

THE KINGDOM AT HAND

by Jackson Morro

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FOREWARD

“Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” So writes the evangelist Mark in the first chapter of his gospel.

We cannot understand the ministry of Jesus and what God the Father was trying to say to mankind unless we understand the Kingdom of God. Jesus’ passion was to proclaim and incorporate the rule of God among men. Jesus paid with His own life of obedience, even unto death on the cross, to establish this Kingdom where anyone could enter if they would repent and believe..

This current book, *The Kingdom at Hand*, is my third of four planned books about the Kingdom of God. *The Kingdom at Hand* is not meant to be a technical treatment of the Kingdom but rather a hybrid of biblical study and devotional so the person who reads and studies it can approach the Kingdom of God through both knowledge and heart devotion, for the Kingdom of God is not “here or there” but within us (Luke 17:21).

My highest wish is that each reader will enter, see, and understand the Kingdom and above all, enter an eternal love relationship with the King, Jesus.

Jackson Morro
Pastor
January 2008

CHAPTER ONE

THE TIME OF WAITING IS OVER

In Galatians 4:4, the Apostle Paul stated, “But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law.” The fullness of time... the birth of the baby Jesus was God Almighty telling planet earth *the time of waiting is over*. Ever since Adam’s fall had plunged the world into slavery to the law of sin and death, God had promised a Redeemer. Through the centuries, the people of God had looked forward to this Redeemer who would bring forgiveness of sin, an eternal reign of peace, and would inaugurate an eternal banquet. The prophets called Him the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Expected One, *He Who Is To Come*.

The heart of God’s people leaped with joy every time they heard the phrase *He Who Is To Come*, and everyone knew what that meant. On a very special night, a baby was born in a manger in Bethlehem. How many people really knew that little baby, yawning, wiggling, and stretching His arms like all little babies do, was actually *He Who Is To Come*? That little baby would be the Redeemer, the Saviour of the world, the Counselor, Provider for the needy, Friend of the lonely, the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, the Light in darkness, the Fountain of Living Water, and the lasting Word of God’s love to us. *And the time of waiting was over*.

We read in Acts, Chapter 2, that on the Day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter stood before a crowd of over 3000 people and explained to them the meaning of a mighty happening that had just occurred. The power of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on 120 people who had followed Jesus of Nazareth who had been crucified but had risen from the dead. Peter explained how the prophets, especially the prophet Joel, had foretold this day. In Acts 2:16, Peter said, “This is that...” This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel, and *the time of waiting is over*.

Going back in time, about 35 years earlier, we see at the beginning of Luke’s gospel how Almighty God began to act in a very special way to bring about His promised plan of redemption, a plan He had actually formed before the foundation of the world, but which He would now bring to pass at this special moment, “the fullness of time.” We see an elderly priest named Zacharias; he is a faithful servant of the Lord. He and his wife Elizabeth longed for a child but had been unable to have one. As Zacharias went into the Temple to burn incense before the altar of the Lord, the Angel Gabriel appeared and said, “Zacharias, God has heard your prayer. Elizabeth will have a baby boy named John and he will be the prophet who prepares the

way for the Messiah.” But Zacharias said, “It can’t be. We’re too old.” But the angel responded, “Because you’ve doubted, Zacharias, your mouth will be shut and you’ll be unable to speak until the baby is born. No negative words of yours will be allowed to interfere with God’s plan because He has decided *the time of waiting is over.*” And Elizabeth became pregnant.

Six months later, Gabriel again appeared to a young virgin in Nazareth named Mary and said, “Hail favored one, the Lord is with you. You will conceive a child named Jesus. He will be the Son of God with a kingdom that never ends.” Mary asked how this could be since she was a virgin. Gabriel answered that the power of the Holy Spirit would conceive the child within her. Furthermore, he told her, her relative Elizabeth, called barren, was now in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God, and He has decided *the time of waiting is over.* Mary said, “Be it done to me according to your word.”

Mary hurried over the hill country to visit Elizabeth. When Mary arrived, both Elizabeth and the baby in Elizabeth’s womb were filled with the Holy Spirit. Mary herself, under the power of the Holy Spirit, began to sing a song, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has done great things for the needy and holy is his name. He has remembered His promises to Abraham and *the time of waiting is over.*”

Shortly after this, the baby John was born and Zacharias’ tongue was loosed and he could speak once again. As he held his baby son John the Baptist, Zacharias came under the power of the Holy Spirit and began to sing, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, He has come to His people and set them free. He has raised up a mighty Savior to deliver us from our enemies and to forgive our sins. And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because *the time of waiting is over.*”

The great moment finally arrived. When the days of Mary’s pregnancy were fulfilled, she and her husband Joseph were in the city of Bethlehem for the Roman census. Bethlehem was so crowded they had to stay in a stable and place the newborn baby Jesus in a feeding trough for His crib. Angels announced to nearby shepherds that they should go visit this baby and glorify God. The host of angels began to sing, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and goodwill toward man, for *the time of waiting is over.*”

With all this singing at the beginning of Luke’s gospel, if we didn’t know better, we might think Luke was trying to write a musical instead of a gospel! But actually, God was moving in a sovereign way by the Holy Spirit, and when that happens, a lot of people always have a lot to sing about.

About 30 years passed, and suddenly, a young man named Jesus walked into the local synagogue at Nazareth. It was His turn to read that Sabbath and the reading was from Isaiah 61. He read:

“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; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” (Luke 4:18-19)

Then He closed the book and looked at them and said, “This day this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. *The time of waiting is over.*

“If you’re poor, I’ve come to bring you godly prosperity, and *the time of waiting is over.* If you’re sick, I’ve come to bring you healing. My name and power are above cancer, heart disease, diabetes, AIDS, any sickness, and *the time of waiting is over.*

“If you’re a prisoner, addicted to anything, I’ve come to set you free so no created thing will ever be master over you, and *the time of waiting is over.*

“If you’re brokenhearted, lonely, rejected, I can put that broken heart back together, and *the time of waiting is over.*

“I’ve come to make your life everything it should be, and *the time of waiting is over.*”

For three years, this Jesus preached and healed throughout the towns of northern Israel and He proclaimed:

I am the Bread of Life for all who hunger...

I am the Fountain of Living Water for every thirsty spirit...

I am the Light of the World; no one ever has to walk in darkness again...

I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life and I will always direct you in the way you should go...

I am the Good Shepherd and the Door to eternal life and I will give your life meaning if you follow Me...

And the time of waiting is over.

As Jesus’ ministry grew, He headed from the north downward to Jerusalem and at a suburb named Bethany, He raised a dead man, Lazarus, back to life and said, “I am the Resurrection and the Life; whoever believes in Me will never die—and *the time of waiting is over.*”

But then the religious and political leaders at Jerusalem began to plot against Him. They said, “He’s dangerous—He’s a troublemaker.” The leader Caiaphas said, “We’ll kill Him—we’ll set Him up. We’ll have the Romans do it. In two or three days, everyone will forget about Him.”

They arrested Jesus and went through the mockery of a trial. He was like a silent lamb and said nothing to His accusers. Finally, Caiaphas the High Priest put Him under an oath where He had to answer. Caiaphas said, “I adjure you by the Living God to tell us—are You ‘He Who Is To Come’?” And Jesus raised His head and looked Caiaphas in the eye and said, “I am. And the next time you see Me I’ll be sitting at the right hand of Almighty God because *the time of waiting is over.*”

They turned Him over to the Romans who quickly crucified Him—but on that cross He broke the power of sin forever by paying the penalty of divine justice for every sin of every person for all time and He cried out, “It is finished!” *The time of waiting is over.* Three days later He conquered the power of death as He came forth from the tomb resurrected and said, “I am alive forevermore—and *the time of waiting is over.*” He then ascended into heaven and sat down as King and Lord, and on the Day of Pentecost poured out His life upon all who believe in Him, and Peter cried out, “This is that. The Messiah, He Who Is To Come, has turned loose a mighty army that will walk in His power and never call retreat, and *the time of waiting is over.*”

Another man, the Apostle Paul, took up the call and spent his whole life proclaiming this Jesus to the world and wrote about the choice God commands all of us to make -

“At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation, I helped you. Behold, now is the ‘acceptable time,’ behold, now is the ‘day of salvation.’” (2 Corinthians 6:2)

Paul proclaimed, “All men must make a choice to choose or reject Jesus. Now is the time. *The time of waiting is over.*”

The Word of God has come down to us today. Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand. *The time of waiting is over.*

CHAPTER TWO ***THE ONE WHO LIVES***

In John 14:19, Jesus of Nazareth stated, “Because I live, you shall live also.” When all is said and done, the essence of the Kingdom of God is that real life, eternal life in all its fullness, is brought to us through Jesus of Nazareth, the risen Lord and Christ. Real Christianity proclaims that true

life, the forgiveness of sins, and human wholeness comes to us from Almighty God through this Jesus of Nazareth, the “One Who Lives.” Precisely because Jesus lives, we can have fullness and abundance of life (John 10:10) through Him—the Lord and Christ—the One Who Lives. The simple but absolutely powerful proclamation of Christianity is that anyone who needs life for any area of their existence can have life through Jesus at whatever their point of need is.

About 2000 years ago, it was a time in human history when the western world was ruled by the Roman Empire. In the small, subjugated nation of Israel, the people had been waiting for almost a thousand years for a Messiah who would redeem them, liberate them, and restore their national greatness. They were in a heightened state of expectance looking for the Messiah (or “Christ,” the “Anointed One”) also known as “He who is to come” (Matthew 3:11; Matthew 11:3). They were looking for this Messiah to set them free from the Roman occupation and usher in the Kingdom of God on earth.

From time to time, several revolutionaries had arisen in Israel, claiming to be this Messiah. We read in the scripture about Theudas and Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:35-37) and a Jewish revolutionary group known as “the Assassins” (Acts 21:37-39). Barabbas, who was released by Pilate was also a revolutionary (Mark 15:6-7). These “would-be” Messiahs would gather a group of devoted followers and take military action against the Romans, expecting God to act on their behalf so they could destroy the Roman occupiers, but they all failed and suffered defeat and death. In the middle of all this expectation and turmoil, one young man arose in the north of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth. He was the Messiah, the Anointed One, He who is to come. *He is the One Who Lives!*

Jesus came proclaiming the Kingdom of God. He did not say the Kingdom of God was going to be established by political action. This Jesus said the Kingdom of God would be established on earth by having this Kingdom established in the hearts of people everywhere. The Kingdom would come to individuals through the forgiveness of their sins and by turning to the newness of life God would provide for the hearts of men. Jesus said, “Don’t look for the Kingdom of God here or there, for the Kingdom of God is within you.” (See Luke 17:21.)

