His roar has gone out over all the earth. What He did as the 'lion of the tribe of Judah' still rings out through time and place. As we identify with His indwelling Spirit, we learn to roar like lions and instill fear in the enemy's camp.

Joel 3:16

'The Lord also will roar from Zion'

Interestingly, Zion is the place of peace. Peace is anathema to the enemy: he cannot stand it. He thrives in confusion and unrest. The God of peace crushes him under our feet when we walk in the realm of peace as we trust God.

Romans 16:20

And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.

Then, in the final book of the Bible a fascinating contrast by juxtaposition is given between the 'lion' and the 'lamb'.

First, as we saw earlier, Jesus is described as the '**Lion**' of the tribe of Judah.

Revelation 5:5

5 But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."

Then, the description quickly changes to that of a '**lamb** as though it had been slain'.

Revelation 5:6

6 And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, ...

I believe this shows the close connection between the meekness of a lamb and the strength of a lion. Many people see strength only as being ‘tough’ and unwavering. They tend to swagger through life treating people harshly and are generally unmerciful, not realizing that strength is often found in the ‘yielding wisdom’ and meekness of the lamb that has no great inherent strength of its own, only a strong awareness of being with the shepherd.

James 3:16-17

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy...

The King And His Kingdom

Matthew records five kingly discourses that Jesus made during His short three and one half year ministry. They covered several key defining areas life and relationships of His spiritual kingdom He began setting up in the hearts of His subjects. At this point, we briefly outline them as follows.

First, Jesus speaks of the contrast between His kingdom and the established religious order of the day – the status quo, commonly known as the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ in Matthew 5:1-7:37.

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Second, Matthew 10:5-42 describes His charge to His disciples as they went out to represent Him to the people while He was still on earth.

Third, Jesus teaches the vital foundational parable of the soils in Matthew 13:3-52. This parable defines all kingdom dynamics and process.

Fourth, Matthew 18:3-35 records some vital relationship principles in the kingdom.

Fifth, Matthew 24:4-25:46 is forward looking and speaks of the future outworking of His kingdom in the 'end times'.

Each of these discourses deserve a chapter each, but in the scope of this book we will focus on just some key areas that underscore Jesus as the King and how they apply to us today.

Kingdom Keys

Isaiah 22:22-23

22 The key of the house of David

I will lay on his shoulder;

So he shall open, and no one shall shut;

And he shall shut, and no one shall open.

23 I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place,

And he will become a glorious throne to his father's house.

Revelation 3:7

'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens":

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These two scriptures point to Jesus Christ who holds the 'key of David' – a reference to kingly authority. Keys give you access to the realm and all its benefits.

Jesus has reserved His kingdom benefits for those who are subject to Him in His domain. That's how covenant works. The king calls His subjects to 'enter' His kingdom like 'little children' (Matthew 18:3). Little children are trusting and don't come with an agenda of their own. They are teachable and eager to learn. They are responsive to the call of their parents. Here Jesus personally 'calls' His subjects (Matthew 4:18-22) to follow Him, and outlines their essential kingdom purpose at the start: He calls them to become 'fishers of men'. Today, when Jesus calls anyone, He always attaches His noble purpose to that person's life. Our responsibility is to learn from Him how, when and where we fit into His grand scheme of things. Really to be born again is not so much for 'Jesus to come into our lives' but for us to come into His life! That is where the true emphasis ought to lie.

The King is calling you to follow Him as a person, not to follow a cause, system or even a church or denomination. The heart of this call is a personal devotion to Him. The rest of what you do flows out of this encounter. Never get the 'cart before the horse' or you will degenerate into some form of religious practice, albeit with a nice Christian veneer.

Mercifully Jesus did not come to merely renovate the old religious order with some cute contemporary twists, but to completely revolutionize people's relationship with God. He came to restore them to a vital loving relationship with a present and completely interested 'Father'.

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He began by tearing down a series of common misrepresentations of belief and practice in the famous 'Sermon the Mount'. He began by defining what the state of blessedness really is in 'the beatitudes'. He radically contrasts the compromising positions that had been adopted in His day with regard to: righteousness, anger, murder, adultery, divorce, false witness, retribution, attitudes towards enemies, piety, charitable giving, prayer and fasting, personal treasure, life priorities, trust, judging others, and bearing fruit in the kingdom. The 'Sermon on the Mount' sets standards that only He Jesus could keep.

The religious leaders of the day had given the people the impression that they 'had it down what God required'. Over and over Jesus said: "They say'...this or that...'but I say to you'. In other words Jesus pointed out that they were wrong in so many of their teachings, and the people did not know! It was huge wake up call. He had begun to 'pull down' the false edifices of religion as he began to build up the kingdom of truth in its place. He created quite a stir which later played out with the authorities concocting trumped up charges against Him which they used to eventually persuade the crowds to call for His crucifixion.

His main point in this kingdom discourse is for us to put our trust in Him who is able to met God's requirements. He is the King, and what He says defines the realm in which we are to live and the truths to order our lives by.

In the New Testament context (since Jesus had been crucified and launched His church), the apostle John records Jesus' true assessments of the seven churches of Revelation. Once again 'the King' speaks as the legitimate head of the Church and gives His perspective of their 'spiritual health or vitality'. Obviously they were busy

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doing what they were doing pretty much oblivious to what the King really was thinking!

For example, Jesus commends the Church at Ephesus for what they did right but did not neglect to point out in love where they erred.

Revelation 2:1-4

2:1 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,

'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

He then shows them the way out and gives promise to those that overcome. This basic pattern is found in all His commentaries given to the churches as to their true spiritual state and the remedy.

In our time it is sobering to think that, very often we too are happily busy 'doing our own thing' in church life and practice, while all the time the Lord actually sees what we are doing quite differently. His goal is never to put us down, but through healthy reflection in the light His perspectives, He wants to lift us back up to fruitful belief and practice.

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To continue with the discourses of the King as recorded by Matthew: as the 'King of the Jews' Jesus establishes His kingdom priority: righteousness or right standing with God.

As His earthly ministry and then final redeeming work on the cross unfolded it became clear that it was impossible to attain to this blessed state of righteousness through one's own efforts, no matter how noble or intense they might be. (Nicodemus was a classic example of a well meaning sincere leader who nevertheless fell short of God's glory, and was given the command to be 'born again' - John 3:3).

The lesson Nicodemus had to learn applies to us today as well. Only when we as His subjects learn to receive righteousness as God's gift can we begin to properly put our efforts and rewards in perspective. Anything good in our lives comes only from a personal relationship with God, and then is 'added' to His foundational gift of righteousness.

Matthew 6:33

33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

When we keep our kingdom priority intact, the 'things' (food, drink and clothing – the necessities of life) are effortlessly added.

As subjects (sons) of the King, we live in a realm or domain where do not need to worry about anything. He will supply all our needs 'according to His riches in glory' (Philippians 4:19). It is not according to our ability to gather up riches, they are there in His realm already! In fact His domain is characterized by abundance - He is

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‘Almighty God’ the one who is ‘more than enough’ – El Shaddai! Our mindset ought to be a ‘supply’ based and not ‘demand’ based.

However, if we see ourselves as having to ‘work’ for the necessities of life we become trapped in a law based system (or domain / realm) characterized by uncertainty and worry: is there going to be enough; and also am I doing enough to please God to deserve the things I need?

In this scenario we never seem to move into the realm of doing what we do with a view to blessing others and thereby extending the kingdom. We are so busy trying to carve out our own slice in order to survive, when in fact God is saying: ‘your slice is already reserved for you’; come and partake by faith of what you need, and produce an excess and share it with others. Jesus was bent on setting people free from the proverbial religious and economic ‘rat races’.

In Jesus time, the Law’s true purposes had been perverted by the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees, and the average person was laboring under a heavy burden of an elaborate system of religion that really did not facilitate God’s redeeming presence. Yes, there was a faithful remnant that lived by faith, but most were bound up by legalism laboring under its over six hundred laws or requirements.

Jesus taught that if anyone was to follow Him they were to know what life in His kingdom was going to be like. His kingdom discourses were like ‘vision casting’ sessions at a church launch or at the beginning of a year rally.

The difference here is that He was defining non negotiable and thus eternal kingdom attributes that have marked His

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true kingdom for two thousand years. Take time to read Matthew 5:1-7:29 in the light of His mission to tear down the false so that a solid platform could be provided for building the true.

When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple to be dedicated according to the Law, Simeon prophesied over Jesus as follows:

Luke 2:34-35

34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the **fall and rising** of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against 35(yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." (Emphasis added).

As the master kingdom builder He knew that He could not build on a shaky foundation. The old corrupt order had to be torn down before the new could be built. This is still God's divine order of growth. He cut to the heart of every matter in His sermon, and even Mary's heart was pierced through by His incisive commentary on life and religious belief and practice.

In short Jesus, the King is totally committed to His subjects well being and liberty, and will cut away anything that holds them back. His delight is still that we prosper and be in health even as our souls prosper.

Psalm 35:27

27 Let them shout for joy and be glad,
Who favor my righteous cause;
And let them say continually,
"Let the LORD be magnified,

Who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant."

3 John 2

2 Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

The psalmist and the apostle both heard the heart beat of God: He wants us to do well and bring Him glory as we do.

Three Keys To Jesus Kingdom

Key 1: Unity And Division in The Kingdom

Matt 12:22-30

22 Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. 23 And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" 24 Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." 25 But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. 26 If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? 27 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. 28 But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. 30 He who is not

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with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

The multitudes immediately made the connection between Jesus' authority over demon possession and affliction and the prophetic scriptures that spoke of the Messiah being the 'Son of David'.

Any kingdom has a domain in which its king rules and reigns according to the laws of that kingdom. Jesus had already begun to outline the benevolent aspects of His kingdom rule and order.

This incident shows the key importance of unity. Jesus' ministry was penetrating satan's kingdom in a serious way. Yet He is absurdly charged by the spiritually blind Pharisees that He was actually in league with 'Beelzebub' – the ruler or prince of demons.

Jesus points out that it takes a **stronger** one to enter a strong man's house (the demon possessed person) and plunder him back from under the devil's control. Besides, any kingdom in disunity will not stand. He thus underlines the importance of being in unity, because unity or agreement equals strength.

Today we are blessed to have the 'greater one' living on the inside of every believer. We are therefore the stronger ones as we walk in unity with Jesus, His Word and one another in His kingdom realm (1 John 4:4). No devil can stand against the people of God as they walk in the unity and strength that flows from the fivefold ministry Jesus has set in the Church.

Ephesians 4:11-13

11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;...

We live in a time where technology (internet, radio, TV, podcasts etc) have provided us with unprecedented exposure to such a rich variety of ministry gifting from around the world. Personally our family has been blessed by positive influences from around the globe on all continents through the modern media. I encourage you to allow the Lord to lead you in exposing you to the fivefold ministry gifts through the media. This is of course in no way intended to negate or undermine the value of the local church leadership set in your midst who are called to shepherd your souls in a hands on way: up close and personal.

God's order of blessing is top down. If it was not, we would be able to save ourselves from the bottom up. Having said that, unity is a product of leadership. The 'oil' flows **down** from Aaron's head to His beard and then onto the rest of his body: top down – from God through leadership to man.

Psalms 133

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brethren to dwell together in unity!

2 It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Running down on the beard,

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The beard of Aaron,
Running down on the edge of his garments.
3 It is like the dew of Hermon,
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the LORD commanded the blessing--
Life forevermore.

Of course all human leadership is not perfect, yet God chooses to show us that His blessing of unity flows down from Him as the source. First, it is imperative to sit under Godly leadership anointed and appointed by Him and then to pray diligently for them so that they are protected from the enemy's attempts to derail or disqualify them.

Unity is also dependent on what is allowed to come and go in the kingdom. Authority in any realm can be stolen and or abused, so Jesus stands at the 'door' protecting us from any intrusion (John 10:7-9). He also delegates to His subjects the permission to exercise authority on His behalf. We all have a part to play in rejecting anything that detracts from the blessed state of unity. When we understand the value of remaining committed to the source of our blessing, we will put a stop to things that cause division. We will exercise authority over wayward thoughts, words and actions that undermine unity.

Think back to the authority Adam was supposed to exercise over everything that crept in his realm before the fall. God actually expected Adam to run Satan off from the garden. He ought to have taken captive his seducing lies, but unfortunately he did not, and the rest is history. By not shutting the door to Satan, Adam basically separated himself from God and the unity he had with God had now to be restored through covenant. There was now a sin 'distance' between him and God.

Following on from this we now look at a second powerful key to kingdom living that Jesus restored to us in His commission to bind and loose.

Key 2: Binding And Loosing

Matthew 16:13-19

13 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" 14 So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Jesus wanted to know what the disciples were thinking about His true identity. When Peter answered by way of revelation from heaven that Jesus was indeed 'the Christ, the Son of the living God', Jesus used this bedrock revelation to declare that He would be unstoppable in building His church. He proceeded from this point to show the crucial participatory role that he Peter, the other disciples, and indeed we also would play in binding and loosing. Whatever we bind or loose on earth will have (already) been bound or loosed in heaven, indicating the

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close harmony of heaven and earth when it comes to God's people exercising their authority on earth. There is nothing that we can bind or loose on earth in God's name that is not already sanctioned in heaven. The authority we have is not frivolous.

Things do not just happen in life on earth. We are not subject to raw fatalism where whatever happens simply happens for no reason. Things happen because they are allowed or permitted to happen. As His sub – regents on earth we are expected to exercise the authority granted us by the Lord to both loose and bind. This happens as we walk in His ways, are led by His Spirit and speak (agree or come into unity with) His covenant promises over our lives.

God has sovereignly chosen it to be this way when He delegated authority on earth first to Adam and then now to Jesus and His subjects under the New Covenant terms.

Binding the enemy is not standing up with an aggressive voice shouting at the devil 'we bind you satan'. You don't see Jesus dealing with the devil in this manner. This type of practice you may have experienced in some churches is probably the product of misguided zeal. No, Satan is 'bound' when we praise God, live in righteousness and stand our ground against his lies. In the next section we see two examples of How Jesus did indeed deal with the devil through binding and loosing.

It always helps to stay close to what the Bible teaches, otherwise we are in danger of becoming frustrated with all the binding and loosing that goes on in some circles with little effect if at all. A lot of this sort of thing goes on at 'intercessory prayer meetings'. I am not sure that all the activity is always that effective.

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As we walk in communion with the King, we will know what has already been bound and loosed in terms of the Covenant. Our authority as Christians is based on the revelation of Christ that we 'own' in faith for ourselves. We cannot expect to be bold in what we lose and bind based merely on hearsay. We must 'know' who we are in Christ, and who He is in us, otherwise we run the risk of being embarrassed like the seven sons of Sceva were in Acts 19:13-16 when the evil spirit knew that they did not really know Christ nor were operating in His authority.

