

# GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

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*CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ~ MAKING DISCIPLES ~ EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY*

## THE BLESSED HOPE

### Part 1

By Rayola Kelley

Once again, we are facing a New Year. How many of you thought we would actually see 2008? As I said at the beginning of 2007, the one thing that I am sure of and that we are a year closer to Jesus' coming. According to some of the popular predictions of certain individuals, we should not even be here. The reason for our supposed absence is that Jesus was presumed to have come some time last year. Some individuals had it all figured out, and according to their information on the subject, they could prove it. Some Christians were once again jumping on the bandwagon as to how Jesus was to return last year.

As Scripture advocates, there is nothing new under the sun (*Ecclesiastes 1:9*). The speculation that surrounds Jesus' coming is no exception. I have been a Christian for over 30 years. I can remember how a man figured that Christ would come back in 1988. He even wrote a book that presented 88 reasons why Jesus was coming back in that particular year. In my recollection, many Christians ran out and bought that book. I can remember how excited some of those Christians were. In their minds they were going home that year. After all, times were getting bad and life was presenting its challenges. In light of such matters, surely Jesus was going to come back to deliver them.

Well, guess what happened? Jesus did not come back. Some of those Christians were devastated. In fact, some became scoffers at the whole situation. And, what was more amazing was the man who wrote the book, just figured out he might

sucker the Christian people again by his next prediction. He wrote another book, calling it 89 reasons why Jesus was coming back in 1989. This time, the Christian public did not buy his vain speculations on the subject.

The great mystery for 20 centuries has been the question of when Jesus is coming back. Let us face it, the Jews were looking for Him to come the first time, and many are still waiting for Him to come. As believers, we are to look for Him to come the second time. As in His first coming, the speculations have been incredible surrounding this event. Instead of bringing any kind of hope to people, it has made them operate in what I call wishful thinking.

Wishful thinking goes like this. "All the facts point to Jesus coming back at this time; therefore, we can conclude it is true because it sounds right." Such thinking has nothing to do with hope but with wishful thinking. It is as if someone is trying to conjure up a case and present it to God, so that He will see that He must agree with his or her thinking; and Jesus will come back according to the person's conclusion.

The Blessed Hope has been a part of the Church's foundation since Jesus ascended into heaven after His death, burial and resurrection. However, it was never meant to become part of a guessing or speculation game, but one that would be a point of great hope, comfort and encouragement to the Christian. Sadly, instead of it being a point of hope, it has become a point of great speculation and debate that produces scoffers even in the Christian realm. In fact, in some cases, it has ceased to serve as a point of truth or comfort, and has become a doctrine that can be adjusted and fit into certain beliefs. Often, it is treated as the doctrine of the great escape, rather than the truth of the great blessed hope that has been given to every Christian who believes upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

My main concern at this point in

time is the condition of America. What will we see as a nation before Jesus returns for His Church? According to my scriptural understanding, Jesus' coming will be triggered by events involving the nation of Israel, not the Church in America. In spite of the heretical teaching of Replacement Theology, the Church is not the nation of Israel. We are spiritual children of Abraham due to faith, but there always have been a biological people brought forth from the loins of Abraham who represent the nation of Israel (*Matthew 3:9; Galatians 3:6-9*). Many of the promises in the Bible have to do with the nation of Israel. Granted, as his spiritual children we will benefit from some of those glorious promises, but we must not be mistaken as to whom these promises are being directed.

Some of those promises surrounding Abraham's biological offspring involve people's attitude towards Israel. Based on attitudes towards Israel, nations will be blessed or brought down (*Genesis 12:1-3*). Have you heard the latest? In the name of trying to make peace with the political insanity of the Muslim radicals, American leaders are willing to sacrifice the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign nation in its own land. Sadly, some of the thinking that is being advocated through diplomatic channels has been influenced by "so-called" Christian leaders who do not represent the scriptural beliefs of the Christian faith. However, this is nothing new. This same attitude existed during the rise and fall of Nazism. Talk about promoting something that will not only cut our throat as a nation, but it might prove to be our final demise.

In all honesty, there can be no point of agreement on any front with the Muslim faith and its hatred of and goal to destroy Israel. Regardless of how the Muslims talk about being peace-loving, hatred is the platform of their belief. It begins with the hatred towards Israel, and is also being clearly directed at Christianity, Americans and any other "so-called" infidels who dare to disagree with their religious insanity.