The Kingdom of God was the realm of life, of human existence, that would bring salvation, healing and liberation to all people who had been trapped in sin and death. The Kingdom of God would first of all make individuals sound and whole; then relationships would become sound and whole; finally, all of society (i.e., where the Kingdom of God is) would

become sound and whole. Salvation would begin with the new birth of the human spirit that had been dead in sin, but it would not end there. Salvation would bring healing and redemption to every dimension of human life, even to the transformation of a new heaven and a new earth through the presence of the glory of God.

Specifically, this Jesus stated that He was the Son of God who would both proclaim and bring this Kingdom into being on earth. In Luke 4:18, we read what Jesus proclaimed in His hometown synagogue from the prophecy of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18, KJV)

What an awesome moment it must have been, when after reading that prophecy, Jesus looked at those present in that little synagogue in Nazareth and said, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:21)

This Jesus, however, didn’t just talk about these things. He actually did them. We read in Luke 6:17-19 that there was a power, a *dunamis*, coming forth from Him. As Jesus moved in this power, people were healed and set free. When He prayed for sick people, they really got better. When He cast out demons, they really left. Multitudes gathered around Him and practically climbed over each other to get to Him and touch Him. Everywhere this Jesus went, the sick were healed, the poor were liberated, and the captives to habit, addiction and demons were set free, and broken hearts were mended. People were made sound and whole.

Furthermore, this Jesus spoke with authority (Matthew 7:28-29). He forgave sins (Matthew 9:1-6). He would say, “You have heard that it was said this way, but *I* say unto you...” He spoke with the full authority of One who has God’s own authority.

When Jesus ultimately took His ministry to Jerusalem, the political and religious capital of Israel, the Romans saw Him as a threat to the political system and the chief priests and Pharisees saw Him as a threat to the religious establishment. So they jointly conspired and put Him to death. They crucified Him. But instead of fighting with the sword, Jesus remained true to the principles of the Kingdom of God of love, forgiveness and trust in God the Father to vindicate Him. On the cross, He offered His suffering as

payment for the sins of the world. He was the sacrificial Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world. Unlike all the other so-called Messiahs, Jesus didn't fight back; but unlike all the other so-called Messiahs, Jesus didn't stay dead.

Early Sunday morning, on the third day after His crucifixion, Jesus rose from the dead. Almighty God, the Father, raised Jesus from the dead and Jesus walked out of the tomb alive. By the resurrection, Almighty God vindicated the life of Jesus once and for all. God the Father told this world that the life of Jesus had absolute, lasting and definitive value. When the Romans crucified Jesus, they were saying, "Might makes right." When God raised Jesus, He was saying, "Right makes right." When God raised Jesus from the dead, He was pointing at Jesus with both hands saying, "He's the One. Listen to Him. Believe in Him. His life is the life I validate. I freely offer My redeeming and healing love to this world, but it will only come to this world through Jesus." God backed up Jesus' claim, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father, but by Me." (John 14:6)

The Apostle Peter, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, proclaimed, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) In other words, the resurrection was God clearly, unmistakably, unequivocally and definitely telling people, "*This is how it has to be.*" Salvation does not come through Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, Hare Krishna or anyone else. God points at Jesus and says, "This is how it has to be." The resurrection was God saying a "Yes" to the life of Jesus—a "Yes" that can never be reversed.

This Jesus and His life is God's gift to all mankind (John 3:16). Wherever Jesus went, sins were forgiven, people were healed, relationships were restored and justice and mercy appeared in proper balance. And today, Jesus is risen, He is the One who lives, and as He is presented to people, sins are still forgiven, people are still healed, relationships are still restored, and justice and mercy still appear in proper balance.

Over the centuries, many people have tried to establish empires. Where are they today? Where are Alexander the Great, Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler? Jesus, however, continues on. Those who try to destroy Him pass away, but He remains victorious. No matter how hard His enemies fight against this Jesus, He just won't go away! Jesus sets people free, and He keeps people free.

CHAPTER THREE

IMMANUEL, GOD IS WITH US

We read in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 1, that an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him that his fiancé Mary was pregnant with a child that had been conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. The angel said, “You shall call His name Jesus for He will save His people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21) The angel continued, “They shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means, ‘God With Us.’” GOD WITH US. In Jesus, God was saying to the human race, “I am with you.” What greater blessing could the human race ask for than to know that God is with us, God knows all about us, God loves us and cares for us?

We read in the Gospel of Luke 6:12-23 the great impact of God in Jesus being with us:

12It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.

13And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles:

14Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James and John; and Philip and Bartholomew;

15and Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot;

16Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

17Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place; and there was a large crowd of His disciples, and a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon,

18who had come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were being cured.

19And all the people were trying to touch Him, for power was coming from Him and healing them all.

20And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

21"Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

22"Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man.

23"Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven For in the same way their fathers used to treat the

prophets.

About 30 years before this incident, the angel had told Joseph that the child Jesus would also be known as “Immanuel” which means “God is with us.” Now, in Luke’s Gospel, we see the grown-up Jesus at a very special moment in His life and ministry. He goes to the top of a mountain and spends the whole night in prayer. Then He calls His disciples to Himself and chooses twelve of them for a very special position—to be His twelve apostles. These are twelve men who have left everything to follow Him, because that’s what it takes to be in ministry for Jesus. You have to be willing to leave everything to follow Him if that’s what He requires of you.

At the base of the mountain is a great crowd, a multitude of people with all kinds of needs and hurts in their lives. All of a sudden, this crowd looks up and they see a person in the distance coming down from the top of the mountain. As this man approaches, they watch and He gets bigger and bigger and closer and closer right before their very eyes. Suddenly, something like an electricity goes through the crowd and there’s an awareness—this is Jesus—He’s the Son of God—and in this Jesus, GOD IS WITH US. Jesus then stands at the base of the mountain, on a level with the crowd of humanity, and the people now know that God Himself is accessible to them. There’s a power coming forth from this Jesus and the people almost try to climb over each other to touch Him and draw from His power, because now God can be touched and their needs can be met and their hurts can be healed through this Jesus. Jesus looks at the people and the first words He speaks are “Blessed are you... Blessed are you...”

It’s no accident or coincidence that God set up this scene in the life and ministry of Jesus. God was speaking to men in all times of history that He truly is with us in Jesus. It’s no accident that Jesus came down from the mountain to where people could touch Him. God was coming down from heaven in Jesus so people could touch God and see that God was a God who cared about people and their needs and hurts.

And Jesus told the people, “Blessed are you... Happy are you... Congratulations to you... Fortunate are you...”

First, He says, “Blessed are you poor—for yours is the Kingdom of God.” In other words, blessed are you who have needs because God’s time has come to show that He’s the God who meets needs in Christ Jesus. He’s the God who, when He created this earth, told all things to be fruitful and multiply and NOT be needy and lacking. Jesus makes the bold claim that through HIM (Jesus) all your needs can be met.

Then He says, “Blessed are you who hunger now for you shall be

satisfied.” God has come to man in and through Jesus to satisfy every kind of hunger man can have. Jesus is the Messiah who will bring a banquet to those who believe on Him. There will be PHYSICAL BREAD for the plates on our table. There will be SPIRITUAL BREAD to satisfy the spiritual hunger of humanity in Jesus, the Bread of Life, and there will be “CHILDREN’S BREAD,” physical healing for the sick who come to Jesus in faith.

Jesus continues, “Blessed are you who weep now for you shall laugh.” Blessed and fortunate is any person who has any sorrow in their life that would give them a heavy heart or bring tears to their eyes because Jesus can take that sorrow and turn it into joy by causing something good and of eternal value to happen.

Finally, He says, “Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.” (Luke 6:22-23)

Blessed are you when you stand up for what God says is right, even when it costs you something to take that stand. When all is said and done, God will vindicate you.

Who are the most accurate preachers of the Gospel today? The true preachers are those who boldly proclaim, as Jesus did, that God sent Jesus to save, heal and deliver man in *every* dimension of his life. Jesus came to radically strike at the strongholds of the devil who has kept the human race in slavery to sin and death and the effects of sin and death. Jesus came first and foremost to save people from their sins—and then the effects of that salvation in the here and now would cause radical destruction to the works of satan by destroying his kingdom of darkness at its foundation. Jesus would set men free from sin by giving them forgiveness and eternal life. Then the power of eternal life within men through Jesus Christ would heal sickness, poverty, hunger, sorrow, persecution and oppression. “For this reason was the Son of God made manifest, that He might destroy the works of the devil.” (1 John 3:8)

Jesus literally destroyed the power of sin and death by His sacrificial death on the cross and His resurrection.

When Jesus walked this earth, He went around doing good, healing all who were oppressed by the devil (Acts 10:38). When God raised Jesus from the dead, He was showing Jesus was still Master and Conqueror over everything that would hurt and destroy man. When God raised Jesus from the dead, He was showing He could take the most horrible and seemingly

senseless event in history and turn it into the most important event that ever took place on planet earth, the very event upon which salvation for all humanity would hinge. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus gives all of us who believe the power, the hope and the right to say, even in the most difficult times of life, “GOD IS WITH US, AND THIS ISN’T THE LAST WORD.” Even when everything in life seems to be turned upside down for the moment, we can still say, “GOD IS WITH US, AND THIS ISN’T THE LAST WORD.”

It’s a popular thing among people today, when they see a tragedy portrayed in the media, to ask the question, almost in an unbelieving, complaining way, “Where is God in this tragedy?” The answer is very clear. God is and always has been with us in Jesus. When these tragedies and cruel, inhuman acts occur, the real question we should ask is the question God asked Adam after Adam sinned and hid from God: “Adam, where are you? Mankind, where are you? Humanity, why have you made the decisions that have led to this poverty, war, and suffering when Jesus has already offered you a remedy?” The war, crime, poverty and suffering in this world is not an indictment of God, it is an indictment of the human race that has chosen to reject God’s presence with us in Jesus Christ. The answer and the solution to all our problems is still the same today: JESUS—Who shall be called Immanuel which means, “God is with us.”