In the following passage Jesus links the first key of unity with the second key of binding and loosing. They go hand in hand to invoke Jesus manifest presence in bringing to pass on earth anything that we might ask for.

Matthew 18:18-20

18 Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything those they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

Jesus 'Binds' And 'Looses'

Jesus gave us at least two examples of binding and loosing. He only did on earth what He saw and heard His Father saying and doing in heaven, and thus represented the Father's will at all times (John 8:28, 38, 14:10), so it is important that we see scripturally what is sanctioned by heaven and follow Jesus example.

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First, He bound the ‘strong man’ and plundered his ‘goods’ - the man held captive in demonic chains.

Matthew 12:28-30

28 But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.

In our context, because we have authority delegated to us and the greater one the Holy Spirit indwells us, we can exercise authority over demonic spirits and bind them. In this way people who are bound are free from the spirit's influence. This usually takes place in what I call ‘direct’ ministry. It is not that we can sit a hill top somewhere and bind all the evil spirits in the valley below. If this were so, surely some saint or group of intercessors would have done this by now. Even Jesus did not do this.

Then second, Jesus ‘loosed’ a woman who had been bound by satan for eighteen long years.

Luke 13:10-13

10 Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. 11 And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. 12 But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity." 13 And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

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Notice the following: Jesus was teaching the Word of God in the synagogue on the Sabbath. The woman had suffered for eighteen long years, and yet nothing had been done to help her. Jesus ministered to her by boldly declaring her liberty and then laying hands on her to effect the miracle deliverance. She immediately felt the difference and glorified God. The synagogue authorities reacted adversely to all this, Jesus answering them by pointing out that she was a daughter of Abraham – a covenant woman – who ought to have been loosed from satan’s grip as her covenant benefit!

I contend that her deliverance ‘belonged’ to her all along because of her covenant, but the religious leaders did not minister to her as they were so wrapped with their perverted interpretations of the Mosaic Law rendering them unwilling and unable to help her!

We may liken this woman to many in the church today who have been negatively bound by traditional religious doctrine and practices that are contrary to the liberating true Gospel of grace. Jesus is saying to His ‘covenant woman’ – you are ‘loosed’ and set free from the ‘infirmities’ that result from trying to keep long lists of rules and regulations taught as doctrines, yet finding only their source in the hearts of men and not God Himself.

Colossians 2:21-23

21 Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," 22 which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

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The essence or spirit of God's kingdom is liberty in Christ to 'be and do' not a long list of 'do not's'.

Galatians 5:13

13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty

2 Corinthians 3:17

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty

James 1:25-26

25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

The emphasis is now that we have been set free from sin by Jesus' blood, we are free to live move and have our being securely within God's kingdom. We are accepted, forgiven and deeply loved by God, the 'King' of the realm. Everything in His realm is holy and is therefore to be touched and enjoyed. He delights in the well being of His people and is pleased when we walk by faith accepting His free gifts.

Only when we walk in the freedom that is in Christ can we effectively bind the enemy and loose those that are captive to sin and its consequences.

Key 3: Sowing Seed And Reaping A Harvest

Matthew 13:1-3

13:1 On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. 2 And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat

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and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.
3 Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow.

Jesus explained that this parable of the sower and the seed is foundational. It 'unlocks' (like a key to a door) all the other parables according to Mark 4:13. Jesus taught this parable as the dynamic of growth and increase in His kingdom. He thus firmly established growth and increase as His will for our lives.

This parable was **spoken** by Jesus to the multitudes, but **explained** only to His disciples. They were prepared to follow Him up the mountain and ask questions, so He took the time to explain to them the hidden meaning to the parable.

He used parables first to arouse general interest; to present spiritual truth in an easily remembered form (no cassette tapes, CD's, audio recorders and MP3's in those days), and to withhold potentially dangerous truth from the hostile and unbelieving. Only those submitted to His sanctifying Lordship had powerful truths revealed to them. It seems as the rest of the people in the valley wanted to 'get their cake, eat it and leave'.

When you read the whole parable, you find Jesus communicating the central kingdom truth that the Word of God (the seed) will produce increase when sown on good soil (hearts prepared to receive). The various degrees of success and / or growth: 'thirty, sixty and one hundred fold', speak of the tremendous 'potential' inherent in the Word.

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However, if the soil is poorly prepared then ‘waste’ occurs. The birds come, the seed is eaten up, or the weeds grow up and choke the plants. The potential benefits from preaching the Word is ‘lost’ on such people whose hearts have not been ‘softened’ through prayer before they hear the Word. History records many instances of communities ‘hardened’ to the Gospel being turned around after anointed intercession has been made to prepare the ‘soil’. God thrust a faithful ‘laborer’ into this harvest to boldly proclaim liberty and revival breaks out. It has happened time and again.

It is also critical to avoid tainting the ‘seed’ (genetically modifying it) through introducing any unbelief and religious tradition (Mark 6:1-6) to the Word. Only the true ‘Gospel of grace’ is the power of God, having in it the capacity to change the world, one heart at a time!

God has invested Himself in the Word, and when proclaimed in its unadulterated form it carries great transforming power, not only in our own lives but in those we are called and privileged to minister to.

God has destined His church for greatness, and His goal is to have the knowledge of His glory fill the earth. Like a mighty forest begins with one seed, so the church begun with the small seeds of revelation sown in the hearts of submitted men and women almost two thousand years ago. The church continues to increase on all continents despite ‘appearances’ to the contrary.

The ‘kingdoms of this world’ will continue to be infused and transformed by kingdom truths and progressively become ‘the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ’.

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Revelation 11:15

15 Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

God's government will continue to increase and it will rest upon Jesus shoulders only.

Isaiah 9:6-7

6 For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and
justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Notice the Lord's zeal will perform this. His Spirit will burn in us, we do not have to manufacture the zeal. Our responsibility is to respond to His ability...in us.

As His kingdom representatives, we are to enjoy close fellowship with Him, hear and feel His heartbeat and from the warmth and integrity of that fellowship share the love of the King to all who will listen. Growth is assured. Sow and you will reap.

Rank And Position In Jesus Kingdom

Matthew 18:1-5

18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, 3 and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.

Matthew 23:11-13

11 But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. 13 But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

The first passage focuses on the humility it requires to enter into Jesus Kingdom. We are to **receive** (not achieve) what God has for us like a little child. Have you noticed how little children find it easy to receive? They have not yet been taught to ‘work for’ their blessings.

There are many people who describe their advancement (greatness) in God’s kingdom in terms of their sacrifice, hard work and dedication. Admirable as these qualities are (and many books have been written showing how important they are), they actually stand in the way of what Jesus

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teaches here. Read the first passage again. He says in effect that the more you learn to receive the greater you become.

In the second passage the focus shifts a bit to functioning within the kingdom as a servant. Sonship is a guarantee of birth; servanthood is a choice of humility.

When you are secure in God's love for you, you are prepared to serve others. When you are not, you are driven by the need to be served. The Pharisees obviously fitted into this category. They loved to be served and thus 'blocked the way' for others to enter in.

When you take matters in your own hand and advance yourself, you will be humbled. God's kingdom works in reverse to the common human way. This style of leadership has the added problem of hindering those that you are supposedly leading.

Most people see through leaders who are more interested in their own advancement at the expense of those they lead. Only those leaders that make it their business to raise up and serve others are seen as true public servants for example. Leaders are dream equippers and releasers. They delight in seeing their people do well, and do not become insecure and envious when someone else goes higher than they do.

In Christ, we all have equal access to the throne of grace. There are no second class citizens here. Neither is God a respecter of persons. He treats us all with equity.

Psalm 98:9

9 For He is coming to judge the earth.
With righteousness He shall judge the world,

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And the peoples with equity.

Psalm 99:4

4 The King's strength also loves justice;
You have established equity;
You have executed justice and righteousness in
Jacob.

You can never accuse God of unfair treatment.

When we know that we are God's 'beloved', like the disciple John did (John 19:26 / 20:2 / 21:7 / 21:20), we enjoy or 'unlock' more of God's favor. To some this may seem like favoritism, but it is not. The person who learns to 'receive' from God more than the next naturally enjoys more. Keep it simple. Be a like a child and receive, receive, receive. God prefers child like faith to the smell of sweat!

Here is an added benefit in all this. When you know you are 'backed' by God's love for you, you find it easier to love others and serve them. You are at peace and in a state of rest and it shows. People do not see you as driven, but led!

God's love exalts you, not your intellect, status, 'apple polishing', family influence or any such thing. Be secure enough to serve. Jesus who is **the only begotten** Son of God took the towel of the lowly household servant and washed His disciples' feet. He is and always will be the greatest in the kingdom.

Reigning (As A King) In Life

The King has commissioned us as His ambassadors to take His kingdom righteousness, peace and joy to the World (Matthew 28:18-20). Whole nations are to be impacted. He expects us to boldly take the keys (authority) He has given us and use them to establish His purposes on earth as they already are in heaven.

What we do **for** Him springs from who we **are in Him**. There is no striving, only kingdom rest. We know the end from the beginning. He has already conquered everything, and we now get to do ‘mopping up’ operations. Our ‘work’ rests on the shoulders of His completed work. We live, move and have our being in the realm of a victory already won. It is finished: Jesus has already conquered death, hell and the grave. There is no need to try to do it all over again.

We are not striving to rule over life circumstances through our own efforts. Rather we rule and reign in the realm of life through the one who supplies us with an ‘abundance of grace’ and the ‘gift of righteousness’.

Romans 5:17

17 For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

Here Paul shows that **receiving** the ‘abundance of grace’ and the ‘gift of righteousness’ is key to reigning (as a king) in the realm of life. If we don’t enjoy God’s grace and His righteousness by faith, we are likely to walk in defeat as the lying onslaughts of the enemy dictate to us how we should live. Thankfully, there is an increasing body of believers

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who are rising up into the fullness of their true stature in Christ. They realize that they are defined not by their circumstances, but by the unchanging Word of the Lord.

So the ‘theme of man’s dominion’ (under the Lordship of Christ) underlies much of Matthew’s Gospel. Part of Jesus’ mission was to restore mankind back to God’s originally intended place of dominion on earth (Genesis 1:26).

The plan is still unfolding and will be consummated when Jesus returns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Revelation 19:16

16 And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Chapter 6

The Ox Servant Mark's Gospel

Mark 10:42-45

"You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. 44 And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

God is the master 'marksman' – He knows and targets each Gospel account towards a specific people group.

It appears as if Mark's Gospel was written to gentile (non Jewish) readers with Roman background. The Romans had conquered the 'known' world at that time and their

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characteristic militaristic way of doing things was obviously well known throughout their realm.

The following pointers seem to support this:

- The topical narration is brief and quick: something that would impress Roman readers. It is not a detailed sequential biography. For example Mark puts Jesus' teachings and miracles together to make a point.
- Currency and time references are Roman, not Jewish as in Matthew's Gospel.
- Jewish customs and sayings are explained (Mark 7:34).
- There is no genealogy nor any birth account: servants don't qualify here.
- Jesus' gospel campaign is recorded in military style: planned and organized.

Mark 6:39-40

39 Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties.

- Jesus is the able commander as He quickly recruits soldiers (Mark 1:16), shows His power over the enemy (Mark 1:23) and demands subordination and obedience within a definite chain of command.

In our context today, the church as a whole is described in terms of a 'body' (Ephesians 1:23), 'building' (1 Corinthians 3:9), 'house' (1 Timothy 3:15), family (Ephesians 3:15), and an 'army' with soldiers wearing 'armor' (Ephesians 6:10-17).

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Of course if you are in need of comfort, identity and belonging you might favor describing the church as a family. Then if you are interested in building and growth then the building imagery is going to appeal to you. If you lean towards pacifism, then the military imagery in Mark's Gospel is not going to grab you at first. However if you are a Navy Seal or SWAT team member you might be impressed with the military precision with which Jesus conducted His campaign to conquer evil... and so on. There are many people who appreciate order, chain of command, strategy etc.

My point here is that God knows what our natural leanings are and will reach into our world or way of thinking to show us His grace. Stay open to **any** and **all** of His truth – it will always help.

Jesus Displays Characteristics Of A Servant

Even though the church is described in military terms with efficient and decisive leaders, they are nevertheless marked by a servant nature.

Isaiah 42:4

"Behold! My Servant whom I uphold,
My Elect One in whom My soul delights!
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.
2 He will not cry out, nor raise His voice,
Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.
3 A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench;
He will bring forth justice for truth.
4 He will not fail nor be discouraged,

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Till He has established justice in the earth;
And the coastlands shall wait for His law."

Isaiah 52:13

13 Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently;
He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.

Isaiah 53:11

11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied.

By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,
For He shall bear their iniquities.

The above three references point to Jesus as God's servant who by definition is someone who reports to and serves another. As our leader He sets a wonderful example to follow:

- He was willing and 'immediately' available for service (Mark 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 29). The word 'immediately' is used no less than forty one times in Mark's Gospel.
- He was prepared to endure the hardship of offense and rejection from His own (Mark 6:1-6).
- He was prepared to give His life in sacrifice (Mark 8:34-38).
- He anticipated the needs of others (Mark 8:1-9).
- He was obedient to His 'master' (God the Father) even when He was pressured to do something other than God's will (Mark 14:32-37)

I know that if I am to follow in His footsteps, I need all the grace (enabling favor and strength) I can receive. How

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about you? The Christian life is not hard, it is impossible without God's help. Only when we are in perfect union with God in Christ can we ever expect to serve like He did with His heart.

Paul makes some remarkable statements about looking after the interest of others in his letter to the Philippians. This is what servants of the Lord do: they are not focused on themselves, and do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit!

Philippians 2:1-4

2:1 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Interestingly Jesus in His humanity chose to make Himself of no 'reputation'. He did not 'hold onto or forcibly retain hold of' His exalted preexistent position as the eternal Son of God, but willingly submitted to the 'limitations' of humanity when He was born into the world through Mary's womb.

Philippians 2:5-11

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8

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And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

He was exalted precisely because of His willingness to obey His Father in Heaven and serve undeserving mankind.

Today, there are many in the Church who do not understand God's ways, and try to live the exalted life as 'King's kids' without really serving the King and His other kids. They don't understand or perhaps by pass this verse: 'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,' (Vs 5).

Sons *And* Servants

Of course through Christ work on the cross we are accepted into God's family as sons (children – male and female) with full covenant benefits and privileges of this sonship.

John 1:12-13

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

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Full sonship is God's idea. We are born 'again' into His family when we receive Jesus as Lord. We are immediately translated from being slaves to sin, to being sons and joint heirs with Jesus.