Their goal is not only to destroy and possess Israel, but also to control the whole world. Our attempt to make peace with this viper will result in it turning on us in vengeance and anger. We know in the end that the Muslims will not succeed in subduing the whole world under their demonic lie, but how many people will be sacrificed in the process in the name of tolerance and ignorance as many turn the other way out of fear and indifference to the real issues?

Let us consider the moral condition of America. We have kicked God and prayer out of schools, as well as many other institutions. We have done away with displaying the Ten Commandments in public places. One can conclude that the political climate of America does not recognize God or respect His form of justice. Such disrespect has caused a snowball effect that will bring this nation to ruin.

The schools in California can now teach homosexuality to students from kindergarten and up. To speak of homosexuality as a sin or an abomination to God from the pulpits is considered a hate crime that could end up with the church doors being closed. Pornography has taken center stage under the guise of freedom of speech. Our children and elderly are being abused and violated in ways that are unimaginable. Clearly, the imaginations of many are becoming wicked continually as they explore every evil, sensual practice while sacrificing the innocence and dignity of others (*Genesis 6:5-7* refer to *Matthew 24:37-39*).

Another environment we must consider is the professing Church in America. It is clear that much of it has become worldly in its philosophies and practices. It may be politically correct, but revival will never occur from such a premise. Only true repentance and humility will cause the Church to be revived from its worldly, dull or ineffective state.

Granted, many Christians are doctrinally savvy, but they lack true revelation when it comes to Jesus Christ. They may be moved by religious causes, but how many are being led by the Spirit? There are many activities going on in the name of religion, worship and "so-called" right-

eousness, but has God ordained them? Statistics claim that many are attending church, but how many of these are truly saved, and learning to become devoted disciples of Jesus? In all honesty, is God really involved with the religious pursuits and activities of what we can perceive to be the visible or professing Church around us? We can point to the quantity of what is being done in the name of Jesus, but does any of it really possess the quality that comes from the work of the Spirit, the life of God, and the truth of Jesus?

The reason I am bringing up the condition of America is because, as a nation, we are daring and demanding God to judge us. God has a limit as to how long He will be long-suffering towards a wicked nation. When you think that if God had found ten righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah, He would have spared these two wicked cities, we get a sense of His willingness to refrain from such judgment. However, eventually as a righteous Judge, He must bring about judgment. We know He could not find ten righteous people in these two wicked cities, and the one man (and his daughters) who was vexed over the wicked condition was spared from the judgment that fell upon them (*Genesis 18:32-33; 19:23-28; 2 Peter 2:7-9; 3:9*).

The warnings of impending judgment against America are sounding. Economically, our money is becoming increasingly worthless in every market including Canada. We have drought in one part of the country and floods in another part. Consider the Scripture in *Amos 4:6-7*: "*And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest; and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city; one piece was rained upon, and the piece upon which it rained not, withered.*" As you continue to read *Amos 4*, you realize that it is God who blesses and withholds His blessings.

We also have threats of destructive tornadoes, hurricanes and earthquakes. Obviously, we are living in precarious times, and wishful thinking will not change the fact that, as a nation, we will reap what we have sown

in regards to our spiritual state before God (*Galatians 6:7-9*).

The question we must be concerned about as Christians is are we ready to stand if such judgment should touch our lives because of the wickedness that surrounds us? Granted, as believers we will be spared from God's wrath, but judgment has to do with testing and separation. People will be forced to make a decision as to whom or what they will cling to in such times. We can ignore, deny or live according to wishful thinking concerning the frightening warnings that are already besieging us as a nation, or we can prepare to find our refuge in the Lord. Like Habakkuk, who wrestled over the impending judgment ready to come upon Judah, will we come to the same conclusion he did as he faced the impending tribulation: "*Behold, his soul that is lifted up is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith*" (*Habakkuk 2:4*).

Personally, I have no idea what we might face as a nation. If God's scriptural warnings hold true, we could possibly see this country, in the near future, taste the bitter dregs of its rebellion and idolatry. As Christians, we must know that our hope is not in this present world or age. However, we must honestly face the times we are living in. We cannot hide behind wishful thinking that being a Christian will provide us an escape. When Jesus talked about tribulation or trouble, He never talked about it in terms of escaping. Rather, He talked about it in terms of finding a place of refuge in Him, so that His people could be delivered through it like Noah. After all, our Lord has overcome this world (*John 16:33; 2 Peter 2:4-5*).