CHAPTER FOUR

THE KINGDOM AT HAND

In this chapter, we are going to look at the central message of Jesus’ ministry—the Kingdom of God—the realm of reality where God rules on behalf of those who come to Him in faith. It’s also the realm where Jesus Himself is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

As the Gospel of Matthew opens, we see people coming to a mighty prophet, John the Baptist, who tells them to repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand. Shortly thereafter, John is arrested and imprisoned by the wicked, adulterous King Herod. But then we see a young man from Galilee, Jesus of Nazareth, going out to people and preaching the very same message: “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.” The message of the Kingdom of God was absolutely central to the ministry of Jesus. The Kingdom of God was the cornerstone of the message He brought to people.

It's interesting to note that Jesus went *to* people. People had to come to John the Baptist, but Jesus was a traveling preacher, going *to* people. Here we see the difference between Old Testament law and New Testament grace. Old Testament law required people to do things to try to please God, a task that was impossible to do perfectly. But New Testament grace manifested the saving action of God going *to* people of Jesus of Nazareth. God Himself went looking for people and offered them salvation, healing and wholeness.

We see that as Jesus went around preaching and healing, He aroused very strong reactions. People either radically accepted Him and began a new life—or they fiercely rejected Him.

The atmosphere of Jesus' time was very tense both politically and religiously. Politically, the Romans occupied the Jewish nation as conquerors and they were extremely cruel and oppressive. This led to frequent violence and rebellious uprisings in Israel. It was also a time when the Jewish religious leadership was corrupt and morally inept. The High Priest and the Temple crew were greedy and immoral, and the local leadership of the Pharisees and Scribes had fallen into a rigid legalism and fundamentalism that oppressed the very people they should have brought salvation to.

Many people began longing and crying out for the Kingdom of God—the intervention of Almighty God who would set up a kingdom of justice and righteousness for those who were downtrodden or oppressed—or trapped in the failure of their own sins. We read in Luke 3:15 that many were hoping the Kingdom of God would soon appear. Even some righteous Pharisees, like Joseph of Arimathea, were looking for the Kingdom of God. But, the “Kingdom of God” meant different things to different people. There were three main ideas popular about the Kingdom of God.

1) *Some looked for the political restoration of King David's royal kingdom.* God would send a messiah (or Christ) who would be a military leader to destroy the Romans and re-establish the nation of Israel. Originally, the Apostle Peter had hoped for this (Acts 1:8).

2) *Others looked for the immediate end of the world where God Himself would destroy all wickedness and set up a new world consisting of only righteous people.* John the Baptist looked for this.

3) A third view looked for a kingdom that would originate in the heart of man, in the very spirit of man—a kingdom where God would rule over the individual's heart—and, where this rule was set up, all of God's power and

God's life would be present, and by releasing this power through faith, *all things* would be possible and *nothing* would be impossible. This was clearly the Kingdom that Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, preached and proclaimed: "Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:21, KJV) (See also 1 John 4:4.)

Jesus proclaimed that we would enter this Kingdom and understand how to move and operate in the power of this Kingdom by being "born again." We would receive this new birth as a gift from God if we would repent, or turn away from sin and embrace God and allow Him to rule over our lives and seek His will for us instead of insisting on and asserting our own will.

For Jesus, the Kingdom of God had very specific meaning:

- 1) It was a Kingdom where the broken fellowship between God and man would be restored and the broken fellowship between man and man reconciled.
- 2) The Kingdom of God was a place where the goal was to make every life whole and fulfilled.
- 3) The Kingdom would end everything that caused oppression, slavery and bondage of any and all types.
- 4) The Kingdom would be the place that offered the option of victory for *everything* that seemed a defeat, even death itself.

We read in Acts 10:38 that as Jesus went around preaching the Kingdom, He also went around *doing good* and healing all who were oppressed by the devil. The very power of the Kingdom was revealed in and through Jesus. And every life that opened itself to Him became A *JESUS SUCCESS STORY*.

The Kingdom of God was first of all the place where individuals would be made whole. As individuals were made whole, then relationships would be made whole. As relationships were made whole, even society itself could potentially be made whole.

The Kingdom of God offered people a way out from their despair, defeat and failures. Moral failures like Matthew, Zaccheus and Mary Magdalene could have a brand new start. Blind Bartimaeus could regain his sight. 5000 hungry people could be miraculously fed. Even the dead Lazarus could live again. In all of this, Jesus was always doing what God the Father would do—heal, show mercy, have compassion. One of the biggest mistakes we can make is to see Jesus as coming to save us from an angry Old Testament God. Jesus did not come to save us from God. Rather, God sent Jesus to save us from the devil and save us from the consequences of our own sins

(Matthew 1:21).

The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom where people open their hearts to God, and God is allowed to enter the human heart and rule over a person's life. When God is allowed to enter and rule a person's heart, God brings the very presence of His own life. He brings a new life that overcomes inner alienation and spiritual death, and He establishes a spirit of celebration, peace, freedom and communication. Through faith, all things become possible because all the resources of God's own life and power enter a person.

Jesus said we enter the Kingdom of God:

- 1) Through *repentance* (Greek word *metanoia*) - a change of heart. We turn from our old way of ruling our own life and instead we submit to God's rule. We turn away from sin and all that displeases God and instead we make God the focus of our life. We acknowledge we are sinners and that we need His forgiveness and His new life.
- 2) We undergo the new birth, or we become what Jesus called "born again," born of the Holy Spirit. God gives us this new birth when we publicly confess His Son Jesus as Our Lord and believe in our heart that God *did* raise Him from the dead. We accept Jesus' personal sacrifice on the cross as payment for our sins.

If you have not entered the Kingdom of God, you can do so right now through the simple, but heartfelt act of confessing your sins to God and then inviting the Risen Lord Jesus into your heart, your spirit. It costs no money, nor do you have to join an institutional church or go through a religious ceremony. Entering the Kingdom of God is an act you perform in your heart.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE KINGDOM PRAYER

We read in the Gospels that at one point the disciples of Jesus came to Him and said, "Lord, teach us how to pray." It's interesting that they didn't say, "Teach us how to preach" or "Teach us how to minister." They had seen Jesus pray often; many times He would leave them and go apart to pray. Many mornings they would wake up and see that Jesus was already awake

praying. Many times He had spent the whole night in prayer. The disciples instinctively knew that Jesus' rich prayer life with the Father was what made things happen. Everything Jesus did seemed to flow out of His prayer life and the disciples wanted to learn about this power of prayer. Jesus responded by giving them the "Kingdom pattern" for effective prayer.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 6, we see a pattern of prayer that Jesus taught His disciples. It's traditionally called the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). Perhaps it should be more appropriately called the Lord's pattern for prayer, or even better, the Kingdom Prayer. He told His disciples to pray "in this manner" or "in this way." I don't think Jesus ever meant this prayer to become just a repetition or formula. In John's Gospel, Chapter 17, we see Jesus in personal prayer, in what's known as the High Priestly Prayer where He went to the Father and defined the New Covenant benefits He was purchasing for us as He was about to go to the cross. Some preachers feel this prayer in John 17 would more appropriately be called "the Lord's Prayer."

However one may feel about the proper place of John 17, we do see in Matthew 6 a defined pattern for effective praying in the Kingdom of God. The prayer is not meant to be a repetitious formula, because all effective prayer must go from our heart to God. But Jesus obviously meant for us to be aware of His own pattern of Kingdom praying. The prayer is part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' charter for the Kingdom of God.

Let's look at the Kingdom Prayer:

1) Jesus starts out by addressing Almighty God: "*Our Father Who Art In Heaven.*" Jesus calls the Almighty Creator and Source of all life by a special title—"Father" or "Abba" (actually a "dad" or "papa"). Jesus was saying that we in the Kingdom of God are in a very special relationship with the Almighty Creator. We are not "just another part of creation," but through Jesus Christ we are children of the Almighty Creator. He is our Father—the Source of life, protection, provision and wisdom.

Some years back on Father's Day, I was speaking to a Sunday School, a Children's Church, that Christ's Chapel used to conduct at one of our city housing projects. Most of the young people were teenaged boys—only a few girls used to attend. Some of these young men had already had tough lives. Most were from single parent families. For some, their earthly fathers had already died. I told them that whether or not they still had an earthly father, they have the security of having a Heavenly Father, a perfect Father who will never make a mistake in their life. They have a Father who knows the number of hairs on our head, and a Father who will make sure we have what

we need every day.

2) Jesus then said of God, “*Hallowed (or “Holy”) Be Your Name.*” Jesus shows us that when we come to God in prayer, we don’t just rush in and start asking for things, but we take time to show Him honor, thanks, appreciation and fellowship. We honor Him and treat His name as holy. There are three characteristics of holiness: a) that which is holy is infinitely separated from and superior to any limitations of created things; b) that which is holy is totally untouched by sin or evil; c) that which is holy is driven and compelled to exercise redeeming love toward that which has been broken by sin. So first of all, in the Kingdom of God, we acknowledge that Our Father is *the Holy One*.

3) Jesus continued, “*Thy Kingdom Come; Thy Will Be Done On Earth As It Is In Heaven.*” Jesus taught a basic principle of the Kingdom in Matthew 6:33: “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these other things will be added to you.” Jesus shows us that when we pray, we should *always, always, always* desire God’s will first and foremost in any and every situation. When we go to God in prayer, we should always pray for God’s perfect will in our lives and the lives of others, and even that God’s perfect will be done in every situation on earth, for that is truly when God’s Kingdom will come on earth. 1 John 5:14-15 tells us God guarantees a “Yes” to every prayer that we pray that’s in His will. We must always remember that it is also always God’s perfect will to save, redeem, heal and make whole because in Heaven wholeness, provision, peace, and health are the “state of affairs.” God’s Kingdom touches earth with the very quality of salvation and healing that is fulfilled in Heaven.

4) Then Jesus says, “*Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread.*” If we seek God’s Kingdom first, He promises to meet all our needs. If we’ve prayed for God’s will and Kingdom to come, then we can *confidently* expect our needs to be met. Jesus also said we ask for our daily needs because God wants us to take one day at a time. He made us in a way that we are best when we focus on today and trust Him *now*. We handle one day at a time best. Implicit in the word “daily” is that in the Kingdom, it will be an ongoing, unfailing provision even though we receive it one day at a time. God is faithful today, and when tomorrow becomes today, we’ll find out He’s still faithful.