Romans 8:16-17

16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ,...

As Jesus was in the world when He lived on earth, so are we today in Him (1 John 4:17). As He enjoyed God's total covenant protection, provision, purpose and power to fulfill His calling, so do we. That is what it means to 'go in His name'!

There are some who argue that we no longer need to have a 'servant mindset', but are rather to rejoice in our full sonship in Christ. They very often see these scriptures through a modern western mindset that disdains servanthood. In contrast, independence and personal identity as a 'son' is extolled. This is correct assuming that one's independence is from sin, and our identity is with Jesus the Messiah who said that a 'servant is not above his master'. That is, what the master was prepared to do in serving the people, so must a 'servant' (Christ follower) be prepared to do.

John 13:14

14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

To serve others as a son need not be contradictory. When you are secure in your relationship with God, you will not be concerned about what position or status you hold with

men. You serve voluntarily with a heart of compassion and genuine desire to see others needs met.

The 'Ox' - Symbolic Of Productivity

The 'Ox' imagery found in Ezekiel and Revelation that we have outlined at the beginning of this book are tied together in Mark's Portrait of Jesus the Messiah.

The ox was the 'tractor' of that day, with the farmer working together with the ox to produce the crops. Oxen were often spanned (or yoked) together 'with' other oxen in a team. Their combined effort was **greater** than the sum of the individual efforts. In a very real sense since we have chosen to follow Christ we are yoked together with Him and He with us. He began to build his church, inviting us to participate (Matthew 16:17-19), then left and commissioned us to go in His name with the Holy Spirit's help and continue the mission.

Mark 16:19-20

20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working **with them** and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen. (Emphasis added).

The Lord worked 'with them' – their ministry was a **combined** effort. He now considered them 'joint heirs' (Romans 8:17), and through the Holy Spirit worked with them to fulfill the Great Commission.

There is a difference in working 'for' and working 'with' someone. Working 'for' someone implies less than complete identification, but working 'with' suggests a higher level of connection and cooperation. Much like an

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employed worker in a family business is different to the son working at the same office as the worker. There is a strong blood tie that goes beyond some sort of contractual employee – employer relationship. As an employee your employment can be terminated and the relationship come to an end, whereas as a son things are different. You will always be a son.

Back to the oxen. The older, more mature and experienced ox was yoked with the younger or less experienced ox. The younger ox learned to move in harmony with the older ox, thus minimizing the potential chaffing and consequent pain on his neck from the wooden yoke. He learned to mimic the older ox's every move even to the point of bending to drink water at the same time. In this way the effect was that the yoke or burden became 'light'.

Matthew 11:29-30

29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

In our New Testament context, now that the Holy Spirit has come to indwell us, we may liken the yoke of the Lord as the glorious privilege of being 'led by the Holy Spirit'. This is the characteristic feature of mature sonship in the New Covenant (Romans 8:14). He 'works with us' as our helper, just as Jesus said He would.

John 16:7-8

7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.

The Holy Spirit is the senior ‘ox’ in the team to whom we willingly yield. He is the ‘greater one’ in us (1 John 4:4) who causes us to do superhuman things – impossible in our own strength. Yet together nothing is impossible to him who believes.

In our service for the Lord we are looking more to what we are to do in harmony with what He is already doing, rather than to solicit God’s help in what we propose to do. If we are ‘led’ by the Spirit we will always ask for what God has already planned and prepared for us. We are ‘pulling’ together, not apart from each other. Put another way, the Christian life is not about doing ‘our own thing’ while asking God to bless it. Rather, we discover through the scripture, prayer and discernment what God is already doing (done) and flow with it. The blessing is already there.

Self Righteous Service **Vs** **True Grace Based Service**

In our service for or with the Lord all things must be **of** Him, **through** Him and **to** Him (Romans 11:36). He must be the source, enablement and our focus or motive. If not, our service (good on the outside as it may seem) will still amount what I call ‘self righteous’ service. According to God’s standards, our own righteousness is not righteousness at all (Isaiah 64:6). I believe it helps to recognize some characteristics of self righteous service in contrast to true grace based righteousness.

1. Self Righteous Service (Human Based Effort):

- Feeds largely on external rewards: like position and status versus an inner sense of joy or well being.
- Seeks human applause or public recognition: like that which the Pharisees craved versus knowing by faith that God is pleased.
- Retains the right to choose where and when to serve rather than willing surrender to the will of God.
- Is most often affected by moods and feelings and not by a conviction to serve that comes from responding to God's perfect love.
- Is centered on glorification of the servant, though this may not be generally admitted.

You could argue that no one you know personally displays all these characteristics. It is safe to say that many if not most people are marked by 'striving' to be someone to varying degrees. They tend to be 'driven' rather than 'led' and even appear to put their trust more in 'doing the do's' rather than receiving the 'already done's' of Christ's free gift.

The wonderful disciplines of prayer, fasting, Bible reading and free will charitable giving, may often amount to what we can call a 'Christian works program'. In this scheme of things, God's gifts are devalued as the 'program' supposedly advances you into a **better** position to enjoy God's favor. However the truth is, everything you need is already found in Christ when you are born again. You will never be in a better position – you are already seated in heavenly places at God's right hand the moment you are born again. This is God's gift to you: the highest position

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possible! There is therefore no need to strive to ‘get into position’ – you are already there: simply receive.

Ephesians 2:6

6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,...

Put another way: there is no use in climbing a ladder that you are already on top of!

In this position of rest, no sweat or striving is required (or allowed) – we have what we have by faith in the completed work of Christ, and not by virtue of our own efforts.

So, what we do for the Lord in service springs out of a grateful heart for what is already complete. Our consciences are clear; we are at peace with God through Christ’s blood and also at peace with ourselves. There is no longer an internal civil war going on. The accuser (Revelation 12:10) can no longer condemn us as we stand righteous before God.

In this blessed state you are delivered from the feeling of having to do more and more to please God: more prayer, Bible reading, fasting, church attendance etc. In Christ you are accepted: period - nothing more to do!

Instead, the fruit of our holiness grows naturally outward as we draw inward sustenance from our secure relationship with the Lord. Sure we serve Him (or work out our salvation with ‘fear and trembling’ Philippians 2:12), but we fear and tremble lest we slip back from grace and begin to trust in our own efforts once again.

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We are keenly aware of the importance of our witness in the world. Salvation has a purpose. We are called, indeed created to fulfill ‘good works’ (Ephesians 2:10), and as we live our lives in the light of eternity, we are moved by a reverential awe of the work God has done **in** us and His desire to work **through** us. We tremble at the thought of doing anything in our own effort and thus negate the work of Christ. See verse thirteen of Philippians as vitally connected to verse twelve.

Philippians 2:12-13

...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

God is always working ‘in us’ to ‘work things out’. It is His work, not ours. Our response to His ability is to believe and receive. Right believing produces right doing or living, not the other way round.

The source of Jesus’ military like success as described in Mark’s Gospel is God, not the disciplines’ Jesus displayed like prayer, obedience, organization, goal setting etc. Yes they were the channels through which God’s power and purposes flowed, but at the heart of Jesus fruitfulness was God’s favor, anointing and wisdom on His life.

Today, we read the Gospels (and any other Scripture for that matter) not to find a set of principles to follow but rather to encounter the living Christ and follow Him – it’s personal!

When Jesus taught the errant disciples on that seven mile journey to Emmaus immediately after His resurrection, He expounded the scriptures concerning Himself (Luke 24:27).

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He did **not** launch into a cute media presentation of **powerful principles** that **propel** a **person** to their **purpose**. His ‘destiny’ series focused on encountering Him in His resurrection power. The essence of our service with the Lord is based on a vital living relationship and not on some clinical set of principles.

2. True Grace Or Relationship Based Service:

- Is, at its heart, "I want to" not "I have to" – it springs from love, not duty!
- Is content in being hidden: does not need to be seen by men. (Knows that God will reward in the open).
- Does not feed on human applause, and continues unchanged with or without it.
- Is indiscriminate in ministry: shows no favoritism towards those that may reward you with some sort of return.
- Is an expression of ‘effortless’ lifestyle of faith in God’s abilities and power.
- Waits in restful silence (does not try to attract attention) when not needed and is ready to serve at all times.
- Has its eyes focused on pleasing the master.
- Does not neglect small things as unimportant.

Grace based service is a matter of revelation. When we see Jesus and what He has done for us, we are grateful and make it our choice to serve Him. Our voluntary service is a product of His power, not ours.

Psalm 110:3

3 Your people shall be volunteers
In the day of **Your** power;

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In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth.
(Emphasis added).

We volunteer in the day of **His** power, not our own.

Mark uses the term ‘Son of Man’ rather than ‘Son of God’ no less than fourteen times in His Gospel. His intent is to portray Jesus as vitally connected to the needs of man as God’s divine servant. Jesus was not driven to be in charge like so many insecure people / leaders. His destiny was in God’s hands and He was not going to snatch back control. He knew that ultimate victory would be achieved through apparent defeat at the cross. The cross was His place of ultimate exaltation. It is ours too.

God wants you and I to know that our place at His right hand is secure. No striving allowed here: we are seated and not standing up. We don’t even have to ‘go down’ in order to ‘go up’. When we humble ourselves (go low) and accept Christ that’s as low as it gets. There’s no need to add some sort of salvation ‘supplements’ to this experience. Things like fasting, all night prayer, service etc. can’t make you go any lower. He has already gone to the lowest place on your behalf. Simply identify with Him in this by faith.

We have already been lifted up in Christ, so let us ‘come down’ from the glory mountain as carriers of God’s presence to those that have yet to taste and see that He is good.

Psalm 34:8

8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good;
Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

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Let your service be an expression of your great appreciation for His love towards you.

1 John 4:19

19 We love (serve) Him because He first loved (served) us. (Parentheses added).

Chapter 7

The Face Of A Man Luke's Gospel

Have you ever been frustrated with someone who cannot relate to your situation? They don't seem to identify with the challenges you are facing, and despite their reassurances that they 'know' what you are going through you still feel that they do not. Perhaps this is how you have felt at times about God, who often feels so far away just when you need Him the most.

The good news is that Jesus has totally identified with our humanity with all its needs, hopes, dreams, brokenness, and frailties. He has eternally solved the problem of deity's perfection being removed from man's imperfections by taking on human flesh as the 'Son of Man'.

This is Luke the Gospel writer's emphasis.

He uses the term 'Son of Man' twenty five times to show that Jesus was not some spiritual apparition roaming the

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earth, but someone born of a woman in the flesh who is intimately in touch with our human needs.

He had the face of a man, was a man, and still is the tangible ‘Son of Man’ at God’s right hand. He was entirely in tune with man’s need as this example shows.

Luke 19:9-10

9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham;
10 for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Jesus had just come to the house of Zaccheus, the short of stature tree climbing tax collector ‘sinner’ despised by the community for his thieving practices. Zaccheus’ repentance and offers of restitution prompted Jesus remark referenced above. He had ‘entered Zaccheus’ world’ to seek him out for salvation. He did not judge but welcomed Zaccheus’ turning and confession of Lordship, much to the surprise of the self righteous onlookers who considered themselves children of Abraham. They saw this rich tax collector as an outsider – a pariah in his own community. Jesus saw him differently.

Oh, that we would see people / sinners around us through Jesus eyes.

Context And Background to Luke’s Gospel

Luke's Gospel appears to be written with the intent of reaching people of Greek background who valued human perfection as their central goal of life. The Greek Empire had been overrun by the Romans many years before, yet

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their philosophies of life influenced people in Jesus' day through their writers and philosophers. This is still significantly true in many 'western democratic' societies today.

Their culture valued moral (to a degree), physical and intellectual perfection, and the 'scientifically' trained medical physician Luke was a good candidate for communicating Jesus' perfections as a man to people who would be impressed by His perfection. Luke's background and training as a physician would remove most intellectual barriers with His Greek audience and give him favor.

Luke 1:1-4

1:1 Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.

Notice the following:

- Luke's Gospel was an 'orderly' historically accurate chronological account.
- The Gospel would trace the spread of the faith to the whole world: all men, both Jew and Gentile.
- Luke deals mostly with eyewitness accounts, and not with theological conjectures and commentary.
- It would be comprehensive: 'all things'. (Vs 3).

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Then also, His mostly gentile audience would appreciate his omission of much material that is primarily Jewish in character. For example, Luke omits Jesus main contrast with Jewish teaching in the Sermon of the Mount (Matthew 5-7); His discussion of Jewish tradition (Mathew 15) and His condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23). In contrast, Luke concentrates on features of Jesus life and ministry that appeal to all people everywhere.

For example, Luke records Jesus' birth in the Roman context: Luke 2:1-2 / 3:1 – the Roman Census, Caesar and governors. Jesus' ancestry is traced back to Adam, all mankind's common ancestor and not the Jewish patriarch Abraham. In this way the Lord is connected to the whole human race, and not just the Jews. Notice however that Luke's account is not 'politically correct' to a fault: he does not 'hide' Jesus' Jewishness in his account of the circumcision and temple dedication.

Nor did he neglect to portray the essential truths of Jesus' deity, Lordship and His true nature as the Messiah when he focused on Jesus' humanity.

Luke uses the title 'son of man' 25X and portrays Jesus as the 'Ideal Man' - a fitting representative of all mankind before the Holy God of the universe.

Jesus' Humanity

Luke presents Jesus in His humanity in the following ways:

First, Jesus' birth is related in detail (this would impress 'medically minded' people and those interested in human background or lineage). His relationship to His cousin John

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(the Baptist) is discussed in detail in Luke Chapters 1-3. Thus Luke emphasizes His human connectedness through birth and family.

Second, His human upbringing, growth and development is also discussed in the first three chapters.

One scripture stands out for me. It describes how Jesus 'increased' in His human capacity, something someone in their supreme state of deity does not ordinarily do. Deity is simply complete in all power, wisdom and presence, and thus has no need of any increase. This underscores the miraculous nature of the incarnation where Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us.

Luke 2:51-52

51 Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus **increased** in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (Emphasis added)

In His humanity, the perfect Lord of glory chose to be subject to His 'imperfect' parents, even after He by revelation knew who His Heavenly Father was according to Luke 2:49.

Luke 2:49-50

49 And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" 50 But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.

This wonderful example helps us grow up under submission to 'imperfect' leadership in our natural and

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church families. If Jesus could ‘increase’, even when He was in submission to man’s shortcomings in leadership and authority, so can we.