This brings me to the subject of Jesus returning for His Church. The Blessed Hope is about living in light of the great expectation of Jesus coming back, not in light of the great escape. Much of the presentation of the great escape is nothing more than wishful thinking. Such thinking hopes that our faith as believers will never be tested in the fires of judgment, persecution or loss. On the other hand, the great expectation means our hope does not rest in what we will not experience or see. Rather, it rests in the person of Jesus coming for us.

## TOO LATE By Jeannette Haley

As another year rolls around, reflecting upon the events of the previous year seems like the natural thing to do. Some situations tally up with a measure of satisfaction, while others bear the stamp of “too late” indelibly impressed upon them.

Some of the “too late” stuff can relate to last year’s “resolutions” or goals. You know, things like studying the Bible more, praying more, witnessing more, exercising more, and eating less. Then, there are the more serious “too late” issues that can haunt us for a lifetime, unless we repent, or, as the case may be, cast all of our regrets, concerns and cares upon the Lord.

Adam and Eve certainly found out *too late* that God meant what He said about not eating of the forbidden fruit. Nothing they could ever say or do could reverse the awful consequences for their disobedience. She was deceived, he was disobedient. You know the rest of the story.

From those two premises — deception and disobedience — spring the majority of our “too late” regrets. Consider the antediluvian inhabitants’ disobedience to God’s moral laws, written in their consciences that resulted in the great Flood that destroyed all life except that which was shut up within Noah’s ark. As the raging waters closed over the peoples’ heads, in their final moments, all knew that it was *too late*. It was *too late* to repent; *too late* to embrace the truth; *too late* to be saved.

Abraham pleaded with God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if ten righteous souls could be found. Sadly, ten couldn’t be found. We all know the terrible fate of the inhabitants of these cities, and of Lot’s wife who disobeyed, looked back, and turned into a pillar of salt. Once the judgment of God comes down, it’s *too late*. According to the first chapter of *Romans*, America is on the brink of experiencing a similar fate, regardless of who becomes the next president. The bottom line is, God has a limit to how much sin and debauchery He will tolerate from any individual, city, tribe, or nation, and America is no exception. Furthermore, we are not God’s cho-

sen people. We are not the “apple of His eye.” Israel is.

“But,” someone may argue, “We are Christians.” The answer to this is found in *2 Peter 4:17, 18*: “*For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*” The entire professing church would have to truly repent and be converted for God to forestall His judgment. In addition, America would have to wholly line up with God’s plan for Israel. Is it *too late*?

Let’s remember the story given in Exodus where we read the incredible account of how the king of Egypt suffered through ten mighty manifestations of God’s power, yet his heart continued to harden in spite of giving occasional lip-service to the God of Israel. In the end, his deceptive heart resulted in the self-delusion that propelled him to pursue the fleeing Israelites into the midst of the Red Sea. As with the antediluvians, it was *too late* for Pharaoh and his armies to turn back as the waters flowed over them, taking them down into a watery grave.

*Too late* the unbelieving, disobedient, murmuring Children of Israel promised obedience to God. Because of it, they were destined to wander in the wilderness until all died except Joshua, Caleb and those who were under the age of twenty. (Numbers 14).

King Saul realized *too late* that his continual disobedience and delusion caused the presence of God to depart from him, costing him both his life and that of his son.

Once disobedient, idolatrous Israel had been taken captive to Babylon, it was *too late* for them to recover all that was lost. What agony it must have been to recall, *too late*, the words of warning from their prophets. For 70 long years, they remained away from their homeland, from Jerusalem, from their way of life and worship.

The Old Testament, given to us for our example, is rich with “too late” stories, proverbs and admonitions. One would think that with such a wealth of wisdom and instruction our personal lives, families, churches, and nation would be free from those regrettable “too late” situations. Yet, it is ob-

vious that the same mistakes are being repeated on every level.

Now, I realize that there are those today who wave the Old Testament aside as non-relevant. “We are New Testament Christians,” they argue. But, just what does that mean? Are we to assume that somehow God Almighty *changed* because Jesus was crucified, buried and resurrected? If so, just *how* has He changed? The answer is, it is impossible for God to change. He is immutable or unchangeable. God is still holy. God’s wrath still abides upon the wicked. (See Romans 1:18, 2:8; Ephesians 5:6; 1 Thessalonians 2:16; John 3:36.)