5) “*Forgive Us Our Debts (or Trespasses) As We Forgive Our Debtors (or Those Who Trespass Against Us).*” We have all sinned against God—and sin

can block our prayers from being answered. But other people have sinned against us. So, another block to getting prayer answered is hatred, unforgiveness, or the holding of grudges. Prayer produces a spiritual pipeline between God and ourselves. Our prayers go through that pipeline and God's answer come back through that same pipeline. Jesus tells us that our unforgiveness or the grudges we hold are like corrosion that narrows or even blocks the pipeline. Forgiving our enemies cleans out the pipeline and God promises to keep His end of the pipeline clear by forgiving us when we forgive others.

6) "*Lead Us Not Into Temptation, But Deliver Us From Evil.*" Of course, we know from scripture God will never tempt us or lead us into evil. James 1:13 tells us God cannot be tempted and He cannot tempt anyone. The proper translation is more "Do not let us be put to the test," or "Do not let us choose a path that will turn out evil, but stop us." If we're going to go down a road that's bad, dear God, slam the door in our face to stop us, so we'll not make a mistake." In other words, protect us and guide us as we travel the roads of life, and don't ever let us "get in over our head" so to speak.

7) Finally, "*For Thine Is The Kingdom And The Power And The Glory Now And Forever. Amen.*" We acknowledge the Kingdom belongs to God (though He has given it to us). We acknowledge to God that He really rules everything (the *Kingdom*); He is the One who really makes things happen (the *Power*); and all life and creation comes from Him (the *Glory*), both right now and for all eternity. So be it.

The Lord's Prayer, really the Kingdom Prayer, is the pattern for successful prayer. It is a model, not a repetitious formula. It was how Jesus Himself exercised Kingdom Power on earth. It is how Jesus invites and instructs us to exercise Kingdom Power also.

CHAPTER SIX

FOUNDATIONS

Anyone who has ever built a house, a business building, or any physical structure knows that a good, solid foundation is vital to the survival and

success of that building. Every so often, we hear about a house or building collapsing, often with loss of life or tragedy—all because it had not been built on a proper foundation. In Italy there is the famous Leaning Tower of Pisa which engineers have to shore up and make corrections to when it sinks and leans so it will not collapse, because it lacks a solid foundation. What is true in the physical world and the world of engineering is also true in the spiritual world. We must build our lives on a good, spiritual foundation in order to have a victorious life. One of the most important considerations in any building is a good, solid base that will uphold the structure. Engineers and contractors go to great lengths to make sure they are building on a proper foundation. Sometimes a foundation is built slowly, one stone at a time, one row at a time. But as the world progresses, the foundation takes shape and the building placed on that foundation lasts and endures.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. Our walk with God will be successful if we have built our spiritual life on a good foundation. We see in the Bible that there are two important, in fact, absolutely necessary foundation stones that we must build our spiritual life upon: 1) The first foundation stone is the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2) The second foundation stone is the Word of God—the truth and revelation in the sacred scriptures.

1) We read in 1 Corinthians 3:9-15 that the first foundation stone we must build our lives upon in the person of Jesus Christ Himself:

9For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

10According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.

11For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

13each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

14If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.

15If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

These words were written by the Apostle Paul. There's an old saying, "We have one life; it will soon pass. Only what's done for Christ will last." The life we are given on this earth is extremely important because it is a seed for a harvest we can reap in eternity. I like to call our earthly life the *alpha seed* which brings in eternity an *omega harvest*. For example, in the Book of Revelation we can trace every mention of Jesus' exaltation and glory in heaven back to an *alpha seed* that He sowed in His earthly ministry in one of the four gospels. (Compare, for example, Luke 4:14-21 with Revelation 5:1-10; Matthew 14:29-31 with Revelation 7:9-17; Matthew 21:1-11 with Revelation 19:11-16. These are just a few of the *alpha seed / omega harvest* comparisons.)

The lifetime we've been given on this earth is vitally important for the harvest we'll have for all eternity. The Apostle Paul tells us that *only* those things done in this life that are built on the foundation of the person of Jesus Christ will last and endure into eternity. Our great earthly accomplishments and our earthly fame and fortune will not last. Only those things which honor, exalt, glorify and reflect Jesus Christ will last into eternity. Of all the people in the Bible, the Apostle Paul perhaps realized this more than anyone.

Put simply, *THERE IS A JESUS ANSWER TO EVERY DECISION WE HAVE TO MAKE; THERE IS A JESUS ANSWER TO ALL OUR CONSCIOUS MORAL CHOICES; THERE IS A JESUS WAY OF DOING EVERYTHING WE HAVE BEEN CALLED TO DO IN THIS LIFE*, be it in employment, family responsibility, citizenship, or any aspect of life. The Apostle Paul tells us that only our Jesus answers to the issues of our life will last into eternity—everything else will be lost and worthless.

After his conversion, the Apostle Paul was consumed with living out *only the Jesus answer* for his life. In **Galatians 2:20** Paul considered his own life and will dead and now he only wanted to live as Jesus lived and to please Jesus. In **Philippians 1:21** Paul stated, "For me to live is Christ" and "to die is gain" so he could be with Jesus. In **1 Corinthians 2:1-2** Paul stated that when he preached, he only wanted to preach about Jesus, not great theology. In **2 Corinthians 10:4-5** Paul stated he even wanted to bring every thought captive to the way Jesus would think and have every thought honor and reflect Jesus. In **Ephesians 4:17-24** Paul tells us to lay aside the old man and put on the new man which is like God and like Jesus. In **Philippians 2:5-11** Paul tells us to have the mind of Christ which is motivated by unselfish love and service. In **Romans 8:29** Paul states that the whole purpose of God's work in our life is to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ, to make us like Jesus. Paul built his own life on this first foundation stone: the person of

Jesus Christ.

2) There is a second foundation stone we must build on in our walk with God. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself tells us that this second foundation stone is the Word of God, the scriptures, the words of Jesus Himself. Jesus stated in Matthew 7:24-27:

24“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.

25“And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.

26“Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

27“The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell – and great was its fall.”

In another place, Jesus stated, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.” (Mark 13:31) The Word of God, the words of Jesus, are an absolute, solid, eternal rock foundation to build our lives upon. The Word of God is vital to a victorious spiritual life because the Word of God specifically defines for us who Jesus is and what God’s truth for us is.

- a) *First, the Word of God is our direction.* Psalm 119:105 states that God’s Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. The Word of God has the wisdom to direct us in the right path for *every decision we’ll ever have to make in life*. I’ve often said that if I had a major decision to make and I didn’t know what to do, I would get on my knees and read my Bible until I found the answer even if I had to go from Genesis to Revelation. I have sought God’s answer in His Word at times of major decision in my life and the Lord and His Word have never failed me.
- b) *Second, the Word of God has life, power and truth for us.* In John 6:63 Jesus stated, “The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life.” The Bible is not an ordinary book like a famous novel. The Bible contains the “living word” - this living word imparts life-giving spirit and power to our spirit, soul and body.
- c) *Third, the Word of God contains the promises of God which are our realm of spiritual authority and blessing.* The promises in God’s Word are God’s gift to us and God’s statement to us of our legal rights as sons of God to fight the powers of satan and evil that want to steal, kill and

destroy us. When we exercise our faith and lay hold of what God has legally provided for us in the spiritual realm, we can destroy the works of the devil.

- d) *Fourth, the Word of God is our safety zone.* In John 17:17 Jesus said, “Sanctify them in Thy truth, Thy word is truth.” The Word of God defines Who God is for us—Who Jesus really is—what God’s truth and God’s wisdom is. We don’t have to depend upon man’s ideas and philosophies. If we stay within the boundaries of God’s Word, He’ll keep us safe and protect us from deception and error 100% of the time. We’ll never be deceived by other people, or by evil, lying spirits, or by our own faulty thinking. God will bring us through this life safely in His truth.

Foundations are the necessary solid base to keep a building standing Do YOU have the true foundation for your life—the person of Jesus Christ?

Remember, 1 Corinthians 3:9 states you are God’s building. Build on a good foundation. Your life on earth is important. It is the *alpha seed* for your *omega harvest*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ANOTHER JESUS SUCCESS STORY

At the very beginning of the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 1, verse 1, we read, “The beginning of the Gospel [Good News] of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” At first, we see the Good News of Jesus Christ in His proclamation of the Kingdom of God at hand. But as we continue, we learn that God is showing us that the Good News is the person of Jesus Himself. We see Jesus as the One who goes around doing good, healing all who are oppressed by the devil. Jesus is the One who proves that good things really do happen, no matter how evil, sick or dysfunctional the world may be.

Traditionally, the healings and miracles of Jesus have been presented as proofs He is the Son of God (John 20:30-31). Jesus’ healings and miracles, however, were so much more than acts of power to prove He was the Son of God. They were acts of love to show His care and God the Father’s care for people. The whole framework of Jesus’ earthly ministry was the joy and delight He experienced when He turned hopeless cases into success stories. Jesus went especially to the neglected people—people who were not

considered important or worth the time or effort to redeem. He specialized in redeeming and healing outcasts like lepers, tax collectors and prostitutes. He would touch their lives with a mighty act (*dunamis*). Every one of His mighty acts in a needy person's life would produce "Another Jesus Success Story."

Most religious leaders of His day opposed Jesus and His healing ministry. He was severely criticized. He was called a troublemaker and a con-man. Some Pharisees even went to the extreme and blasphemed the Holy Spirit by accusing Jesus of having demonic power. But no matter how severe the criticism and opposition, Jesus didn't care and Jesus didn't stop. Jesus had a "thick skin" toward criticism when it came to doing good. And those whom Jesus healed didn't care either! They were thankful and they followed Him. When the Pharisees tried to get a blind man that Jesus healed to denounce Jesus (John 9:25), the blind man refused and said, "I only know one thing—I used to be blind, but now I see."