Third, Jesus is seen to identify with all human need when He ministers to a variety of people: outcasts, sinners, rejected ones, (Samaritans, Gentiles, the poor and sick). His ministry also included women and children, young and old, noble and rich, as well as the educated and successful. He was not elitist in any way nor did he take sides with the poor against the rich. He judged every situation He faced with justice and equity (Psalm 99:4)

The immediate application of this is found in the writer to the Hebrews commentary about Jesus as our High Priest:

Hebrews 4:15-16

15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Everyone will find fair and just treatment in God’s presence. You will not be received on the basis of your wealth (or lack of it), race, gender, age, education etc. We can all come to Him in confidence that the blood of Jesus our High Priest works just the same for all of us.

Fourth, Jesus as the ‘perfect man’ is seen overcoming temptation, thus qualifying Him as someone to be honored in a perfect’ society.

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Luke 4:1-2

4:1 Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2 being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.

The rest of the temptation account through to Verse 13 shows Jesus successfully warding off temptation through the Word of God, and then returning in the power of God having ‘qualified’ in this intense ‘human’ battle to serve the people.

He relied not on His innate spiritual strength as deity, but on the written Word of God commonly available to all. He countered every temptation with: ‘it is written’ and not with an appeal to His uniqueness and inherent strength as the Son of God. As He grew up, He had prepared Himself by ‘hiding’ the Word of God in His heart that He might sin against God (Psalm 119:11). This is something we all can and should do.

In this way He would leave a perfect example for us to follow, and also with no excuse for succumbing to the enemy because of our innate frailty as human beings. Like our hero, we can also use the Word to ward off temptation. In this way we have a way of escape from every possible trap of the enemy (1 Corinthians 10:13).

He showed us His superiority over His adversary in three main categories of sin: ‘lust of the flesh’; ‘the lust of the eyes’ and ‘the pride of life’.

1 John 2:15-17

16 For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world.

These three categories cover the three main drives of fallen men that our adversary tries to exploit, specifically those that originate in the spirit, the soul (mind, emotions and will) and the flesh (bodily passions). When anyone yields to anything or anyone else other than God Himself to meet their spiritual, intellectual and physical 'needs', they are sure to be tempted into falling short of God's glory.

The 'world' here is the so called 'order' of things as produced by fallen man. Because the source (the world) is corrupted, the product or fruit of its endeavors will be corrupt unless it is has been redeemed and sanctified by the Lord's cleansing blood.

Our spirits must be born again, our minds renewed and our bodies 'set apart' from 'unrighteous' passions by the indwelling Holy Spirit. We attain to 'human perfection' through the Lord and savior of all humans: the Lord Jesus Christ alone. What He has done for us at the cross qualifies us all to receive God's grace, favor and wisdom, no matter what our backgrounds may have been.

Fifth, Luke shows an emphasis on Jesus prayer life that points towards **man's human** 'need' of God.

Jesus had 'come in the likeness of men', not 'holding onto' His deity so as to be our perfect representative as a man (Philippians 2:5-8). The fact that He even prayed indicated that He was 'functioning' as a man and therefore in 'need'

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of God's covenant provision and protection which He accessed by means of a lifestyle of prayer.

Luke 5:16

16 So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.

Jesus prayer life reveals a threefold purpose: to exalt the Lord in praise, to petition Him in need, and to further His purposes on earth through intercession. Jesus fulfilled all these as our 'ideal man'.

Sixth, Jesus (as He lived as a human under the Old Covenant) is seen to be in need of the help of the Holy Spirit.

He was filled and led by the Spirit (Luke 4:1); and anointed for service by the Spirit (Luke 4:18). These actions of the Holy Spirit in His life were not of some mere academic value: He depended on and yielded to the Holy Spirit's help. With the many challenges we face today most true Christians will admit their need the Holy Spirit's help.

Jesus described the coming of the Holy Spirit as a 'divine advantage' (John 16:7). The disciples thought they had come into something really good when they followed Jesus, but Jesus had them reeling when he described the Holy Spirit in these terms. The Holy Spirit was to come and live on the inside of them...and us. He was (and still is) given to every believer to help, strengthen, teach, comfort, equip, and empower us. As we grow in the knowledge of who He is, His nature and ministry to and through us, we become more fruitful in what God has called us to be and do.

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Seventh, Jesus even needed to be strengthened by an angel according to Luke 22:43. He was under great stress in the Garden of Gethsemane before His betrayal and an angel was sent to 'strengthen' Him. Why then would we think we can get by in times of stress and temptation without God's help, whether it is through the agency of an angel or the Holy Spirit? It is a sign of reality to receive help in need, not weakness. Pride rejects help. Even Jesus was not a 'self made man' who never cried! Such weak men only exist in movies. The person of faith receives all that God has for them and should expect help from heaven at every turn without trying to go it alone.

Eighth, Jesus ministered as a man under the terms of the Old Covenant or Testament with the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 3:21-22

21 When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. 22 And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

Acts 10:38

38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

I think it is fair to say that Jesus did not minister in His own strength. He relied on the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Notice that God the Father was well pleased with Jesus

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from the start...before Jesus had done anything in ministry terms. Jesus had performed no miracles at this point, had not even cast out any demons, or raised anyone from the dead.

Jesus had walked out his first thirty years of human existence on earth in faith (a faith that pleased God according to Hebrews 11:6). I believe there is a powerful lesson here. We should **begin** anything we do for the Lord with a sense of the Father's approval. If we work for approval, we have it backwards. Really, when we put our trust in Jesus at the point of salvation, we are already accepted and approved in God's eyes (Ephesians 1 & 2). There is nothing more we can do to improve on our acceptance. The good works we do, if led by the Holy Spirit, are already stamped with God's 'good housekeeping seal' of approval. He ordained them anyway from before we ever started (Ephesians 2:10), so they have to be acceptable to Him. When we learn to rest knowing that all things are of God, through Him and to Him, the Christian life becomes 'easy'.

In a very real sense God is with us in the same way that He was with Jesus. As Jesus was equipped and empowered fulfill His destiny, so are we.

Scripture unequivocally teaches that Jesus delegated His authority to us in the same way that God delegated authority to Him.

Luke 9:1-2

9:1 Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. 2 He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

Luke 10:1

10:1 After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.

Luke 24:49

49 Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."

Now that the Holy Spirit has come, we all have the same potential as the early disciples. Sure some of them were apostles, but Mark clarifies things a bit: he records that 'those who believe' also have power and authority delegated to them. So delegation goes beyond apostolic authority to 'regular' believers.

Mark 16:17-18

17 And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Yes, we are very human, but so were the apostles: fishermen, tax collectors - ordinary men and women if you like. Although we are very human, we also have a very divine God living on the inside of us, and as believers we are anointed to minister to the needy in supernatural ways. The 'greater one' – the mighty Holy Spirit is able to supersede anything the enemy has done in someone's life (1 John 4:4). When we yield to Him we begin to see God's

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miraculous power flow through us to meet humanity's needs.

Ninth, Jesus also had human emotions as well as the feelings that went with them.

For example, on one occasion He came across a funeral procession. A widow had lost her son and most likely her means of support also. This double tragedy: the loss of her husband and now her son was witnessed by a large crowd. I am sure there were many who were sympathetic towards her, but they were not 'moved' with compassion to do something about it like Jesus was. Perhaps the crowd thought 'that was that' – nothing could be done – the son was dead!

But Jesus was on the scene and He 'saw' the widow woman through eyes of compassion and mercy. He stepped up and touched the coffin and spoke life to the young man, raising him up from the dead.

Luke 7:12-16

13 When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." 14 Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." 15 So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.

Later Jesus taught about the Good Samaritan's compassion as He personally got involved with the victim on the side of the road (Luke 10:30-37). Earlier on, the priest and the Levite had passed by, which speaks of religion's distance and unwillingness to help. The Samaritan however, – a

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religious outcast in the eyes of the establishment – stopped to help. He poured both ‘oil and wine’ into the man’s wounds that served as cleansing and soothing agents. These speak of the need to minister both the Word and the Holy Spirit to the hurting.

Not only do we need to ask God to open our eyes to see with eyes of compassion and not judgment, but we need the courage of our convictions to step in with practical help too. Mercy is what God requires, not some sort of intellectual justification and cynicism towards people who may have been caught in a bad situation or even brought distress upon themselves through some sort of foolishness.

Micah 6:8

8 He has shown you, O man, what is good;
And what does the LORD require of you
But to do justly,
To love mercy,
And to walk humbly with your God?

Tenth, Jesus was readily approachable...even by outright ‘sinners’!

One time Jesus was invited to the local Pharisees house for some food. As He sat down, a sinner woman of the town braved the scorn and boldly came into the house, stood behind Jesus, bent down and wiped His feet with her tear drenched hair and anointed His feet with fragrant oil.

Luke 7:36-40

36 Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. 37 And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at

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the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, 38 and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."

The sinner woman was attracted by His grace and mercy and thus saw Him as totally approachable. Either she was blindly driven by her need or she had heard about His grace and mercy. She did not try to 'clean herself up' first and then come to Him. No, she came to Him as she was, in her desperate need of mercy. She worshipped Him, pouring out her tears as well as the costly fragrance. The fragrance of her devotion defined the moment. It stood in stark contrast with the cold mist of the Pharisee's formalism that could only assess the moment in distant 'theological' terms. The Pharisee had no clue about compassion, repentance, devotion, worship and intimacy – things which in one dramatic moment the 'sinner' woman understood.

Change comes as we come to God, not before we come.

Eleventh, Jesus lovingly pursued His disciples in their need.

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus were walking away from their destiny. They had witnessed the terrible crucifixion of their Lord on The Passover, yet in their confusion and depression they decided to head out of town.

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Jesus pursued them, and joined them as they conversed and reasoned as to what the meaning of all that had happened was. The women of their company had earlier reported that Jesus was indeed resurrected, yet their spiritual eyes were closed to this and they continued further and further away from God's plan for them.

Luke 24:13-16

13 Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 And they talked together of all these things which had happened. 15 So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. 16 But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.

As you read on in the account, Jesus then spent the whole journey explaining the things concerning Himself from the Old Testament Scriptures. Their natural eyes were 'restrained' from knowing Him after the flesh; His goal was for them to know Him in His resurrected form after the manner of the scripture. They were no longer to rely on their natural senses to apprehend or comprehend Him. As He spent personal time with them, even 'breaking bread' that evening, He moved them from the realm of mere mental 'reason' to 'revelation' through the Word. Their 'eyes' were opened to His true person in this act of intimacy that came on the heels of a truly great seven mile long Bible Study (the distance between Jerusalem and Emmaus) Their hearts 'burned' as The Holy Spirit worked with the Word to bring revelation to their hearts.

It is noteworthy that their eyes were opened when Jesus 'broke bread' with them (Vs 35). I believe we receive so

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much more when we preface the communion table with the liberating word about Christ. It seems as if the modern church needs to be reminded of the foundational truths about the risen Christ once again.

I remember before I received Jesus as Lord I tried to figure out God through a process of mental reasoning. It seemed fruitless and endless, yet I remained under the Holy Spirit's conviction. My wife and her Christian friends had been praying for me to have the 'blinders taken off my eyes'. Then one day I attended a Gospel meeting where the anointing of the Holy Spirit was present in a powerful way through the praise and worship and preaching. The 'lights went on' in my spirit and I was born again. It was somewhat like when Jesus pursued the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. He had been pursuing me all the time.

Some today extol the value of the believer's 'pursuit of God', as if He needs to be chased down as He runs away and hides from us! I believe it is more valuable to speak of God pursuing us. He is the one doing the 'chasing'. He is infinitely more passionate about us than we are passionate about Him. I believe it more helpful to boast about His love for us rather than our love for Him. After all, our love is but a response to His love for us.

1 John 4:19

19 We love Him because He first loved us.

Our Heavenly Father is like the prodigal son's father in the famous parable that Jesus taught in Luke 15:11-32. The father had been hurt by his son's actions and sinful living, yet was constantly looking out for his son's return. The story is a lot about the 'expectant father' who, when he 'saw' his son afar off, had '**compassion**' on him, then

‘ran’ to him finally embracing him as he **‘fell on his neck’** and repeatedly and affectionately **‘kissed’** him!

Luke 15:20

20 And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

This was no cold, judgmental and hesitant reunion, but a warm moment of total acceptance and joyful restoration as the father put a robe, ring and sandals on his once errant son. He was restored to a place of fellowship, authority and purpose in his life, undeserving as he most certainly was. The son did not need to earn his way back into favor, he merely had to receive the abundance of grace (favor) now bestowed on him by his gracious father who did not even hold a grudge for his son’s earlier prodigal behavior.

Ironically, the elder brother was ‘geographically’ close to his father – he had continued to live in the father’s household – yet he was relationally distant from his father. You could say that he was bound by his own erroneous views of his father, not knowing what his father’s true generous nature was really like. Proximity is no guarantee of revelation. Think of the many people who sit in church week after week yet are not really walking in victory: in fact they are perishing in the ‘midst of the assembly’ (Proverbs 5:14) through a lack of (revelation) knowledge (Hosea 4:6). They really don’t know and enjoy God’s generosity.

I remember a time when I went through a bad patch in my faith while in the midst of a dynamic thriving move of God. I was on staff, fruitful and productive in my

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responsibilities, yet internally it seemed as if I was ‘drying up’. Looking back I see that a number of lies about my identity and role had gripped me. I had not taken them captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5), and it was like I was perishing while I sat in the midst of the congregation. Thankfully the Lord was always there for me as He reassured His love for me and I found my feet and began to rest in His love for me once again.

The older brother in Luke’s account probably saw His father looking out into the distance each day but never accepted or maybe even asked why he was doing it.

You have not because you ask not.

He was in his father’s household, but never fully identified with his father’s heart of mercy.

This is like many people ‘in church’ today. They go through the motions, but do not really have a close relationship with their loving heavenly Father. They even get upset when gross ‘sinners’ come into the church and get mightily saved, accepted, restored and blessed, healed even, while they continue to suffer under some variation of religious ‘bondage’. This is not even God’s fault. He is who He is, and is not going to ‘force’ Himself onto unwilling and unteachable family members who do not have enough faith to approach Him with confidence and understanding of His boundless love and generosity. The Word is there for all to partake freely.

Twelfth, after Jesus' crucifixion Luke is careful to portray Jesus as the resurrected Lord – but nevertheless a 'man' who could still eat fish! He was not a 'spirit' being and totally relatable to us in our humanity.

Luke 24:36-43

36 Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you." 37 But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. 38 And He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." 40 When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. 41 But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, "Have you any food here?" 42 So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. 43 And He took it and ate in their presence.

He was, and still is, interested in seemingly unimportant human things like breakfast and our human need to be reassured. Never think that Jesus is not interested in what may seem to be unimportant things like your job, the friends you have or don't have, where you live etc. He has come to be at the center of our world, not its periphery, supposedly somewhere out there in 'spiritual land' removed from reality. He is involved, and cares deeply about you.