By throwing out the Old Testament, and redefining the New, today we see a new Jesus emerging who is unrecognizable by New Testament standards. This new Jesus fits in nicely with the politically correct foolishness of our day. He also fits in nicely with the mug wumps — you know, people sitting on the fence with their mug on one side and their wump on the other. If you didn’t get that, I’m talking about people with one foot in the world, and the other in religion. They call themselves the “emerging church.” The Bible calls it the apostate church.

This grotesque, religious, politically correct, worldly, ecumenical hybrid may claim to be “Christian” but the spirit behind it is antichrist. Working through unbiblical, humanistic, and New Age philosophies, this movement is drowning the world today in a flood of spiritual darkness and death. Paul warned, “*Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God*” *2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4*. [Emphasis added.] It will be *too late* for multitudes of deceived souls who do not recover themselves out of the snare of the devil. (See *2 Timothy 2:25, 26*.)

What did the Jesus of the Bible (not the modern version of “Jesus”) teach about the subject of “too late”? According to the parable of the barren

fig tree (*Luke 13*) and in His discourse found in *John 15*, we learn that if we fail to bear fruit (evidence of Christ in our life) we will be "cast into the fire, and burned." In *Matthew 13* we read that when the harvest is reaped, the tares (phony "Christians") will be gathered and burned. According to the parable of the great supper (*Luke 14*), all those who have excuses why they could not come at the Lord's invitation will be excluded, or left out.

In *Matthew 22*, we read the sobering account of the man who came to the wedding of the king's son in his own wedding garment (his own righteousness) and how he was cast into outer darkness. The rich fool in *Luke 12* was given the opportunity to follow Jesus and gain eternal life, but his heart was with his treasure, loving his money more than he loved Jesus, thus he walked away in his lost state. In *Luke 16*, Jesus paints a graphic picture for us of the reality of hell and the horror one faces when it is "too late." Again, in *Matthew 25*, Jesus made it plain that there is an "everlasting punishment" for many where it is "too late" to repent and be saved.

In the parable of the talents (*Matthew 25*), the unprofitable (unbelieving and disobedient) servant was cast into outer darkness. Likewise, in this same chapter, Jesus gave us the parable of the ten virgins, five wise and five foolish. The wise entered in to be with their Lord, but the door was shut, never to be opened again, to the foolish. In *Luke 17*, we read of the sudden coming of the Lord, and how it will be *too late* for those who are not prepared.

Many people, two of whom we personally knew, and some that friends knew and loved, have passed out of this world quite recently. Of them all, we are only assured that three of them are in glory with the Lord they loved and served. Others we cannot say. We know one, who, in all probability, is eternally lost. For



those who do not belong to Christ, and who suddenly find themselves snatched out of this world, it is truly *too late*. It is too late to believe, too late to repent, too late to receive

Christ and His forgiveness, too late to be born again.

What about you? If you died today, would you be rejoicing in the presence of the Lord, or would it be too late?

#### LETTERS & EMAILS



"Wonderful Holiday messages in your last sermon and pamphlet." - WA

"I am really getting a lot out of your series 'The Cover Up' Rayola . . . It is explaining a lot about how the churches are misrepresenting the truth of the Bible and leading people away from God instead of to Him. You write in a way that is easy to understand. Jeannette, I also thought it was interesting how you brought out Eph. 2:20. Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone, etc. I have been noticing how the enemy uses that as a counterfeit in the Masons, etc., especially in their buildings. They (the Masons) are always emphasizing the cornerstones of their buildings. Makes sense if you realize how the enemy always uses a counterfeit to mock God." - AR

"I have receive the parcel which you have posted to me . . . I have already half of the "MANUAL" ["Manual for the Single Christian Life" by Rayola Kelley] It is nice material which will equip me the future. The other one too, most of the topics we treated last semester on doctrine and what we shall be offering next semester are in it. It will really help to enhance my knowledge on the deity of God and other heavenly beings and the Satan, creation etc. God richly bless you. My sincere thanks to Rayola." - Ghana

"I have been reading the revised Hidden Manna, I had forgotten how not only insightful it is but just flat incredible!!! Rayola...what God has shown to you simply amazes me. I know it has been a journey to get this far, thank you for sharing it all, the good the bad and the ugly! When I look back over the last 10 1/2 years and in part of our ministry you all have had I can't help but think WOW! How we all came together and how you have been used in our lives and how He has used and is using you in the lives God has placed in our lives. You are our TREASURES!! Anyway I wanted you to know how much respect and love I have for you all!!" - ID