One great aspect of Jesus' earthly ministry was His wisdom—His teachings—He was the very wisdom of God Himself. But Jesus didn't just offer wisdom; Jesus didn't just give great advice and "leave it at that." When people had a need, Jesus *did* something and met that need and solved that problem through an act of power. He performed *healings* to set people free from physical illness. He performed *exorcisms* and *deliverances* to set people free from evil spirits that controlled them. He performed *miracles* where He would bypass, accelerate, or modify the laws of nature to meet peoples' needs and solve peoples' problems. And every manifestation of power in a person's life would produce "Another Jesus Success Story."

In Mark 7:31-37, we see one of Jesus' healings. He is in the gentile region of Tyre and Sidon. Even though Jesus often proclaimed His ministry was only to the children of Israel, Jesus often took "little detours" into northern gentile territory, known as "Galilee of the Gentiles" and He had a knack of healing any gentile who happened to approach Him with faith when He was on one of these "little detours."

In Mark 7:31, we read of one such detour where Jesus is going back and forth into gentile territory. We see that some people brought a man to Jesus who was deaf and could only speak with great difficulty. They asked Jesus to lay hands on the man and heal him.

In Mark 7:32, we see that Jesus took the man aside from the multitude. This is because Jesus is a very personal Lord and God the Father is a very personal God. None of us is ever just a number in a crowd to the Father or Jesus. We are all special and individual, and God has an individual healing and plan for each of us. We read that Jesus did three things with that man to

turn him into another Jesus Success Story (Mark 7:33-34):

1) Jesus put His fingers into the man's ears. Jesus was laying His hands on the sick part of the man's body as a point of contact for the man to release his faith, and as a point of contact for Jesus to release the power within Himself.

2) Jesus touched this man's tongue with some of His own saliva. Remember, Jesus from eternity past had always been with God the Father as the Eternal Word, the second person of the Trinity, the One through whom all things were created. By touching the man's tongue with His own saliva, Jesus was transmitting His own ability to speak to this man. In a sense, Jesus was transmitting His own health into this man. So often, in our world, we are concerned about transmitting diseases through bodily fluids like saliva. But here, Jesus transmits health through His bodily fluid.

3) Jesus looked to heaven, to God the Father, whose will He was doing. He gave a deep sigh, releasing the power of the Holy Spirit as He spoke a creative word—the Aramaic word *EPHPHATHA* = “BE OPENED.” Jesus was speaking a creative word, just as He had in eternity past. The Hebrew is *DABAR*, the Greek is *RHEMA*—a word which accomplishes what it says.

And we read in Mark 7:35 that He could hear; His ears were opened. He could speak; his tongue was loosed. (KJV states, “the string of his tongue” was loosed.) He was made whole; he was another Jesus Success Story.

BUT—not only was he now physically well, but Jesus had also restored him to a position of spiritual authority:

1) His ears were opened. He could now hear the Word of God and grow in faith for himself (Romans 10:17). He would not have to depend on his friends' faith anymore to bring him to Jesus.

2) His tongue was loosed. He could now speak clearly his own creative words of faith as Jesus had commanded His followers to do in Mark 11:23. This man would now be able to *speak* to mountains himself and see them move.

And we read in Mark 7:37—Jesus does all things well. All His healings are gifts to us. Not only does Jesus give us a gift, but He wraps it up and puts a bow on it. *He does all things well.*

We read in Hebrews 13:8 that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. His risen ministry is no different in purpose than His earthly ministry and He's still in the business of turning hurting people into Jesus

Success Stories.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

When we study the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, we see three aspects:

- 1) There is the *Wisdom* of Jesus in His teaching, His parables, and the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus was all of God's wisdom wrapped up in a human body.
- 2) There is the *Power* of Jesus in His healings, His miracles, and His delivering people from demonic power. Jesus was all of God's power wrapped up in a human body.
- 3) There was the life that Jesus lived for us. The Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20 "the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me." He loved us and gave Himself up for us. Jesus was all of God's love wrapped up in a human body. In this study we are going to examine one specific aspect of Jesus' power – His miracles.

In the earthly ministry of Jesus, we see the Jesus who teaches perfect wisdom, because He is the wisdom of God. But in Jesus, we see more than just good advice – we see the manifestation of God's power to confirm and validate the truth of God's wisdom. Jesus doesn't just give good advice about people's problems; Jesus also does something about them.

When God manifests His power through Jesus toward people, God is telling us, "Look, I *really, really* love you and I *really, really* forgive you. God doesn't just forgive the legal penalties of our sins; He actually makes things better through healings and miracles.

I grind my teeth in anguish whenever I hear any preacher who states that it is not *always* God's will to heal, meet needs, and deliver from suffering. The scripture clearly states that it is God's will to heal all people (Acts 10:38) from all diseases (Psalm 103:3). If we discount miracles, we shortchange God by making Him less powerful and caring than He is, and we *shortchange people* by denying them the hope and promise of what is really available to them through the provision of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the One who goes around doing good. Jesus is the One who makes dreams come true. We see that Jesus doesn't do miracles to prove

Himself, He does them out of love and compassion to restore broken people. Many times the Pharisees would demand Jesus prove Himself by doing a miracle and He'd refuse. Then later, we'd see Him move heaven and earth and make the impossible look easy to He could restore a broken and hurting person.

In the scripture we see a difference between healings and miracles. Healings involve the curing of sicknesses and infirmities within the human body or human person. Miracles, however, deal with the operation of natural laws and natural phenomenon. A miracle suspends, speeds up, or bypasses natural law or the normal natural order of things. The God who created natural laws as a reference point for our earthly existence also has the power and the right to suspend, speed up, or bypass those laws for the good of His children.

I personally have never had any difficulty dealing with the science of miracles. Two hundred years ago, we didn't know you could split an atom to release megaton nuclear power. One hundred years ago, we didn't know about DNA and the possibility of "genetic engineering." I have no problem with the Jesus who operated in perfect faith and knowledge walking on water, multiplying bread and fish, or turning water into wine.

Scientifically, we know that all things are made up of the same parts – atoms, protons, electrons, neutrons. Different materials are simply a different arrangement and configuration of atoms, protons, electrons, and neutrons. Rearrange the atoms in a chair into the same configuration as atoms in a carpet and the chair will become a carpet. When John the Baptist stated that God could turn stones into children of Abraham (Luke 3:8), he was right. Just rearrange the stones' atoms and put the breath of life into the newly arranged atoms and God could indeed turn stones into children of Abraham. God originally created all things out of nothing, so He can also turn those same things into what He wants. I've never had any problem with the scientific possibility of miracles.

But the whole issue of God's miracles is not explaining *how* He does them, but believing that in His goodness and integrity, He *will* do them for His people. The issue is not *how*, but trusting that yes, He will do them.

In Jesus' earthly ministry, we see Him perform three types of miracles and He gives us a special promise in each one:

1. NATURE MIRACLES – In Mark 4:35-41, Jesus stills a storm on the Sea of Galilee and in Matthew 14:22-23, He walks on water to get to a boat where His disciples are in danger of sinking and He again stops the storm. In His nature miracles, Jesus proves that He is always in control and the #1

Promise to us is we need never fear; with Jesus, everything is always under control.

2. MIRACLES OF MULTIPLICATION – We see in the Gospel of John, Chapter 2, that Jesus turned water into wine when a young couple ran out of wine at their wedding. Then twice, Jesus multiplied bread and fish – once to feed 5,000 people (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:33-44) and a second time to feed 4,000 (Matthew 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-9). We see Jesus proving God’s promise that if we’d seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, then all the other things we need, like our daily bread, will be added unto us. Jesus promises He’ll always provide for His own, even if it takes a miracle. His #2 *Promise to us is that with Jesus, we’ll always have enough – in fact, we’ll have abundance; enough plus something left over.*

3. MIRACLES OF RESURRECTION – We see Jesus raise three people from the dead. He raised Jairus’ 12-year-old daughter from the dead (Mark 5). He raised the son of the widow Nain (Luke 7:11-17). He raised His friend Lazarus from the dead (John 11). In His resurrections, Jesus was proving His power even over death, and we have His #3 *Promise – with Jesus, it is never too late.* He gave Jairus’ daughter more tomorrows when she ran out of tomorrows. He gave the widow’s son more tomorrows when he ran out of tomorrows. He gave Lazarus more tomorrows when he ran out of tomorrows.

Again, the miracles of Jesus give us three great promises:

1. *With Jesus, we never have to fear, everything is always under control.*
2. *With Jesus, we’ll always have enough – plus something left over.*
3. *With Jesus, it is never too late – even when it looks like we’ve passed the deadline.*

When Jesus performed miracles, He usually commented on people’s faith. He’d either say they had great faith, faith, or little faith. Jesus’ miracle ministry confronts us with the issue of our trust in Him. In the battles of life, do we still trust Jesus? Do we have the same steadiness when things might not look so good as when they are good? Do we still trust Him even when things momentarily might look desperate?

Do we boldly and joyfully confess Jesus has everything under control in the middle of a storm?

Do we boldly and joyfully confess Jesus has provided more than enough

even when it appears for the moment that we lack?

Do we boldly and joyfully confess it's never too late for Jesus even when it looks like we've passed the deadline?

Incidentally, both the scriptures and the personal experience of those who live by faith have proven Jesus faithful 100% of the time. You see, the relationship of God and man can be described this way:

God to us = unconditional love

Us to God = unconditional faith and trust

Now, I want to speak to you about one miracle that is the greatest because it lasts forever: the miracle of the new birth. Jesus stilled storms, but there will be other storms. Jesus miraculously fed people earthly food, but they got hungry again. Jesus raised Jairus' daughter and Lazarus physically, but they died again. Jesus, however, can perform the greatest miracle of all by giving us eternal life so that we'll truly live forever, never hunger again, and be forever with His peace that passes all understanding. We receive this greatest and permanent everlasting miracle when we ask Jesus, the Risen Lord, to be our Savior and come live in our heart. If you have not made this decision and received this miracle, will you pray with me now?

“Lord Jesus Christ, I come to You right now. I see the great miracles You did and will do for Your people. You offer us the greatest miracle of all, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Jesus, I repent of my sins, place my old life at the foot of Your cross and ask You to be my Lord. By Your strength and grace, I'll serve You the rest of my life. Amen.”

If you pray that prayer from your heart, you'll receive the greatest miracle Jesus can perform – the miracle of making you into a new creation, and you are born again into eternal life.

God bless you today.