Final Comments And Application

God is 'touchable' and infinitely 'approachable', just like Jesus was (and still is). Jesus came with the 'face of a man', entirely human yet entirely divine. He knows you, cares about you, and is ever ready to meet your human need. He calls you and me to draw near to Him as close as we want

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to. In one sense, we are as close as we can get, being ‘in Christ’ (2 Corinthians 5:17), yet our experience of this closeness is a matter of increasing revelation and enjoyment by faith.

The woman with the issue of blood serves as a good final example of God’s ‘touchableness’. Despite the religious Law of the day she came from behind and ‘touched’ Him. (Actually she touched the hem or ‘Tsit-Tsit’ of the Rabbinic prayer shawl or ‘Tallit’ Jesus was wearing).

He was the ‘sun of righteousness’ with healing in His ‘wings’ - the corners of the garment carrying a thread of royal blue dye.

Malachi 4:2

2 But to you who fear My name
The Sun of Righteousness shall arise
With healing in His wings;...

The ‘heat’ from the ‘sun’ is here likened to the revelation of Jesus as God’s righteous Son – the healer!

She had heard about what Jesus was truly like and what He was doing, and her faith arose according to Romans 10:17. Sad to say, in all the twelve years of her affliction, no one in the religious establishment had helped her. The Law even stated that she was unclean and not allowed in normal public interaction. She had done her best (under the Law) and it was not enough – it never is! All her resources were drained, and yet she got worse. Sound like someone you know?

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Luke 8:43-46

43 Now a woman, having a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any, 44 came from behind and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped. 45 And Jesus said, "Who touched Me?" When all denied it, Peter and those with him said, "Master, the multitudes throng and press You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'" 46 But Jesus said, "Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from Me."

No matter how long you have been suffering, God wants His power to flow into your need as you 'touch' Him. Reach out and touch Him by faith, and receive His abundant provision.

Jesus is not distant, but quite near and approachable. After all, right now all your sins and mine are forgiven and taken out of the way. As far as God is concerned there is no 'gap' between Him and the believer on the Lord. We have been set free from sin (Romans 6:7). What remains for most Christians is to truly get a revelation of their freedom in Christ, believe it and boldly declare it. Most have a hard time doing this, feeling that somewhere, somehow something is still wrong and needs to be addressed through some sort of program of 'inner healing', fasting, 'cleansing stream' or ... No, Jesus has already cleansed us by his blood, we are broken free already, and what He requires is simply the 'obedience of faith'.

Take His Word of promise and apply it to your life today by speaking what He says about you.

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Romans 10:8-10

"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

As a believer He has drawn you with cords of love and you have family privileges: access into His very presence – the throne room of grace.

Hosea 11:4

4 I drew them with gentle cords,
With bands of love,
And I was to them as those who take the yoke from
their neck.
I stooped and fed them.

Hebrews 10:20-23

21 and having a High Priest over the house of God,
22 let us draw near with a true heart in full
assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from
an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure
water.

Jesus, the perfect man, opened the way for us to draw near as priests to our God and Father. We are invited to draw near as we want. Our hearts or 'inner' beings are cleansed and sprinkled with His redeeming blood, our bodies or 'outer' walk with Him 'washed' (with the water of His Word – John 13:9-10 / Ephesians 5:26).

Jesus was always 'heavenly minded' – He came to seek and save us from our sins, yet He was intensely relevant to our earthly temporal needs as well. He was therefore so

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‘heavenly minded’ that He was of great ‘earthly good’. He was both ‘naturally supernatural’ and also ‘supernaturally natural’ thus bringing the spirit and the natural realms into harmony with each other. His ‘shalom peace’ produced stability and order in all realms, and broke the confusion that division brings.

Like Jesus, we are not to be so removed from people that they feel that they cannot approach us. When we trust Him, and lean not on our own limited understanding, we become conveyors of His grace. Unlike the Old Testament saints, when we touch the leper we don’t get defiled, rather he gets healed!

Follow Jesus in being a ‘friend’ to sinners (Luke 7:34). He was actively fond of sinners, going after them with His forgiveness and grace. Avoid trying to ‘clean up’ sinners before befriending them. Only when they are connected to a perfect Father through His perfect son are they ‘cleaned up’.

Chapter 8

The Face Of An Eagle John's Gospel

John 17:3

3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

John 20:30-31

30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

God wants you to know Him personally through Jesus His son. John's Gospel focuses on this huge life saving and fulfilling revelation. He also underscores that eternal life is defined not in terms of endless days, years and millennia – the **quantity** of life, but rather as a **quality** of relationship with God and Jesus. This

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brings the good news right into the present, and not for some far off remote time frame. The Gospel therefore as relevant today as it ever was: now is the time of salvation.

John's Gospel selects seven key miracles or 'signs' as an encouragement towards this enduring belief in His name. The words 'believe' or 'believing' (trust, adhere to, rely on) occur ninety-eight times throughout the book. John also uses a simple style but remains profound in thought with an emphasis on Jesus deity. Jesus is described ten times as the 'Son of God', yet John does not neglect to reflect Jesus' humanity in statements that show He was 'weary', 'impatient', 'sorrowful', 'appreciative', and 'loving'.

John's Gospel appears to be written to the church (believers in general) in Asia Minor and whoever needs to be secure in their faith and belief. The 'beloved' Apostle John, wrote His Gospel in approximately 90AD - much later than the other three missions oriented gospels called the 'Synoptics'. Together, the four Gospels present us with a complete portrait of Jesus the world's Savior and Messiah.

John is topical in his approach and focuses on the heavenly meaning of Jesus life and mission. For example he tackles such topics as being 'born again' in Chapter Three, 'worship' in Chapter Four, Jesus as the 'bread of life' in Chapter Six, and our close 'identification with the Father' in Chapter Seventeen. Without John's treatment of these life changing truths, we would be that much spiritually poorer. God inspired John to focus on the chosen themes as there was no need for him to repeat what the other three Gospel writers had already recorded.

John begins by laying down the necessity of responding to God's advances of love.

John 1:11-13

11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ...

Any relationship is a two way experience, and God expects us to receive Him for who He truly is. John spoke from experience. He responded to God's love in a measure that seems surpassed the other disciples, as He describes himself as the one 'whom Jesus loved'.

John's Relationship With Jesus

John 13:23 / 20:2 / 21:7 / 21:20

Four times John refers to himself as the disciple 'whom Jesus loved'. I don't believe he was proud or even arrogant, nor was he playing 'one upmanship' with the rest of the disciples. He simply knew without a doubt that Jesus loved him and was prepared to share this as an encouragement to us all.

Most Christians know and believe that Jesus loves all men equally. After all, He laid down His life for all mankind. However, when it gets down to a real personal level many struggle to agree and say that He loves them individually in a personal 'tangible' way. Daily struggles seem to prove that God perhaps does not love and favor them after all. So many sort of get by in their relationship with God and as a consequence do not enjoy the full depths of God's love as John seemed to have.

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Consider this about John: he was the only disciple left in spiritual employ at the foot of the cross as those fateful hours moved on. Love kept him from fleeing in fear and confusion.

His love for the Lord was in response to the Lord's love for him! He did not boast of His love for the Lord, rather he focused on the Lord's love for him. This is shown later when John explains the power of love in the first letter he wrote.

1 John 4:17-19

17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. 19 We love Him because He first loved us.

John loved Jesus because he knew Jesus first loved him. He found it easy to receive love and as a result he could freely give it out.

John Focuses On Jesus' Deity

Jesus was and is not just an exceptionally good man, a great teacher, a humanitarian par excellence. Far beyond these, He is God, and existed in the beginning. John makes this clear in his prologue.

John 1:1-3

1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in

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the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

Jesus' deity and relationship with His heavenly Father is clearly asserted in the above passage, and in John 3:13-20; 5:23, 26; 5:43; and 20:28. Jesus and His Father are one, eternal and preexistent.

Not only do Jesus' heavenly Father and the scriptures witness to His deity, but John the Baptist and Jesus' own works or miracles also testify to His divine nature. Jesus was not satisfied with His own witness; so He relied on these **four** corroborating witnesses: John the Baptist's witness; the Father's own witness; the works (or miracles) He performed, and the scriptures.

John 5:31-40

31 "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. 32 There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true. 33 You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. 34 Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. 35 He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. 36 But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish--the very works that I do--bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. 37 And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. 38 But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. 39 You search the Scriptures, for in them

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you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.

The miracles Jesus performed testify powerfully to His deity and so we look at the seven chose to include in His Gospel. (Seven speaks of completion and deity in Bible numerics).

The Miracles / Signs Of Jesus

John 2:11-12

11 This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

A sign or 'semeion' in the Greek, is a 'token by which something is known' or a 'confirmation of a divine call'. Now we know that this is John's intent in his Gospel record: he wants to confirm Jesus divinity; but we also know that the Lord's motivation in performing miracles was not merely to prove His own deity but more to manifest His love and compassion for suffering and needy people.

John's selection designed to encourage belief in Jesus who was and still is able and willing to exercise His supernatural power to meet man's temporal needs.

Our text scripture once again:

John 20:30-31

30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but **these are written that you may believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and

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that believing you may have life in His name
(Emphasis added)

The miracles are chosen for the purpose of solidifying belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and as a consequence of believing in the source of life: Jesus Himself, we may enjoy the life that He came to give us as His gift.

This life referred to here is ‘life as God lives it’, not our ‘old life’ somewhat improved or ‘painted over’ with some or other degree of behavior modification. No, this is a completely fresh and ‘new in nature’ transformed life that comes only through being born again (John 3:3 / 2 Corinthians 5:17 / Titus 3:5).

Whereas each of the following miracles could be discussed at length, I focus on a key point or two in each to give a taste of what is ours when we put our trust (believe) in Christ.

1. Water into Wine

John 2:1-11

John 2:1-3

2:1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. 3 And when they ran out of wine, ...

Jesus miraculously turns six large water pots of water averaging twenty five gallons into the best wine the locals had ever tasted. His presence at the wedding puts a stamp of approval on God’s plan of marriage, as well as the family’s joyous celebration. It also shows us God’s heart in turning a potentially embarrassing situation around. The

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miracle was a manifestation of God's glory and helped the disciples believe in Jesus (Vs 11).

A key lesson to learn in this supernatural intervention is that God is keenly interested in our daily affairs and celebrations. Rather than being some sort of 'cosmic killjoy' waiting to catch us out in doing some wrong, He is seeking ways to overwhelm us with His generosity and blessing. Jesus specifically came to manifest His name in an accurate way, thus dispelling the religious 'lies' perpetrated in His name.

Water speaks of need – it is a basic necessity of physical life. Wine speaks of enjoyment; it is not considered by most to be essential to physical life. Yet God saw fit through Jesus to enrich this family's life experience to a level of enjoyment they never expected.

Today, perhaps you see the Christian life as one to be endured rather than be enjoyed. I encourage you to begin to see God's kingdom as being characterized by 'joy'. After all, in the words of the apostle Paul, the kingdom of God is:

Romans 14:17

17 ... is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

When we enjoy physical food and drink, the pleasure they give ought to constantly remind us of the pleasure and joy God wants us to enjoy as we believe in Him.

The fruit of God's Spirit in our hearts produces a deep seated sense of well being, gladness and calm delight. It is not dependent on the immediate circumstances, but on the eternal presence and promises of God to provide, protect

and promote us despite any opposition our adversary may put in our way.

Galatians 5:22

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,...

Jesus began showing His disciples what it was to be a carrier of God's presence. He manifested God's glory wherever He went. It flowed out of Him no matter what challenges He and His disciples faced. Glory and joy go hand in hand. In our lives, joy is produced as we abide in God's love for us. No striving is allowed at this 'party' or celebration of life.

Jesus first miracle was in stark contrast with that of Moses'. Whereas Moses turned water into blood resulting in death in the river Nile (Exodus 7:20-21 / Psalm 78:44), Jesus turned water into wine: symbolic of life and celebration! Here the grace and mercy that characterized Jesus life and ministry is set against the ministry of death and condemnation that characterizes Moses' ministry (2 Corinthians 3:7).

2. Healing Of The Royal Official's Son John 4:46-54

John 4:46-51

46 So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. 47 When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. 48 Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe." 49 The nobleman

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said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!" 50 Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives." So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.

Once again, John's focus is on 'believing'. The nobleman 'believed the word that Jesus spoke' and went his way. His whole household was impacted by this miracle.

The man's insistence caught Jesus attention and He spoke the miracle into existence without having to be at the son's bedside. In the spirit, there is no 'distance'. Put another way, faith (which this man had in Jesus) transcends place. The boy was healed at the same hour that Jesus spoke to the anxious father, even though they were removed from one another in place.

In our context, we can also expect Jesus to touch the needy in our family, whether they are in some sort of gospel meeting or not. Jesus always did His Father's will, so it is reasonable to trust Him to do the same in our time. The Father wants to heal any and all that come to Him expecting His mercy and blessing.

3. Healing Of The Man At The Pool

John 5:1-9

John 5:1-9

5:1 After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. 3 In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. 4 For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever

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stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. 5 Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" 7 The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me." 8 Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." 9 And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.

The lame man had lain at the side of the pool hoping to be healed when an angel stirred the water. His infirmity had stricken him thirty eight years earlier, and it seemed as if Jesus was insensitive when He asked him whether he wanted to be made well (Vs 6). However Jesus wanted to see whether the man's will was still engaged or whether he had surrendered to his fate and was just going through the motions at the poolside.

The man's answer was enough for Jesus who then merely said to him: "Rise, take up your bed and walk" (Vs 8) and the healing miracle was effected.

Notably, the miracle happened on the Sabbath and this irritated the religious Jews who obviously had no idea that Jesus Himself was their own and this man's 'Sabbath Rest' standing right there in the flesh before them. They were so 'hung up' on their interpretation of The Law that they missed the spirit of the Word they claimed to know so well.

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The man himself had obviously not been in a 'state of rest' for thirty eight years. In fact his sin, (in this case), had opened the door to his affliction, and Jesus later commanded him to stop sinning 'lest a worse thing' come upon him.

John 5:14-15

14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."

This miracle shows how God can change a sinful mans' life before he has even turned from his sin. God's goodness towards the man led to his repentance, not the other way round.

Romans 2:4-5

4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

Goodness is thus never earned through repentance. God first displays His goodness towards us, and then we repent afterwards. We realize He really does love us when we enjoy His goodness, and **then** we change our minds ('metanoia' – Greek for repentance or a change of mind 'after' the fact).

To confirm this truth, we see Jesus blessing Peter and the disciples with a boat sinking; net breaking load of fish after Peter had let Jesus use his boat as a preaching platform to the multitudes at the lake side.