"I just wanted to write and express my gratitude to God and to you for the articles on your website. I just finished reading Jeannette's article: "Away with Him" and Rayola's article: "Have you heard the latest?" Both articles were very encouraging and thought-provoking. I am always inspired to seek to please God and to love Him more when reading your articles. Definitely not the watered-down "stuff" being fed to the masses by the apostate church. Thank you again for your persevering, faithful service to God and others. The grace of God be with you, In Jesus Name." - MD

"I do feel SUPER after my visit with Rayola. Understanding is a powerful thing. I m just about done with Prison and dots book. Wow! I have said it before ... Rayola you are a hidden treasure!" - ID (See ebook, "From Prisons and Dots to Christianity" by Rayola Kelley <http://www.gentleshepherd.com/ebooks/christianebooks/gsm ebooks.htm>)

"Rayola! I just loved the way you differentiated between "strangers and pilgrims" and 'wanderers'! [November issue] That was a nugget of gold for me, as I'd never heard it explained like that before. Now, when I hear someone say they are just "wanderers" here on this earth, I can ask them if they know the God whom they say they serve . . . the word 'wanderer' always hits me with the connotation that everything is spinning out of (their) control, and they just bump around on this road of life, never knowing what's happening. Your astute definitions of these words struck a deep chord within me, and I thank you for that bit of 'honey' from His Word. Also, you mentioned prostitutes who define themselves by this world system, and it occurred to me how many 'prostitutes' sit on pews every week in churches! They are dressed in a white gown like The Bride, but they are prostitutes underneath that white gown. Whitewashed sepulchers comes to mind here . . . The summation of Thanksgiving: The ancient Israelites began the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles during which they gave thanks to God for their harvest. Jeannette, at the end of your SUPERB article, overflowing with

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Next month, I am going to examine the Blessed Hope or the Great Expectation in light of the hope and comfort it is to bring to the Church until Jesus returns for His Body. My goal is to bring balance to all the debates and wishful thinking that some Christians operate in because of the confusion and fear that surrounds this very subject.

*Letters & Emails, Con't.*

Truth, you asked: "What are you thankful for?" . . . I'm daily thankful for GSM and the labor of love that you all put forth, for His Sheep! You are all so greatly loved and cherished by those of us who just wait on the next edition of the GSM Newsletter. You are fulfilling the call of God on your life, and it's very apparent by the quality of truthful articles that you continually send to us. May God reward you openly." - FL

"Could you please tell me if you know of any good, Bible believing, truth-seeking, churches in Ocala, FL. My family and I are looking and praying about finding a church who preaches/teaches the uncompromised Word of God and is not operating under any type of obvious deception. We want the Truth the Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth...a church that has accountability and operates with discernment. Denominations are not the deciding factor, only that the church is Christian (by the Biblical sense), Truth seeking and led by the Holy Spirit and God's Word in all they do and say. Any help, advice, suggestions or ideas would be greatly appreciated." - FL

"The Churches are in deep worldwide deception. This apostolic stuff is big. Have you read the book by Sandy Simpson, "The New Apostolic Reformation"? What angers me the most is it is going into the third-world countries to the unreached people groups. I still say that the greatest need in the Body of Christ is prayer and discernment." - WA

"I really enjoy your NEWSLETTERS. . . God richly bless you in your ministry so that we too may be blessed through you." - Ghana

**RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER**

**UNCONDITIONAL LOVE AND REPENTANCE**

**Q:** *A church I used to attend taught that once a person accepts Christ as his or her personal savior, any sins they commit in the future are already forgiven because of God's unconditional love. Does that mean a Christian who commits a sin doesn't need to repent and seek forgiveness?*

**A:** Perhaps your former church taught such a concept, but the Bible does not. Sin breaks fellowship with a holy God no matter what spiritual status, saved or unsaved, a person may reside in. God's love towards each of us has been freely expressed by the redemptive work of Jesus' on the cross, but it is not unconditional. We must receive His love when we embrace the gift of His life. From that point, His love should be motivating us in all we do. As Jesus stated, if you love Him, you will obey His commandments, not discard or show contempt towards them in disobedient actions (*John 14:15*).