CHAPTER NINE

W.W.J.B.?

Currently, there is a popular slogan, “W.W.J.D.?” “What Would Jesus Do?” The purpose of the slogan is to make us stop and examine our own possible response to the situations we face in life and evaluate our actions by what Jesus Christ, the Son of God, would probably do if He were in our

situation. We see W.W.J.D. on teenagers' jewelry and bracelets, on bumper stickers and on printed t-shirts. Hopefully, W.W.J.D. helps us to live our lives to glorify God.

We could also come up with another slogan, "*W.W.J.B?*" "Where Would Jesus Be?" Perhaps we should be in these same places. In Acts 10:38 we have the answer to both slogans. Where Would Jesus Be? He went about. What Did Jesus Do? He did good and healed all who were oppressed by the devil.

In Acts 10:38, it was the Apostle Peter who tells us that Jesus went around, doing good, healing all who were oppressed by the devil. Peter knew the places Jesus would be. He was the first apostle Jesus had called to follow Him. He had been with Jesus from the very beginning.

Jesus had said in John 14:3 that He wished us to be with Him: "Where I am that you may also be." And just as Jesus issued the invitation to His Apostles, He issues the same invitation to us as He says, "Follow Me." Just as we should do what Jesus would do, we should want to be where Jesus would be. We see where Jesus would be as we follow His ministry in the Gospels.

1) First, we see Jesus in His early ministry. In Mark 1:35-36, we see Jesus rising early and going to a quiet, lonely place to pray. **THE FIRST PLACE JESUS WENT WAS A PLACE CALLED PRAYER.** Jesus knew the spiritual truth that all productive, worthwhile and lasting work for the Kingdom of God begins with prayer. All our lasting efforts in ministry have to be birthed out of the experience of prayer. It's through prayer that God gives us direction. Through prayer we are empowered to overcome temptation and also to minister effectively. Also, it is through prayer that we appropriate the blessings of God by faith.

2) Secondly, we see Jesus moving forward in Mark 1:37 stating He had to go to other towns to bring them the Kingdom of God. In Matthew 14:14 we see Jesus going to a multitude that had gathered, and He had compassion and healed their sick. **THE SECOND PLACE JESUS WENT WAS THE PLACE CALLED "THE MULTITUDE."** Every one of us has our own multitude we can minister to. Every person Jesus met knew what Jesus was all about, bringing the Kingdom of God and God's salvation to people. Every day, all of us meet more people than we realize. If we were as dedicated to our mission as Jesus was, we would realize the awesome number of people whose lives we can touch, just from our regular daily contacts. Jesus tells us in John 4:35 that we shouldn't say the harvest will be

ready in four months—the fields are already white and ready for harvest.

3) Thirdly, we see Jesus walking along and encountering a tax collector named Matthew. Matthew was hated by his own people, the Jews, because he was collecting taxes for the Romans, the oppressors. Perhaps he knew he was on a wrong road, but he didn't know how to get out of the fix he was in. Along came Jesus and said two words, "Follow Me." Jesus didn't approve Matthew's sins and dishonesty; Jesus didn't condemn him either and shut off all hope. Instead, Jesus offered him a way out: "FOLLOW ME." Following Jesus IS the way out of any problem we face. Matthew did follow Jesus and even had a dinner party for Him. Who attended? Other tax collectors. When the religious leaders tried to condemn Jesus, He told them, in Matthew 9:12-13 that healthy people don't need a physician; the sick people need the help and God desires compassion rather than sacrifice. **THE THIRD PLACE JESUS WENT WAS A PLACE CALLED COMPASSION.** Jesus calls us to go to that same place. Compassion is the place that does not approve sin, but also does not shut off hope no matter how someone may have failed. Compassion offers mercy and salvation, and offers a way out of trouble if we repent and turn to God.

4) Next, we see Jesus at a dinner at the home of a prominent Pharisee, Simon the Leper (Luke 7:36-50; Mark 14:3). Suddenly, a woman with the reputation of being a great sinner comes in, hurries to Jesus, breaks a box of costly perfume over Him, anoints Him and washes His feet with her tears of repentance. The indignant Pharisees mutter that if Jesus were a prophet, He'd know what kind of woman this was and have nothing to do with her. But Jesus rebukes them and tells the host Simon that he had ignored giving Jesus the common courtesy of a foot washing, but this woman had lavished an extravagant love and gift on Jesus. **JESUS HAD GONE TO A PLACE CALLED AVAILABILITY.** He didn't just eat with tax collectors, He went to the Pharisees also. His feet had been available for Simon the host to wash, but only the repentant woman had washed His feet. Jesus, however, had been available for *all*. And Jesus would have us follow Him to the place called "availability." He would not have us shut out anyone, rich or poor, big or small, important or unimportant, from the circle of our love and ministry.

5) We see Jesus follow the destiny God the Father had marked out for Him. He went to Jerusalem to be crucified on the cross, where He would pay for the sins of mankind and purchase our redemption. We see in Luke 9:23 Jesus telling us that if we follow Him, we must take up our cross daily. Jesus

went to “THE CROSS.” And there is only one cross called “THE CROSS.” It’s on that cross that our sins were paid for by the innocent Lamb of God. But Jesus tells us that we each have *our cross* and that cross is obedience to God’s plan for our lives, even if it’s costly to our self or our ego. THE FIFTH PLACE JESUS WANTS US TO FOLLOW HIM TO IS THE PLACE CALLED OBEDIENCE: obedience to God, to His way of doing things, and to His specific plan for us.

6) Finally, there is a sixth place Jesus is. Although He died and was buried, yet on the third day He was raised from the dead. After His resurrection, He ascended into heaven and was enthroned at the right hand of Almighty God as the Lord. He was invested with the name above all names and with all the power and authority available in the universe. The Apostle Paul writes about this great truth in Ephesians 1:20-23:

*20which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,
21far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.
22And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,
23which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

But then Paul goes further and writes about you and me:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-6)

Paul tells us that we ARE seated, not “WILL BE” seated with Christ. JESUS WANTS US TO FOLLOW HIM TO THE PLACE CALLED SPIRITUAL POWER AND AUTHORITY. He makes all the supernatural resources of heaven available to us to do the work of the ministry. If we follow Him to the places called prayer, the multitude, compassion, availability, and obedience, then we will also surely know the place called “power and authority.”

Truly, we must wonder if Simon the Leper had followed Jesus to these places, perhaps we would have known him today as “Simon the Ex-leper.”

CHAPTER TEN

THE STRAIGHT ROAD

The Lord Jesus Christ made two especially bold and absolute statements in the Gospels. In Mark 13:31, Jesus stated, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.” In John 14:6, Jesus stated, “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except by Me.” So, we have been given two absolute, rock solid truths to build our lives on: 1) The person of Jesus Christ, the risen Son of God, the Jesus who is the Source of our redemption and eternal life; 2) The unfailing Word of God, the Holy Bible.

We read in the Old Testament how God led His people out of Egypt by miracles and He promised to bring them into a rich and prosperous place called the Promised Land. The first generation, however, didn’t believe God and so they ended up going around in circles until the unbelieving generation died off. That’s the lesson for us today: When we believe God’s Word, we have a straight road into the Promised Land. When we lack faith in God’s Word, we end up going around in circles.

In the Old Testament books of Exodus and Deuteronomy, we read how God brought His people out of slavery in Egypt by performing mighty miracles of deliverance by the hand of His servant Moses. God also promised to bring them into a place of abundance known as the Promised Land. Somehow, the first generation never made it, but instead ended up going in circles for 40 years in a desert just outside the Promised Land.

They wandered until just about all of the first generation died out. Why? The Apostle Paul, writing in the Book of Hebrews, tells us exactly why in Hebrews 3:19 and Hebrews 4:1-2. They missed God’s Promised Land for them because of unbelief and because they did not join the word spoken to them by God with faith. God had a straight road into the Promised Land for them but because they doubted the truth of God’s Word, they ended up going around in circles. It was tragic because they were so close, yet were so blind because of their unbelief. It was a double tragedy: 1) They had a word from God that He would give them victory, and 2) the land of promise, flowing with milk and honey, was right there next to them. But they ended up going in circles because they did not accept God’s word and promises by faith.

A few thousand years later we see a similar situation in the Gospel of

Mark 6:1-6. We see Jesus Christ, the Son of God, visiting His home town of Nazareth. Prior to this, He had gone through several cities of Galilee, teaching God's Word and performing mighty healings and miracles. Here, in His home town, He is rejected by His former townsfolk. They remember Him as a little boy growing up and they commit the sin of familiarity—not believing He could really be God's Son. When they heard the words that Jesus taught, it did not profit them because like the Hebrews wandering in the desert, the word they heard was not united with faith, *their* faith. As a result, Jesus could perform no great miracle there but only heal a few minor sicknesses.

The people of Nazareth had God's Son right in their midst, but tragically they missed out, and in effect, instead of entering the Promised Land of God's blessing, they went around in circles. Jesus was not the loser; today He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Sadly, the losers were the unbelieving people of Nazareth who missed the blessings that were meant for them. Again, we see the double tragedy: 1) They had the Word of God, the very Son of God, Jesus, in their midst, and 2) All the promises and blessings of God's Word were right next to them, but it profited them nothing because what they heard and saw was not united to faith. It is critically important to unite the Word of God proclaimed to us with faith from our heart. The Word of God tells us that "with God all things are possible," it does NOT say "with God all things are automatic or inevitable"! Our personal faith makes the critical difference.

Again, a few thousand years later, in our own generation, we see another scenario of God's people going in circles when they could enter His Promised Land. I'm talking about liberal theology and the liberal theological interpretation of the Bible. Specifically, I refer to those who try to approach the Bible with a denial of the divinity of Jesus Christ, a denial of His bodily resurrection, and a denial that the bible is the inspired Word of God. This type of thinking is exemplified in the work of the so-called "Jesus Seminar" where a group of unconverted theology professors meet and try to analyze the Bible as a book of history, but not divine inspiration. This type of thinking receives increasing coverage in the media, which often treats their conclusions as if they were "rock solid" new discoveries. We often see these conclusions on TV programs such as *Mysteries of the Bible* or in current articles in magazines like *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*.