Luke 5:4-9

4 When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." 6 And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. 7 So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

Notice the pattern and sequence: Jesus blesses Peter (and the others who enjoyed the overflow – there was more than enough to go round), then Peter repents, acknowledges His sin and confesses Jesus as Lord.

God's grace is never earned; it is first freely given from the Father's heart and then must simply be received as His gift. Any lifestyle change that follows is a 'natural' fruit of a change in the way we think about God (repentance).

4. Feeding Of The 5000

John 6:1-14

John 6:9-14

10 Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. 11 And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. 12 So when they were

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filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost." 13 Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. 14 Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

Jesus had been teaching the multitudes, and in time they grew hungry. Jesus decided to teach His disciples an object lesson, and so challenged them to feed the whole throng. All they came up with was the product of their natural resources and influence: a small lad who was prepared to give up his five loaves and two small fish. Clearly this was not enough. But in the Master's hands it could be multiplied!

(Imagine the News headlines today: "Tough men intimidate young boy to give up his lunch at gospel meeting") – just a thought.

Jesus instructed that the people sit down; I suppose to make the moment more organized but also to make the miracle more obvious to all the skeptics (no hidden train of camels with kebabs and humus from just over the hill).

Jesus supply was abundant: El Shaddai – the 'God who is more than enough' was on the scene. They were all filled, this was no token 'crumb' per family... and there were plenty of 'left over's' for each of the twelve disciples: twelve baskets full'!

The crowd was impressed calling Jesus the 'Prophet who is to come into the world' (Vs 14). Of course, He was not

only the Prophet, but their High Priest, savior and their King too. At this point they did not fully comprehend who He was. His goodness was going before Him to the cross.

The crowd then wanted to take Him and make Him their King. But He withdrew to the mountain alone to avoid this improper and untimely excitement. God's kingdom had yet to be firmly established in their hearts. He did not come to be 'king' in the existing socio-political order, but to be Lord of their hearts first and foremost. This was the work of the Holy Spirit when He was later poured out on all flesh after Jesus had completed His work on the cross.

Signs and wonders attract interest all right, but God always wants to capture our hearts first, not merely our 'votes'.

5. Walking On Water

John 6:15-21

John 6:16-21

16 Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into the boat, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them. 18 Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing. 19 So when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat; and they were afraid. 20 But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." 21 Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.

In this miracle John shows Jesus' mastery over the normal laws of nature. He walked on the water at least three to four miles out to sea on this stormy night, and despite their initial fear, the disciples responded to Jesus comfort and

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received Him into the boat. His presence in the boat made all the difference and then the boat was supernaturally transported to the coast where they were headed.

In our time when we receive Jesus into our 'boat', He can and will cause an acceleration of our efforts. Rowing was obviously hard and tiresome in the difficult stormy circumstances. Yet Jesus added a dimension of grace to their lives that was truly supernatural. In this particular instance, their part was passive. They 'willingly received' Jesus into their boat. That's it. No record of them praying and interceding, binding the spirit of darkness or whatever..., only a simple response to His mercy and grace. Their fears were removed and Jesus deity was highlighted through this gracious miracle.

In these stormy and perilous end times, we can expect Jesus to miraculously help us get to the 'other side' as we willingly welcome Him into our boat. He knows where we are, what we are facing and what we need to help us finish our course.

6. Healing Of The Man Blind From Birth John 9:1-41

John 9:1-2

9:1 Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. 2 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ...

John 9:31

31 Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him...

John 9:35-38

35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" 36 He answered and said, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" 37 And Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you." 38 Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" And he worshiped Him.

In this lengthy account, John uses this miracle to address several issues.

First, Jesus corrects the disciples' false focus on the generational aspect of sin in the family. Sin in the family (the parents or the man himself) was not the issue, only that the man be healed and see again.

Today it seems as if many Christians are caught in teachings that focus on generational curses and original causes, and not on God's power to overcome any problem. God wants us to know that when the anointing is present, sickness, disease and affliction cannot remain. They have to go. God lives in the eternal now and all sin is forgiven through Jesus blood. He is always the Great "I am" and if sickness is the consequence of someone's sin then that has to go too. God's focus is on meeting people's needs.

Incidentally, we are not required to spit on the ground and anoint blind people's eyes with the clay in order to get them healed: minister in that way only if God specifically leads you.

Again, much to the disgust of the Pharisees, this miracle was performed on the Sabbath. They even called Jesus a

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‘sinner’ (Vs 16). Then, only when the man’s parents testified to the miracle did the on looking Jews believe.

Unbelief is sometimes hard to break when it is entrenched in a society that is dominated by legalism. The leaders threatened to put out of the synagogue anyone who confessed Jesus as the Christ (Vs 22). They attempted to do ‘damage control’, and were completely blind to God’s grace and compassion in the matter. They were so focused on what they saw as Jesus’ spiritual incorrectness that they completely missed the point. Their pride and presumptuous arrogance blinded their eyes to the ‘light’ standing before them in person. Ironically, they were blinder than the blind man had ever been.

The ex-blind man’s theology was simple, yet totally accurate: he recognized that Jesus was not a sinner by nature, but a worshipper of God, one whom God hears (Vs 31)! The miracle testified to His righteousness.

Jesus catches up with the ex-blind man after he had been cast out the synagogue - what a ‘reward’ they gave him for being healed - and directs his attention to the all important need to ‘believe’ in and trust in Him as his Lord and savior. Miracles always produce belief in those who are humble and teachable.

John 9:35-39

35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" 36 He answered and said, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" 37 And Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you." 38 Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" And he worshiped Him.

Belief also produces worship. The man believed and bowed before Jesus in thankful adoration.

7. Raising Of Lazarus From The Dead **John 11:1-44**

John 11:1-6

11:1 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. 3 Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." 4 When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.

Jesus knew and loved the family, yet it appeared as if He was insensitive to the sisters' pleas to come quickly. Bethany was close by, a short two mile journey away, so in the natural it was feasible that Jesus could have got to Lazarus before he died and healed him. But He did not. He was seeking to glorify God in the 'sickness' (Vs 4).

(Not that the sickness itself glorified God. Sin, and its cousin sickness and disease never bring God glory. Be sure to check out the responses to every healing miracle recorded in the Gospels – the person healed and or their families were always blessed by the **healing**...and not the sickness)!

In the meantime Lazarus had died, and as the 'resurrection and the life' personified, Jesus was going to display God's

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glory in raising him up and thus produce ‘belief’ as consequence of this dramatic miracle (Vs 15).

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Martha complained that if only He had been there before, Lazarus would have not died. In one sense that was true, but her focus on ‘proximity’ only obscured matters. Today, miracles do not depend on how close we can get to where ‘the anointing is flowing’, rather on our belief and faith in the goodness of God to manifest wherever the need is. Otherwise how will people get healed in the ‘marketplace’? Do we have to bring them to church or some evangelistic healing meeting, or are we supposed to be carriers of God’s miraculous power to wherever the need is. I understand scripture to teach the latter.

Jesus groaned in His spirit twice, (Vs 33, 38) perhaps at the confusion in the hearts of those who ought to have known better. He commanded that the stone that blocked the tomb entrance be rolled away. Verse 41 and 42 are revealing: Jesus showed that God had already heard His prayer and all that was left to do was to command life into Lazarus’ now rotting body. He did not need to go into ‘emergency prayer’ – the matter was settled much earlier; four days to be exact. He wanted all the onlookers to ‘believe’ that God had sent Him (Vs 42). (Also there was a belief among some religious leaders that the soul of a dead man only left the body after three days, so the miracle on the fourth day significantly settled that matter: he was truly dead and the miracle truly genuine).

He then calls Lazarus forth from the grave, who promptly came out alive but bound hand and foot with grave clothes. Jesus said to the onlookers to loose him from the grave clothes and let him go. The dramatic resurrection miracle

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caused belief in some, yet remarkably others slipped off to complain to the Pharisees. Miracles always produce a response. Unfortunately because some people's hearts are hardened they cause trouble.

Interestingly, you could argue that the large stone in front of Lazarus' tomb represents the old Law Covenant 'engraved on stones' (2 Corinthians 3:7-11) that ministered only death and condemnation. Old legalism must be rolled away before Jesus' new life in a person can be manifest. Then, when someone is raised from 'spiritual death' they still need to have the old grave clothes of doubt and unbelief removed before they can walk free. This responsibility falls to more mature disciples, as newly born again disciples are needful of nurturing in the faith.

I remember this to be true in my own life. I was born gain but very shaky in my walk with the Lord when it came to my thought life. It always helped to have my wife and new friends in Christ fill in the 'gaps' and 'connect the dots' so to speak. I grew stronger as they helped unwrap the 'grave clothes' from my old way of thinking.

In Christ, we now enjoy a 'new and living way' (Hebrews 10:20). This is marked by a 'quality' of life: life as God lives it - free from the bondage of manmade religious institutions.

Romans 8:13-15

13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

Whom the Son sets free is free indeed. (John 8:36). We are now children of God with all the privileges (and responsibilities) that come with full son ship.

Jesus Manifested His Father's Name

John 17:6

6 "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world.

When Jesus prayed to His Father He talked about His mission to manifest God's name to those the Father had given Him. His disciples had asked that He show them the 'Father' (John 14:8-9). His answer to them was: 'He who has seen me has seen the Father'. Jesus and the Father were and still are one.

In the ancient record there is a progressive revelation of God's name from the time of Adam through Noah to Abraham and Moses to David and finally to Jesus.

God was introduced as 'Elohim' the great creator and supreme God or deity. Then as the mighty protector and provider 'El Shaddai' – the God who is more than enough for any need. Then with Moses God reveals Himself as Jehovah / Yahweh – the covenant making and keeping redeemer of His people. Finally, Jesus revealed God in a fresh new way with great significance for us today. He revealed His name as 'Abba Father' showing us that God is undoubtedly relational and personal. He wants us to see Him as our Father, up close and personal and not as some deity who is aloof and distant.

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Most religious people I have come across have just a little understanding of who God is, and tend to think of God as somewhat old aged, harsh and someone to be scared of, not knowing quite what He is going to do next. Yet Jesus came to clearly manifest (reveal) His name to us. Jesus was God in the flesh – altogether alive in our midst for all to see for themselves.

John 14:9

He who has seen Me has seen the Father...

For the believer today God has sent forth His Spirit into our hearts crying out ‘Abba, Father’. This is the Spirit Jesus Himself had, which He now imparts to us.

Galatians 4:6-7

6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

We even enjoy the huge benefit of being heirs of God through Christ. This means that we inherit along with Christ as ‘joint heirs’ (Romans 8:17) all that the Father has intended for His children: first, His favor here on earth, and second the wonderful enjoyment of His presence for eternity in the hereafter.

In God’s eyes at least (until we see His relationship with us in family terms) we are fully accepted into His family on the basis of birth and not our efforts, large or small, to prove to Him that we are worthy of acceptance.

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Jesus began introducing God as our Father when He taught the disciples to address God as their 'Father' in what some call the Lord's Prayer.

Matthew 6:9

9 In this manner, therefore, pray:
Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.

Notice that Jesus teaches that God is 'our' Father, collectively binding us together in a shared family environment. In our modern and often fractured society this truth is largely lost as many struggle to survive without the support of a loving extended family. Thankfully in these prophetic end times (Malachi 4:5-6) God is turning the hearts of the 'fathers' towards their 'sons' and vice versa, and the church is beginning more and more to function as the 'family of God'. More and more we are becoming properly ordered, governed and connected to one another in loving respect and honor.

In Christ we have found a place of secure 'belonging' and identity. No longer do we have to lean on the frail natural human heritage that we have: our natural family name, position in society, education etc. We now know God in a personally relevant way. In fact the 'eternal' life that Jesus came to give us (John 10:10) is defined in terms of knowing God.

John 17:1-3

17:1 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, 2 as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as

You have given Him. 3 And **this is eternal life**, that they **may know You**, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (Emphasis added).

Eternal life is therefore not defined as a very long stretched out period of time where believers spend eons of time waving some proverbial 'palm frond'. Rather eternity is a quality of life where we enjoy eternal security in the personal and intimate knowledge of God as 'Father'. That is the cry of the Spirit we should listen for in our hearts. Our faith is intensely relational. Jesus made that clear when he manifested God's name to us.

Present Tense Realities

John also records seven 'I am' statements that Jesus made about His identity. They all point to the amazing truth that He 'was', 'is' and always 'will be' the same. By these statements He identifies Himself with His Father God who revealed Himself to Moses as the great 'I am' when He called him to deliver His people from Egyptian bondage under Pharaoh.

Exodus 3:13-15

13 Then Moses said to God, "Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?"
14 And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM ." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' " 15 Moreover God said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God

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of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.'

As Moses delivered God's people in the name of Jehovah, so Jesus came to deliver us as the great 'I am'. His name is the same forever. There is a wonderful New Testament echo of this as it pertains to Jesus as our ever present redeemer, helper and savior.

Hebrews 13:8-9

8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

He is still the miracle worker, healer, savior, High Priest of our confession, Apostle of our faith. He has not changed one bit and will always be here for us. With confidence we can say that miracles are for today, the gifts are for today, mercy is for today, and grace to walk in God's freedom and abundance is for today. God is not only the God of times gone by, or times yet to come, but the ever present God with us right now!

Jesus' Seven 'I Am' Statements

Jesus made seven 'I am' statements that John carefully chooses to reveal Jesus' perfection as deity (the 'Name') and also His mission to God's people and the world.

1. I Am The Bread Of Life

John 6:32-35

"Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives

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you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always." 35 And Jesus said to them, "**I am** the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. (Emphasis added)

Jesus was being compared to Moses whom the Jews claimed to have given their forefathers the 'bread from heaven' – referring to the manna in the wilderness. Jesus shifts their focus off their historical bias to Himself as the supplier of 'fresh bread and drink' that would cause them to enjoy true eternal life as God lives it. He makes the bold statement that whoever comes into a relationship with Him will never hunger or thirst again.

Christ fulfills at least five aspects of the manna given to the Israelites in the Wilderness as recorded in Exodus 16:1-36.

First, the manna came to them in the 'wilderness of sin' (Vs 1). The Israelites were a complaining and often disobedient people (Vs 2-3), yet God's grace abounded towards them while they were still in their sin: He supplied them with manna (and even quail too) despite their ongoing unbelief.

Jesus ministered into people's needs **before** they changed in repentance. He did not wait for them to straighten up first, before being gracious towards them. Blessing first, change in a way of thinking then followed.

Very often we communicate a message to people today that they are to 'clean up their act' first before God will bless them. In effect this kind of ministry promotes a performance based lifestyle rather than a grace based

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lifestyle of faith. In this way the ‘cart is put before the horse’. God moves ... we respond – that is the true divine order. Even when the woman with the issue of blood moved towards Jesus to receive her healing miracle, it was on the basis of her first having heard about Him (Mark 5:27).

The truth be told, God always reaches out through His goodness when someone is still in their sin (Romans 2:4). There is no way we can do enough to reach a level of spirituality where we deserve God’s blessing. None whatsoever. God moves in grace, then we respond in faith.

(Of note is the fact that before the Ten Commandments were given at Mt Sinai, the nation was led out from Egyptian bondage without one person being feeble (Psalm 105:37). God’s miraculous provision and protection continued to flow into their lives even though the books of Exodus and Numbers record several occasions where they rebelled and murmured. Such was the extent of God’s goodness and mercy. Of course He was not entirely pleased with them at all times, but He nevertheless was extremely patient and gracious with them (read Psalm 78 which chronicles God’s patiently gracious disposition towards them).

Only when the Israelites presumptuously declared that they were well able to keep all His commandments (Exodus 19:7) did things start to go wrong, and on the very day when the Law engraved on stones was delivered to them three thousand people died – their sin bringing this severe judgment upon them. Up till this point they had enjoyed God’s covenant blessing under the **Abrahamic** covenant, but now that the Law covenant under Moses was added

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because of their transgression, the curses began to come upon them (Galatians 3:19).

Second, they were to gather the manna on a daily basis in the morning after it had fallen on the dew (Exodus 16:4). This speaks of an abiding lifestyle of communion with Jesus every day, not just Sundays, Christmas, Easter or when someone 'feels' spiritual. God knows that we need to draw strength from Him every day, and has anticipated our need. Make it your faith habit to feed off fresh bread from heaven each day as you encounter Jesus through His Word.

Third, the glory of the Lord was associated with this miraculous manifestation of God's provision (Exodus 16:7, 9-10). Feeding off the Word of God (Jesus) on a daily basis produces a weight of glory in our lives. Jesus is the manifestation of God's glory and it is this glory that changes us as we behold Him (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Fourth, the manna fell in the morning while the people were asleep (Exodus 16:13-14) indicating the 'rest' God's people find in relying on His gracious provision apart from their own efforts – the work of the day. God wants us to start each day (and each week for that matter) from a position of rest knowing that He has already made a way for our provision. All that is left for us to do is to 'gather up' that which He has already set in place. If we approach our days and weeks from this perspective, there would be much less stress (Ephesians 2:10)

Fifth, every person was to gather the manna according to his personal and family need or want (Exodus 16:16, 18, 21). God is aware of each individual need and supplies His grace accordingly. He is not a 'one size fits all' God, but relates to us individually. This is what is so special and

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unique about a personal relationship with Him. Then, we can gather as much manna as we want: this speaks of spiritual hunger. We can draw as close to God through His Word as we want: there are no limits other than the ones we impose. God is not the great withholder, but the great giver!

Sixth, the manna they tried to keep for another day grew stale and putrefied (Exodus 16:19-20), speaking of the need for a fresh connection each day with the Lord through His Word. There are many Christians who are trying to live of some past experience with the Lord and they miss the daily opportunities He gives them for fresh bread.

In Jesus' 'bread of life' discourse to a mostly unbelieving audience, Jesus points to the communion meal He would later institute for the Church or company of believers. He teaches that those who eat His 'flesh' and drink His 'blood' will have eternal life and be raised up at the resurrection (John 6:53-56). This totally offended the people, including His disciples, as they took this to be contrary to the Mosaic Law. He did not shy away from proclaiming this 'hard' truth, fearful that some would misunderstand Him and leave. He remained faithful to His call to be the 'way, truth and life' (John 14:6). Later His disciples came to understand what He was saying.

Today, we know that when we partake in faith of the 'bread and wine' of communion, we enjoy the benefits of His completed work on the cross: total well being for our spirits, souls and bodies. For us, eternal life has already started. For the unbelieving, sadly they remain in the realm of eternal 'death' or separation from the source of life Jesus Himself!

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Additionally, we live today not because God's words are merely historically relevant, but because they are eternal 'now' words that speak into our own personal needs.

Matthew 4:4

"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' "

God still speaks to us today through His Son, and so we are sustained by His 'now' word to us just as Jesus lived off the 'now' words of affirmation spoken by His father in Heaven at His baptism.

Matthew 3:17

17 And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

God the Father spoke in the present continuous tense to His Son, and today He still supplies us with our needed spiritual 'food' and 'drink' through His words. Our faith is alive and gives us access to the present tense realities of God's provision, protection and purposes.

2. I Am The Light Of The World

John 8:12

12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

True spiritual 'light' is a product of a relationship with Jesus. We are not enlightened through mere intellectual pursuit (diligent study) but through revelation to humble

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hearts. Revelation knowledge goes way beyond the realm of the five senses into God's domain. He is the author of spiritual enlightenment: as Jesus put it – "I am the light of the world".

Peter received a revelation (enlightenment) from the Father heaven as to Jesus' true nature as 'the Christ' (Matthew 16:16-17); the Emmaus Road disciples hearts were warmed (burned within them) when Jesus explained the scriptures to them concerning Himself (Luke 24:32); and Saul when he fell of his high religious horse on the road to Damascus had His 'eyes' supernaturally opened to Jesus by means of the Spirit's intervention (Acts 9:1-18).

I remember when I accepted Jesus as Lord in a church service held in a dirty rented cinema in Johannesburg South Africa, it was after two years of searching for truth. My search was completed only when my heart was impacted by the anointing or convicting work of the Holy Spirit. My mental strivings had only produced frustration and confusion, but when the Holy Spirit revealed Jesus to me was I truly born again. I experienced firsthand the power of revelation. Up to this point no amount of intellectual debate had convinced me. But when God's love in Christ was powerfully presented, I was saved.

Spiritual growth is a product of getting to know Jesus as a person more and more. It is not a matter of accumulating spiritual facts (scriptures and doctrines), but of personally growing in the grace favor and experiential knowledge of Jesus. Only when you read the Bible and listen to sermons with a view of encountering Christ in His risen glory do you grow in the fullness of who you are in Christ. Your heart is 'enlarged', not your head!

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Paul exhorts us by his example to pray for enlightenment as to what we already possess by our faith in Christ. We are who we are in Christ, but God expects us nevertheless to pray and ask ...

Ephesians 1:17-20

17 ...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,...

Wisdom, revelation, knowledge and understanding in the things of God come from Him: they don't automatically drop on you be simply being alive. When we are enlightened we come to know the hope or confident expectation of His calling on our lives; the riches of the glory of His inheritance in us and exceeding greatness of his power towards us who believe. The depth of meaning of these great advantages in Christ comes only through engaging with Him in prayers of enlightenment.

Remarkably, we are called the 'light of the world' by virtue of our relationship with the light Himself!

Matthew 5:13-15

14 You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Because God and His Word live in us as believers we shine as lights in a spiritually 'dark' world. Our light cannot be hidden, it becomes obvious who we are by our words and deeds.

3. I Am The Door (Of The Sheep)

John 10:1-10

10:1 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.

7 Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

Jesus likened Himself as the **door** to the sheepfold (God's people); the shepherd and the doorkeeper. He thus underlines the importance of spiritual protection in a world

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fraught with deception and thievery. The people of His day understood the need for their sheep to be protected in a sheepfold (fenced or protected area), and a doorkeeper who guarded the threshold or door to the sheepfold.

The spiritual treasure we have in our hearts must be guarded against theft by an enemy whose only goal is to steal, kill and destroy (Vs 10).

Then, to hear the shepherd's voice is the privilege and product of a close, abiding relationship with Him. When the shepherd's mingled their sheep at the watering holes, it often appeared as if they would never be able to separate out whose sheep belonged to which shepherd. Only when the shepherd began to call his sheep, did the seeming confusion end. They would follow each shepherd away in perfect order. It is my conviction that in these 'end times' where there are so many confusing voices; God's sheep will hear the voice of the Good Shepherd because they have spent time with Him and recognize His specific tone. It's like being married to someone, and knowing exactly who it is the moment they call. My wife and daughter have similar voices, so much so that when some people call, they confuse the two. But when I call I can immediately tell the difference between them because I have spent time with them and know their slight differences in their voices.

We get to know Jesus' voice as we spend time listening to Him. Intimacy through prayer and worship attunes us to His voice. One notable pointer is this: His voice is always characterized with truths associated with His gift to us, that is 'abundant life' (Vs 10). It always helps to assess or discern so called 'revelation' someone may be preaching against this measure. Jesus came to give us His life, one filled with God's abundance: righteousness, peace and joy

that impact not only our hearts but also our minds and physical well being. If what you are hearing does not line up with God's abundance of grace and righteousness in Christ, then you can be sure the Chief Shepherd is not speaking through them.

4. I Am The Good Shepherd

John 10:11-17

11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. 12 But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. 13 The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

The good shepherd has given His life for His sheep. He was no hireling bent on His own well being and preservation. When the wolf (satan) came, Jesus did not leave the sheep but stayed the course of God's master plan and turned the tables on him through His obedience to the point of death on the cross.

Jesus knows and cares about us, and has prophesied that there will 'be one flock and one shepherd' (Vs 16). This was fulfilled when He rose from the dead, and all true believers began to adhere to Him alone as their shepherd. I

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believe there is also a prophetic unfolding of this in our time as the body of Christ increasingly realizes that we are one sheepfold under the watchful eye of one shepherd. Sectarianism and denominationalism will fade as the glory of the Lord is revealed more and more by believers who are determined to point to the preeminence of Christ in all they teach and do.

The good shepherd also is prepared to leave the ninety nine and go after the one sheep that has wandered. In most modern time management teachings that are prevalent in some Christian circles this would not be considered an optimum use of a 'dynamic' leader's schedule. Jesus nevertheless shows us the importance of every single person including those that stray.

Luke 15:4-7

4 What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'

The shoulder represents the Lord's strength, and when someone has 'wandered' in sin, it is best for them to 'relax' and submit to His loving 'government' or Lordship once again.

Isaiah 9:6

6 For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.

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When we ‘lean back’ into the Lord’s rest, we enjoy the ‘ride’ back home on His strong shoulders. He lifts us up out of the low place we have fallen and gives us a fresh new perspective from a place high on His shoulders. He will also carry us all the way back to the fold of his protection and provision.

Thankfully the Good Shepherd Jesus is not about to leave His sheep to the ‘wolves’ or spiritual predators who are attacking His sheep so savagely these days (John 10:12). He always comes to their rescue when they call out to Him.

He then goes on to ‘rejoice’ at the lost and found ones and invites us to have the same heart for returning prodigals. Unfortunately many people look down their noses at returning prodigals. God wants to enlarge our hearts so that we can rejoice with Him.

5. I Am The Resurrection And The Life

John 11:25-27

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

This statement comes at the time when Martha had complained that if only Jesus had come to the house earlier, Lazarus would not have died. Jesus reassured her that her brother would rise again. She politely agreed with Him, but pushed off this resurrection into the ‘theological future’.

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Jesus assured Martha that the future was indeed secure in Him. She and other believers would never 'die' (or be separated from Him again – death is defined as separation from the source of life). She 'believed' Him and declared her belief out loud. Her focus however at this point was still on the future resurrection which the Jews taught in her day. Truth is: resurrection life is found in the person of Jesus, and eternal life and security is enjoyed the moment anyone puts their trust in Him as Lord and Savior. We enter into an eternal relationship with Him right now by His grace and the confession of our faith. Eternity is not some future experience – it is now. Jesus is thus the great 'I am' not the great 'I will be!'

Jesus then went on to raise Lazraus from the dead to the astonishment of the family and many onlookers at the grave.

As far as the future is concerned, God wants us to know that our 'backs are covered' - that we are eternally secure in His arms of love. He does not want us to live in a state of continual insecurity, not knowing whether we are going to make it from day to day. We are reassured as follows:

John 10:27-30

27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. 30 I and My Father are one."

Both The father and the Son make it their business to secure their own.

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Then Paul made the following about God's ability to keep us secure:

2 Corinthians 1:21-22

21 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, 22 who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

A child grows up healthy and strong when he knows the security of an enduring and consistent relationship with his parents. Sadly, the converse is also true especially in communities characterized by absentee fathers.

God is not absent, but a very present and actively involved 'parent'. He gave us life, and will keep us to the end.

Jesus came that we might enjoy His abundant quality of life starting right now and continuing throughout eternity. To walk in this liberty we need to know that it belongs to us as His free gift, and second to 'labor' in faith (against the contradictions of the enemy) to enter into the 'peace' that comes from being secure in our salvation. His blood is eternally effective on our behalf, it cannot be overwhelmed by any bad thought or deed that we might slip into at any time.

Hebrews 13:20-21

20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

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His blood makes us complete, not our efforts at sanctification or holiness. In fact, we live our lives **from** a position of security. There is no need to strive **towards** this position.

6. I Am The Way The Truth And The Life

John 14:1-6

14:1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 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. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. 4 And where I go you know, and the way you know." 5 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Any life process or set of principles you may have read about or heard in a sermon must be found wrapped up in the person of Jesus. The 'way' of Christian life is not a 'modern' set of rehashed Old Testament religious rules and regulations, or even 'keys' to success or your best life etc. Jesus is the way, and the only way, and He must not be reduced to a set of impersonal principles no matter how cute or hip they may sound. He will have it no other way. He said: "I am the way, the truth and the life" (Vs 6). We are changed (make progress) because we 'behold' Him (2 Corinthians 3:18): not because we are so great at putting a set of things to do into practice. If this were so, we would not need Him as the author and 'finisher' of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

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Anything that shifts your focus (by design or default) off a vital and personal relationship with the living savior is wrong. Such endeavors bring us as Christians back into the realm of self effort without even realizing it. In fact we ‘fall’ from the realm of grace into an adulterous mixture of Law and Grace that only ministers condemnation and failure.

Back to our text scripture: the fact that Thomas (still doubting at this point), who had problems truly believing, asked Jesus to show him the ‘way’ (Vs 5) proves that he had not yet grasped this revelation. He wanted to know ‘what else’ it would take besides knowing Jesus personally to enjoy eternal life and the Father’s presence. Jesus’ answer to Thomas ought to put to rest the long lists of ‘how to’s’ in much teaching and preaching. If any Christian practice is not firmly based on or rests in the completed work of Christ, then it adds to what Jesus has already done for us. We must learn to ‘filter’ things like fasting, prayer, intercession, spiritual warfare, obedience, discipline even, through the lens of the cross. Anything and everything we ‘do’ must spring forth as ‘fruit’ of our abiding relationship with Jesus.

We must not try to fight battles that have already been won, nor should we try to add to work that is already complete. Any steps we may take must fit into the framework of all things being **of** Jesus, **through** Him and **to** Him. He alone is the way, truth and life in any and all matters of faith. Our progress takes place only in absolute union with Him – a place where there is no room for self effort or the pride that can creep in to such an approach.