The only problem with liberal theology and the liberal theological interpretation of the Bible is that it is both theologically unsound and also academically unsound. The tragedy, like the Hebrews wandering in the

desert and the villagers of Nazareth missing the Son of God in their midst, is that the theological liberals and the Jesus Seminar are wandering in the desert and missing God's Promised Land. More tragically, they become responsible for deceiving and misleading people who look to them for spiritual guidance. These unconverted professors draw erroneous and unsound conclusions which are popularized and then passed on in seminaries and divinity schools. Men and women in the pulpit who have been trained in these errors then pass them on to their congregations. The end result is spiritually dead congregations and spiritually dead people hungry and thirsty for spiritual reality. Too many Christian churches are wandering in this desert of liberalism. They have Bibles in their pews but do not believe them. They have crosses on their steeples, but deny the resurrection.

The epistle of Jude tells us to contend for the faith that was once delivered to us (Jude 3). I personally urge any minister, or student, or church member who has been subjected to the type of teaching exemplified by the Jesus Seminar, the late Rudolph Bultmann, or the current John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg, to know how unsound and erroneous these teachings are. Simply:

- 1) They are theologically unsound because NOT ONE OF THEM acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit in organizing and inspiring the Bible, and
- 2) They are academically unsound because they use a faulty, limited version of inductive reasoning that leads to limited, distorted, and really, bizarre speculations that are put forth as concrete, actual conclusions. Even secular historians shake their head in bewilderment at the methodology of the Jesus Seminar.

But there's hope. Recently, a German scholar, a lady name Eta Linneman (who had been trained by the late Rudolph Bultmann), has become born again and has renounced liberal biblical theology, and she is using her abilities and training to refute liberal biblical theology! All I can think of is the dramatic conversion and transformation the Apostle Paul experienced in Acts 9:20-21. Miss Eta Linneman has proven you don't have to go in circles; you can get on the straight road and enter the Promised Land. I urge anyone who professes liberal theology: Take a good, serious look at your faith—are you satisfied? Are you going in circles, or are you on the straight road?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

HOPE

No matter how mixed up or even ruined this planet is at times, if the sun rises and sets, and earth is still spinning on its axis, then God is not done with this planet yet. No matter how terrible your own life may seem to be going and no matter how great your temptation to give up in despair might be, if you are still living and breathing on this planet, then God is not done with you yet. In the midst of all the struggle and perplexity of this life, there is a gift from God called HOPE.

In 1 Corinthians 13:13, the Apostle Paul tells us there are three great virtues or strengths that God imparts to us. Faith, Hope and Love. Many are the times we Christians have heard wonderful teachings about Faith and Love. Few are the times we've heard studies about Hope. Basically, HOPE is the strength and dinner knowing placed in our heart by the Holy Spirit that our life IS going somewhere definite, somewhere good, and our journey on this earth is not some random process, but a journey directed by the hand of God bringing us to a good destination, *whether or not we can see or understand that destination at the present moment*. The Apostle Paul gives a specific description of that hope in Titus 2:13 where he calls the return of Jesus Christ "the blessed hope." The appearance and return of Jesus Christ is when all questions will be answered and all problems will be solved. As we look at current events, we more and more see the words of Jesus' own prophecies about His return being fulfilled and the time drawing closer.

In Jeremiah 29:11, we read: "'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not calamity to give you a future and a hope.'" Through the prophet Jeremiah, God promises His people that He has a plan, a future, and a hope for each of us. As we walk through this life, those of us who belong to Jesus Christ have a hope—the assurance from God that this thing called life on earth is all going somewhere definite—we are not just subject to the random buffeting of accidental events and happenings, but the hand of Almighty God is upon each of our lives molding, fashioning, and guiding us to a destination—and that destination is the ultimate full union and sharing of God's life with our being fashioned into the very image and likeness of His Son Jesus Christ for all eternity. Hope tells us that we are headed toward this destination at every moment of our life in Christ whether we can clearly see or understand the present

moment or not. Hope is this strength which is given to us by the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. The Holy Spirit Himself in us is God's down payment or guarantee of our final destination (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul tells us there are three great virtues or strengths that God gives us—Faith, Hope and Love. Although these three are listed and studied separately, they often work together, and like all the things of God, are meant to work together. Paul tells us rightfully that love, or *AGAPE*, is the greatest. Then faith is ability to reach into the invisible world of the spirit, lay hold of a promise of God, and bring it to pass back here in the visible material world (*PISTIS*). Hope (Greek: *ELPIS*) is the assurance that our life is being directed by God to His goal for us. Paul tells us that we can have faith without love. We can also have hope without love. But love, or *AGAPE*, is so far superior that if we have love, we will also *always* have faith and hope. 1 Corinthians 13:8 tells us that love believes all things, hopes all things, and never fails.

Nevertheless, hope is a platform when both love and faith can stop and rest during the difficult moments of life. Hope is a place where love and faith can stop and “catch their breath.” In Hebrews 6:18-20, the Apostle Paul calls hope the anchor of the soul. Just as an anchor holds a boat steady at its place in a harbor—hope holds us steady in our walk with God. The storm cannot shake loose a boat that is held by a good anchor. Hope is that “gut feeling” given to us by the Holy Spirit to keep us steady in the storms of life. Hope works as a helper to both love and faith.

Hope tells us to keep having faith even when it doesn't seem worthwhile to believe anymore. Hope tells us to keep loving even when it doesn't seem worth it to love anymore.

The prime example of a person of hope is Abraham. We normally think of Abraham as a man of great faith, and indeed he was. The Old Testament had a special title for him— “Abraham the Believer.” The New Testament calls him the Father of our faith. Abraham was also a man of great hope. He was a man who drew on hope when his faith had been stretched almost to the breaking point. He had been promised a son by God. The promise was made when Abraham was 75 years old and his wife Sarah was barren. For 25 years, he waited, and waited, and waited. So much time passed and nothing happened. Humanly speaking, the fulfillment of the promise was more than impossible. The word “impossible” was optimistic. But the Apostle Paul tells us in Romans, Chapter 4, that Abraham “hoped against hope.” He drew on hope when not only faith seemed foolish, but even hope seemed ridiculous.

Abraham would continually tell his wife Sarah, “Sarah, this is all going

someplace good.” And no doubt, Sarah would half-humor him and probably say, “Yes, I know, Abe. It happens every day—a 100 year-old man and a barren 90 year-old woman have a son.” And Abraham would probably counter and say, “No, Sarah, that’s just the point. It *doesn’t* happen every day, but God promised ME it WOULD happen to us. That’s why I have faith and hope.” And Paul writes that Abraham, in hope, grew strong in faith and trusted God to perform His promised—and God DID, and Abraham had a son named Isaac.

The opposite of hope is despair. Despair is when we feel there is no reason to go on, no reason to keep living, no reason to believe that anything will ever change again for the better. Hell is the place of eternal despair. The Lord Jesus gave some very detailed descriptions of hell—a place of darkness, fire, and torment, a place of separation from God where lost souls eternally cry and scream out in agony. But the real hell of Hell is that there is no more hope, ever again. There is the realization of everlasting despair.

In fact, we see the beginning of that hell of despair even in this life in all those who do not have Jesus Christ as their Lord. The Apostle Paul describes such people in Ephesians 2:12—Paul states that if we are separated from Christ, we have NO hope in this world and we are not partakers of the promises of God. How true that is. In our own nation of so much prosperity, we see so many people who own so many possessions, but have such empty hearts—hearts that really have NO hope, for true hope can only come from peace with God through His only begotten Son Jesus Christ. Hope and fulfillment cannot come by owning “one more thing,” or one more better possession.

We also learn from this same scripture in Ephesians that we have two reasons FOR hope if we are in Christ:

1) *The Word of God and His promises and covenants and the DURABILITY of those promises and covenants.* The entire Word of God is a testimony to the faithfulness of Almighty God to His promises and covenants—He fulfills His promises time after time after time—so that we have a certain hope in them.

2) *Jesus Christ and His durability and reliability.* He is the only one that God Almighty raised from the dead and miracle power is released whenever His resurrection is proclaimed. On the basis of that reliability and durability, we have a certain hope that we will share in His glory (Colossians 1:27) and we are promised His return to earth to set up a righteous Kingdom of love, peace and holiness. Paul calls this the “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13). Just as His resurrection and enduring power remain, we know for certain He will

return.

Finally, hope is what keeps us faithful during the battles of this life. The Lord Jesus said no person can serve two masters. The trials of life force us to choose at a given moment what is most important to us—God or *some thing*. Hope causes us to choose God. One preacher once said that it's hard to really embrace or hug someone with a lot of things in your hands. Hope causes us to say we'd rather empty our hands of *all* things, if necessary, so that we can hug God more tightly. But when we do let go of those things rather than lose God, we find that we are hugging the God who is owner of all things and can fill our hands with all the things we let go of, *and more*. More important, He has filled our *hearts* with good things.

Faith, Hope, and Love always work together. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul states love never fails. In Romans 5:5, he says hope is never disappointed. So, if love never fails and hope is never disappointed, faith will always work.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE FOURFOLD MIND OF CHRIST

In Philippians 2:5 the Apostle Paul tells us to have the same mind in us that was in Christ Jesus. In Romans 11:34, Paul asks, “Who has known the mind of the Lord?” But in 1 Corinthians 2:16 Paul answers that question by stating, “but we have the mind of Christ.” What can we learn from scripture about the mind of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ? Can we develop from scripture a psychological profile of Jesus and the inner motivations that inspired His actions?

In the Gospel of Mark 1:14-15, Jesus of Nazareth went around preaching that the Kingdom of God was at hand; the Kingdom of God was near. He was calling all people to enter this Kingdom by an act of repentance—the act of turning their lives around and going toward God instead of going away from God.

Jesus preached that the Kingdom of God was the realm where God ruled with sovereign authority. Mankind, through its own sin and willful rejection of God existed in a realm of suffering and brokenness. Mankind had created its own mess. God, however, because of His love and mercy was offering

all people everywhere the opportunity to enter His Kingdom where they would be forgiven, redeemed, restored, healed, liberated, and made whole.