7. I Am The True Vine

John 15:1-5

15:1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Many Christians strive hard to produce fruit. I have heard over and over again teachings from national platform ministers that go something like this: ‘You must pray harder and longer to get results’ or ‘you must attend church at least twice a week if you really want to grow’. It is almost as if you can hear the people groaning in the vineyard, sweat dripping from their brow as they labor to get to a place that they are already seated in! There is no amount of hard work or human effort that can get you one inch closer to God, or that can produce more fruit in your life.

So how then is Christian fruit produced?

Fruit is a natural byproduct of growth and continuing sustenance from the vine itself. Fruit is in a real sense ‘effortless’ as the relationship between the branch and the vine depends on the vinedresser and not the branch! Jesus is the author (originator) and finisher (perfecter) of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). We are not the source of our own

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power. Our lives ‘flow with oil’ because we are continually sustained by God’s overflowing supply. There is always more than enough for our needs as well as others when we abide in Him.

The ‘vinedresser’ (God the Father) will make sure that you and I are productive. If you need ‘cleaning or washing’ (like the vine leaves that gather dust and other debris which inhibit growth and fruit bearing on a natural vine), God will ‘wash’ the dust off you – which represents the defilement of the world - with His Word. Productivity or fruit bearing is restored in a Christian’s life by the washing of water by the Word and not by ‘working harder’ at some or other spiritual discipline.

We must realize that spiritual defilement comes on a daily basis by virtue of simply being alive in a fallen world. We are exposed to influences in our thought life and maybe our actions that cause us to pick up ‘dust’, like a person who walks on a dusty road – which was the context of believers in Jesus day.

Ephesians 5:25-26

...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,...

In cases where you need ‘washing’, don’t run from the Word, run to it. Go back to church, listen to solid grace based teaching and let God remind you that you are ‘already clean’ because of what Jesus has done by His blood, you only need to have your ‘feet’ or that part that has come into contact with dirt washed. In short you don’t need to get born again, again...and again.

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Jesus' Word sanctifies and cleanses us, not our observance of some intense program of spiritual 'gymnastics' designed to 'cleanse' us. When someone who has been ensnared by the devil in some lie, comes to their senses by knowing the truth (2 Timothy 2:24-26), they become productive again. What the 'leaves and / or branches' need most is a revelation of their connection with the vine and the vinedresser. Fruit then follows naturally.

We can do nothing of ourselves, we need Jesus in everything. There is no area of life that we should reserve for ourselves, for it is in these areas that we are totally useless. This is especially hard to understand in areas where you may be naturally talented and do not generally feel the need to rely on Jesus to be your source and sustenance.

Grace is given to the humble, not to those who feel they can 'manage' or have things 'under control', or who can straighten themselves out.

John reminds us that Jesus is the 'true' vine committed to growth and productivity. The 'pruning' the Father does (by means of the Holy Spirit today) is for the purpose of health and growth. Areas in our lives that produce nothing are 'cut away' – like the excess juice sapping leaves of a vine that have no grapes on it are cut away by the vinedresser in the vineyards. Then those branches that have fallen and are now covered in dust are lifted back onto the supporting vine trellises and cleansed with water (the Word) so that they begin producing again.

It is true to say that God is the 'Father of our spirits' (Hebrews 12:9) and that He will not neglect to 'train, instruct or correct' us as His children through His Word (Ephesians 6:4). Yet it is critical to know that our 'Abba

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Father' is not perverse, chastising or 'punishing' us through sickness or some calamity. (In our culture we lock away fathers who hurt their children in such ways). No, Jesus bore on Himself at the cross any and all sickness, disease and manner of affliction as our substitute so that we might not suffer these afflictions (Isaiah 53:4). There is no New Testament evidence that God used any calamitous action to chasten, rebuke or reprove His followers.

The Old Testament, although full of seemingly hurtful and judgmental actions initiated by God against rebellious people, nevertheless shows God in His true nature as a father who 'pities his children'.

Psalm 103:8-14

8 The LORD is merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.
9 He will not always strive with us,
Nor will He keep His anger forever.
10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
Nor punished us according to our iniquities.
11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;
12 As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
13 As a father pities his children,
So the LORD pities those who fear Him.
14 For He knows our frame;
He remembers that we are dust.

The goal of any reproof, rebuke and correction that our heavenly Father engages in with His children is fruitfulness. We see this process best illustrated in the New Testament where Jesus is preparing His disciples for a life of fruitful ministry.

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On one occasion (Mark 8:31-33) Peter presumptuously tried to define what the Lord should not do. He went so far as to ‘rebuke’ the Lord when He shared that He must suffer many things at the hands of the religionists in Jerusalem and go to the cross. The Lord had to ‘rebuke’ Peter in His turn for trying to stand in the way of the greatest act he would perform to set the whole of mankind free from sin. Then, in Luke 9:55 we see Jesus rebuking James and John for wanting to call down fire on some inhospitable Samaritans. In both of these instances Jesus judges the words of His disciples to be totally inappropriate and verbally rebukes them. Ever heard of a ‘tongue lashing’? These were painful moments for the disciples, as Jesus’ words convicted them and brought correction.

It is important at this point to note that the enemy is the one who takes advantage of any ignorance, disobedience and or rebellion in God’s people to afflict them (Hosea 4:6). He roams around seeking those whom he may devour. In other words he does not have free course to do what he likes. He has opportunity to perpetrate evil only where someone has ‘opened the door’ to him. This person has come out from under God’s covenant protection at that point, and satan now has an opportunity to exploit for his evil purposes (1 Peter 5:8).

The Christian, who has suffered a setback as a consequence of the enemy’s work, may indeed call upon the Lord at that time – say on their sick bed or place of trouble. God will speak to them at this time, comfort them and bring them out, but this does **not** mean that God initiated the affliction or trouble in the first place to teach the individual a lesson! Only that He is there for us when we do get in trouble and will also use the moment to take us higher in Him. It

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remains clear that Jesus came to give us life abundantly, not to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10).

To be fruitful as a branch on the vine we must be clear how our Father in heaven operates as well as how our adversary operates. We should never confuse the two.

We are to ‘abide’ in Him as He abides in us (John 15:4). This speaks of the ‘mystical union’ we enjoy through faith in His blood. As we stay connected to Him (‘continue in’ or ‘dwell in’) through reading and meditating on the Word, meditating, prayer and worship, the ‘sap’ of the vine flows into our lives and fruit grows naturally. The fruits of righteousness are a byproduct of our relationship, not some sort of program. In a real sense fruit is produced ‘effortlessly’. That’s when God gets the glory.

What About The Sinner?

It is useful at this point to turn briefly to how Jesus dealt with ‘sinners’. Zacchaeus called out to Jesus from a tree and Jesus went to his house. There is no record of Jesus rebuking him for his sinful lifestyle. Yet Zacchaeus repents from his sin and promises to make restitution (pay back) for his extortions. Jesus’ visit had obviously made a huge impact.

Luke19:8

8Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.”

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It is apparent that God's **goodness** in Christ impacted Zacchaeus in a dramatic way: it caused him to repent.

In stark contrast, the rich ruler who approached Jesus on the basis of his own righteousness under the Law of Moses went away disappointed and unrepentant (Luke 18:18-23). He trusted in His own efforts at keeping the law which Jesus had tried to point out had fallen short of perfection. (Without knowing it, the rich ruler was under the grip of his wealth!)

In short, when you come to God in humility seeking mercy you get it. However if you come in your own strength, you get the Law – which is designed to point us to faith in Christ and away from the folly of trying to measure up to God's perfect standards (Galatians 3:24).

God knows that sinners sin because they are 'programmed' to sin – the fallen nature of man 'defaults' to sin every time. So why would He rebuke sinners for their sin? No, He calls them instead to repentance in the light of His love and empowerment in Christ (Acts 17:30). Only when someone comes to Christ can they receive the power to overcome sin.

The adulterous woman who was flung at Jesus' feet in shame by her accusers, received mercy for her sin **and** the power to overcome as Jesus spoke to her. Notice he did not rebuke her nor did he shame her. He was full of grace and truth, and did not condemn her. He was not 'soft on sin', only merciful.

John 8:10-11

He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" 11 She

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said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

Remember, Jesus perfectly represented or manifested God's heart towards mankind, so we can safely assume that these examples accurately show us the heart of God as it applies to dealing with sinners.

The Law condemns, grace empowers you for holy living.

The Eagle

John's Gospel describes many great heavenly themes about Jesus that is best exemplified with the 'face' of an eagle.

Isaiah's description of those who wait upon the Lord as being like eagles make a beautiful picture of the Christian life. The eagle is a magnificent bird most commonly seen flying high above our heads in the sky. Here are a few pointers useful to understanding our walk (flight) with the Lord.

Isaiah 40:31

31 But those who wait on the LORD
Shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.

An eagle knows exactly when to wait for the lifting power of the updrafts of air. Eagles do not 'strive' when they fly, they soar with effortless ease. They spread their wings wide and soar above the storms. When we make it our practice to praise God with arms spread wide in surrender and praise,

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we are carried by His ‘air’: we are at rest in God’s ability through the Holy Spirit (air or breath) to lift us in our time of need.

In contrast, when you think of a turkey, you think of a somewhat ‘dusty’ looking bird with its head down pecking things from the ground. Its focus is downward, whereas the eagle seems always to be in majestic flight, high above the turbulent winds. I believe God wants us to keep looking up while we develop a mindset that is focused not on what the enemy is desperately doing as he kicks up ‘dust’ on the earth, but rather on what He, God, has and is doing in heavenly places. In fact, if truth be told, the good news of who we are in Christ gets better: we are actually seated there with Him in a place of rest by virtue of what we believe and not by our frantic efforts to measure up. In Christ we are already ‘measure up’ – we are made to sit with Him. Like the eagle, we live and thrive in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 2:4-6

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and **made us sit together in the heavenly places** in Christ Jesus,... (Emphasis added).

Eagles have exceptionally keen eyesight that enables them to spot prey from great heights. This speaks of our ability to ‘see’ what God sees. In Christ, we are opened up to a new and living way that sees everything through His eyes: with love and compassion. Where others judge, we intercede and bring reconciliation and redemption through Jesus’ blood.

Where others reject, we accept and bring healing and forgiveness. Where others hurt their enemies, we love them. We are not of this world system (socio-cultural mindset) with its characteristic fear, greed and manipulation, but we are ambassadors from a higher place representing the heart of a God who intensely loves all mankind.

Conclusion To John's Gospel

The 'heavenly feel' of John's Gospel portrays Jesus in all His majesty as the Son of God come to save all mankind. John was given understanding and truth about Jesus divine nature like none of the other Gospel writers. In a sense John's Gospel caps the fourfold accounts of God's master plan for man's restoration.

John was the youngest of the twelve disciples and it appears as if he lived the longest, till about 100 years old. This apostle of love was so empowered by this central characteristic of the nature of God that maybe this was the reason he escaped martyrdom. You could say that the love of God that was shed abroad in his heart never failed him according to 1 Corinthians 13:8.

May this revelation of God's nature and purpose towards us grip and direct your heart:

John 3:14-18

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that

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whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Chapter 9

God's Masterpiece

Jesus is God's masterpiece to us. A masterpiece painting has certain key elements: it is painted by a 'master' painter who knows His craft. Each brush stroke is carefully made to portray the subject. Different colors and their hues are used to reveal the heart and intent of the master.

In any masterpiece there is harmony of purpose in everything. Every brush stroke has meaning and points to the complete whole.

In a real way today, when we accept Jesus, as Christ's body, we now become part of God's masterpiece. He is still painting. In this mystical union, the Father sees us through the lens of His son. When He sees Jesus, He sees us, and when He sees us He sees Jesus!

Of course on a human level, we are 'formed' or shaped by what we behold. Like awestruck onlookers standing before a masterpiece at one of the world's famous art galleries, we are changed into His image when we behold and receive

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into our hearts the portraits God has blessed us with in the four Gospels. The process is at once complete at the start but involves an outworking as we are changed from one level of glory to the next.

2 Corinthians 3:18

18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory , just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

With the help of Matthew's Gospel we learn to walk in the footsteps of The King of Kings exercising our authority as 'kings and priests' in His domain. Mark shows us that although we are sons by birth, like Christ, we choose to benefit others through our service. Luke then keeps us appreciative of God's compassionate presence in our human need, while John helps us look upwards to the more profound eternal truths of our faith.

Our responsibility is to continue gazing at His glory which is manifest in Christ and to let the 'Masterpiece' shape you in all rounded completeness.

In the final book of the Bible John the revelator paints a picture of the four heavenly creatures before God's throne.

Revelation 4:6-8

6 Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. 7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. 8 The

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four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying:

"Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!"

The eyes speak of revelation, and as we truly behold God in His glory we are prompted to worship the Lord God Almighty.

As we live a lifestyle of worship to the Lord, we automatically attract attention from a world caught in the deceit of its false worship. We are the true worshippers in spirit and truth who are drawn into an intimate relationship with our Father through the blood of His Son.

The master is still painting people into His masterpiece and without a clear picture of who Jesus is, what He did and what it means to us today, how can we hope to effectively cooperate with Him as He builds His glorious church? Be blessed as you supply your God given uniqueness to what He has called you to be part of.

Matthew 16:15-19

...who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be

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bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth
will be loosed in heaven."

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If You Have Never Accepted Jesus As Your Lord

God has made it possible for you to get into right relationship with Him. He sent His Son Jesus into the world to live, die and rise again from the dead so that you could be forgiven of your sins, live a life that pleases Him, and joined to Him forever in heaven when you die.

God expects you to **acknowledge** your need for His forgiveness, **believe** that He raised Jesus from the dead, and be prepared to **confess** Jesus as Lord before witnesses in the world you live in.

Accept His free gift of eternal life today. Turn away from your sinful past; wholeheartedly put your trust in Him today. Pray this prayer out loud from your heart, you will be giving your life back to Him, and He will love, protect and provide for you all the days of your life.

Dear God in Heaven,

*I accept that I need your forgiveness for my sin.
I repent and acknowledge that I cannot save myself.
I believe that you raised your only begotten son Jesus from the dead.
I ask you to come into my heart right now and be my Lord.
I confess you Jesus as the Lord (master) of my life.
With Your help, I promise to serve you all my days.*

Thank you for saving me. I am now your child, accepted into your family and forgiven of all my sins.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Friend,

Now that you have prayed this prayer, get into a good Bible believing church that focuses on Jesus and His word, read your Bible starting with the gospel of John in the New Testament, and tell someone that you have accepted Jesus as Your Lord. Pray to your new heavenly Father every day in Jesus name, and look to God to help you in every area of your life.

God bless you.

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