Jesus called to all people to enter this Kingdom of God that was now breaking through into human history through His ministry. Jesus warned that there would be a day of judgment when God the Father would destroy the systems of this world that had brought sin and suffering and He would also judge those who lived by that world system, and then God's rule would be absolute. Now was the time to turn to God who would bring healing and wholeness. Jesus proclaimed Himself as God the Father's absolute messenger and also as the agent who would bring this Kingdom into fullness in history (John 14:6). The proclaiming of God's Kingdom was the driving force in the life and ministry of Jesus.

There's often a lot of preaching and teaching about the mind of Christ. We are told to have the mind of Christ. As we look at Jesus and we search the scriptures for the mindset of Christ, looking, as it were, for a psychological profile of Jesus, we can, I believe, see four foundational principles that made up Jesus' mindset. This should be our mindset also.

1) THE ABBA EXPERIENCE of Jesus—In His human consciousness, the first, foremost and overriding experience of Jesus was His constant abiding consciousness of God as His Father. Jesus always used the familiar term “abba” or “daddy” rather than the formal “ab” or “father” when He spoke of God. In fact, Jesus' body had been miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. Throughout all the levels of Jesus' human psyche, He had a conscious, subconscious and unconscious sense of perfect fellowship with God His Father. In Luke 2:49 we read that at 12 years old, entering puberty and adult consciousness, Jesus told Mary and Joseph in the Temple at Jerusalem that He was about His Father's business in His Father's house. God the Father Himself confirmed Jesus' sonship by actually speaking in an audible voice at Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River and later on the Mount of Transfiguration, that Jesus was His beloved Son in whom He was well-pleased. The bedrock of Jesus' psyche, or mind, was His absolute confidence and trust in the Father and that all He (Jesus) said and did was approved of and commissioned by the Father.

2) THE KENOSIS EXPERIENCE of Jesus—*Kenosis* is the Greek word meaning “emptying” and has the sense of freely laying aside one's rightful higher status in order to serve others for their benefit. (Read Philippians 2:5-9.) Secure in the Father's love, Jesus could act in human history without any need for ego-reinforcement and He did not need self-validation from any

human source, because the love and fellowship of the Father was the absolute validation of His human personality. Jesus' psychological freedom enabled Him to serve and minister to others and even forgive those who wronged Him and minister in this self-emptying mode with perfection. As a result, both the love of God (*agape*) and the power of God (*dunamis*) could flow through Him perfectly. Jesus was intensely aware of His role as the Servant of God prophesied in the Book of Isaiah. His statements in the Gospels about Himself as the Son of Man pointed to His lordship as a lordship of service and love for the Father and for others. Even in the parable of the unworthy servant who does all he is told without expecting a reward (Luke 17:5-10), Jesus is primarily referring to His own example of ministry and service.

3) THE LAW OF SOWING AND REAPING—The third active principle in the mind of Jesus of Nazareth was the constant awareness of the law of sowing and reaping. Every thought, word and action is a seed which produces a harvest. Every thought, word and action produces consequences that are greater than the thought, word or action itself. This law was established by God in the act of creation in Genesis. Everything physically reproduces through a seed. This is also true in the spiritual and psychological realms of life. Sowing and reaping is the very essence of creative power in the Kingdom of God. Jesus often preached and taught about the law of sowing and reaping. The Apostle Paul, later in the New Testament, also framed many teachings in the context of sowing and reaping (Galatians 6:7-9; 2 Corinthians 9:6-11).

4) THE ALPHA SEED AND THE OMEGA HARVEST—In other words, Jesus was always intensely aware in His mind that every act of His earthly life was a seed that would produce a glorified harvest for eternity. For example, He rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on a donkey, but He will return to earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords riding a majestic white horse. He called His church a city on a hill (Matthew 5:14); the eternal city of the New Jerusalem is on a high mountain (Revelation 21:10). In His earthly ministry, He ministered to multitudes of sick, hurting, hungry people. In Revelation 7:9-17, we see a multitude around His throne in heaven, redeemed by His blood, who enjoy eternal blessings and they will never hurt or hunger again. Jesus also told us that our lives have this same importance and that in and through Him we are “alpha seeds” who will have an “omega harvest” - “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth... But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...” (Matthew 5:19-21). His Apostles left

all to follow Him and their names are on the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:14). Most important, Jesus lived a perfectly righteous, obedient life as the Alpha Seed so that in the resurrection, His Omega Harvest of eternal perfect righteousness could be imparted to each one of us who accept Him into our heart.

We are told to have “the mind of Christ.” To have the mind of Christ, we must have the Person of Christ. That comes by our saying “Yes” to the decision Jesus originally proclaimed, “Repent and turn to God, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I HAVE SO MUCH MORE TO TELL YOU

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, we read that if any person is in Christ, they are a new creation; the old things have passed away and all things become new. How do we become “in Christ” so we can become this brand new creation, this brand new person? The answer is that we repent of our sins and we ask Jesus to come live in our heart—in other words, we ask the unlimited, glorified, risen Jesus Christ to come live inside our inner man and His Spirit becomes intimately joined and one with our spirit (John 14:23; 1 Corinthians 6:17). His eternal life brings our dead spirit alive. Asking Jesus to come live in our heart is such a simple act but the consequences are of eternal importance. The risen Jesus lives in us and reveals Himself to us in the most intimate interpersonal way possible.

When we invite Jesus into our heart, He enters our very being through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The act of asking Jesus into our heart is, in and of itself, a very simple action. But this simple act is of life-changing, awesome, momentous significance because of WHO we are asking to come in.

In our book on *GRACE* (available free to those who request it from this ministry), we saw that grace is the free gift of the very life of God Himself, which He places inside of us. We also saw that the content of grace is the very *inner life* of Jesus Christ that God places within us, so that what went on *inside of Jesus* in terms of His love, faith, and intimacy with the Father is placed inside of us—so we can experience the very inner life that Jesus

shared with the Father. We enjoy spiritual intimacy with both Jesus and the Father.

We read about Jesus as the Eternal Word in John 1:4—”In Him [Jesus] was life [*zoe*] and the life was the light of men.” We later read in 1 John 5:10-12:

The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son. And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

In other words, God Almighty gives His own eternal life into the hearts of those who believe in His Son Jesus. If we believe in Jesus as the Son of God, we have eternal life and everything eternal or divine life contains. If we don't believe in Jesus as Son of God, then we simply do not have true, divine, everlasting life in our spirit. The Apostle Peter tells us the exact same thing:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (2 Peter 1:2-4)

In the Gospel of John, Chapter 16, we see Jesus on the night before His crucifixion telling His disciples something very important:

I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you. (John 16:12-14)

What an interesting statement. Jesus said, “I have so much more to tell you.” I HAVE SO MUCH MORE TO TELL YOU—but you wouldn't

understand it right now. Only when I send the Holy Spirit after My resurrection will you understand it. Jesus was painfully aware of how limited He was in His ability to communicate to His disciples while He walked on this earth in His human body. In spite of those limitations, He was awesome in what He actually *did* communicate—but He knew there was so much more, *so much more*. He had so much inside of Him that He wanted to give to us, but it could only be put *in* us through the Holy Spirit. We see a HINT of that glory inside of Jesus being revealed before His death and resurrection in the incident known as the TRANSFIGURATION (Luke 9:28-35).

When Jesus went to the top of the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James and John, we read that Jesus began to shine like the sun—the hidden riches of glory within Him began to break through the very pores of His skin and be manifest for a moment. After His death and resurrection, Jesus was glorified and the riches and depths of His inner person was turned loose, and, through the Holy Spirit, the inner heart of Jesus could become intimately invited with the inner heart of anyone inviting Him into their heart. All the riches and power of Jesus' inner self could be revealed in the most intimate depth to the heart that opens to Him.

In other words, we each can have a closer, more intimate spiritual relationship with Jesus than even two people who have had the best marriage on earth. Some marriages are beautiful and excellent and the man and woman get to know each other as well as any two persons can get to know each other. But even in the best marriage, there is still a point beyond which even the deepest human intimacy cannot go. In our relationship with Jesus, however, there need be absolutely NO barrier to full interpersonal intimacy.

Even in everyday relationships, we may get to know each other well, but we don't know each other 24 hours a day. With Jesus, it's different because of His inner perfection. To have His inner perfection abiding in us at all times *is* our life and our strength.

Some people wish they had been alive when Jesus walked the earth, so they could have seen Him. The truth is, we know Jesus far better NOW through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit than we ever could have known Him when He walked the earth in His limited physical body. We even know Jesus better now than His own Apostles knew Him before His resurrection and the Day of Pentecost.

The life of Jesus within us saves us from the four major consequences of sin. The Greek word for sin is *hamartia*—it means to miss the bulls-eye or target. Sin is also, first and foremost, the breaking of man's covenant with God back in Genesis 3. Through Adam, all of us had a covenant with God—He gave us life and existence and we, in turn, were to love and serve Him.

The sin of Adam and our own sinful nature is a rejection of God's love and care. And we suffer consequences.

1) *Sin is punished*—Sin is a rejection of God and brings separation from God, the Source of spiritual life and all other kinds of life. Romans 3:23 tells us the wages of sin is death. Jesus, on the other hand, gives us the free gift of life—the sharing of God's own everlasting, eternal life.

2) *Sin destroys our ability to love*—Every sin is a negation of love. Every sin is a rejection of God who is love. All of our inability to love are always the end result of sin—either our own sin or someone else's sin against us. But Jesus within us restores our ability to love. (Read 1 John 3:14-16.)

3) *Sin is slavery*—Regardless of the sin, we are trapped by it—it controls us, we lack our freedom. Sin, either one time or a habit, is an evil act that controls our will. In John 8:34-36, Jesus stated that everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin, but He, Jesus, sets people free indeed, or *really* free. The power of the risen Christ within us restores our self-control.

4) *Sin results in loneliness and anxiety*—The first result of the very first sin ever committed by a human, Adam, was broken fellowship and fear. When God came to fellowship with Adam, Adam hid. When God asked Him why He hid, Adam said, "I was afraid." That broken fellowship was the origin of all loneliness and alienation in the world. The fear was the origin of all anxiety and stress. Jesus, however, restores our fellowship with God and with each other through the cross and He reestablishes peace and security in our heart.

Our spiritual life boils down to a very simple either/or reality. Either Jesus is in our heart and we have eternal life and all that eternal life brings with it—OR, Jesus is not in our heart and we have spiritual death within us and all that spiritual death brings.

My personal question to you is:
"What's In Your Heart?"