Although salvation is a free gift of God, it does not give us a free ticket to live any old way we desire. Such an attitude implies we are deluding ourselves that we are on our way to heaven, when we, in fact, are still walking in the ways of death, destruction and hell. Scripture bears this out. The Apostle says of such a notion about continuing in sin, "God forbid" (*Romans 6:1-2*). The Apostle John stated that those who sin transgress the Law of God (*1 John 3:4*). He goes on to say: "*Whosoever is born of God doeth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.*" (*1 John 3:9-10*)

It is obvious that if a person is truly born from above, he or she will not be comfortable with sin. Such a person will feel the strong conviction of the Spirit upon his or her life when in sin. As a result, he or she will come back to Jesus as their advocate and once again seek the necessary forgiveness from God to ensure recon-

ciliation with Him (*1 John 1:9; 2:1-2*).

The redemption of Christ is all about dealing with the issue of sin. He came to set us free from the dictates and consequences of sin. It amazes me that those who refer to themselves as Christians would consider for one moment that His redemption means that individuals can continue in the very sin that cost Him His life. Jesus' redemption deals with every aspect of sin. He died for our past sins, while the Spirit was given to us to empower us to be victorious over the present sins that could so easily beset us in our flesh. This is why we must learn to walk in the Spirit according to the righteousness of God. In doing so it will ensure that we will be saved from the future wrath of God that will be directed at all disobedience.

At this point, all I can advise you to do is to beware of those who imply that as Christians we are not responsible to conduct ourselves in honorable ways. Such an implication cheapens the work of redemption and the grace of God. If a person is truly saved, he or she will possess Christian love and unfeigned faith. Godly love compels believers to do right, while sincere faith will always manifest itself in obedience. Remember, people are known by their fruits, not their titles.

**QUOTABLE QUOTES**

"A government big enough to give you everything you want, is strong enough to take everything you have." - Thomas Jefferson

"The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of the blessings. The inherent blessing of socialism is the equal sharing of misery." - Winston Churchill

"If you think health care is expensive now, wait until you see what it costs when it's free!" - P.J. O'Rourke

"I don't make jokes. I just watch the government and report the facts." - Will Rogers

"Government's view of the economy could be summed up in a few short phrases: If it moves, tax it. If it keeps moving, regulate it. And if it stops moving, subsidize it." - Ronald Reagan (1986)

In loving memory of Betty Swinford, evangelist and author, we hope to re-print her life-changing book, "He's Taking Me To Glory" as space allows in this and future newsletters. We pray that God will draw you closer to Himself through this book.—GSM

### **HE'S TAKING ME TO GLORY** **By Betty Swinford**

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#### **1. "Show Me Thy Glory" Exodus 33:18**

I am 49 years old and I ride a Honda. I would like for you to know (without being in the least irreverent) that God likes to ride Hondas too. Perhaps He even likes to ride Yamahas and Harley Davidsons. I don't really know about that. But I know He likes to ride Hondas because He rides with me.

It would be impossible to venture a guess as to how many times we've hit those desert trails together. And the magic of His presence begins to happen. The wind billows my shirt, tosses my hair and caresses my face. Soon I am lost in the sweet sense of freedom, release and relaxation.

Charlie, the mobile home manager in the park where I live says, "A Honda riding evangelist? Well, I'll tell you something! I wouldn't want to ride one of those things unless I was a preacher!"

Our home (in this park) is situated just outside the city. We are surrounded by mountains, ravines and rolling desert. Right now it is carpeted by soft green moss that has been produced by the winter rains. Trees are scant but there are many cycle trails, greasewood bushes and dry waterways.

Like a butterfly on the loose, your bike flies along the trails, dipping sharply now into a deep sandy arroyo, rising now up a steep trail that leaves you breathless, exhilarated. Bobbing along the flowering yellow palo verdes and greasewood bushes, you move without effort, freely but not carelessly.

Perhaps mental work is the very worse kind of all, and total mental work can cause great weariness. The preacher in Ecclesiastes declared that much study was wearying to the flesh.

In our modern day vernacular, we 'can't handle it.' You have—or should have—your own method of relaxation from the cares and pressures of the world. For some, gardening is the answer. For others it's driving. For me, it's my Honda. It's my exit from the typewriter and studying to a frontier where all is at rest, and where everything is moving in the perfect will of God. (Nature is always moving in the will of God.) A beautiful exit it is. For it takes me straight into the waiting arms of my God.

But something far more invigorating and exciting than freedom and release are mine. His presence comes to me in such reality that I am lost in the wonder of it. He is so majestic that all else—pain, suffering, emotional problems, financial pressures—become dissolved in His love. When He comes near and the Holy Spirit begins to communicate, nothing else really matters. Nothing. There is only the time and the moment and the wonder. And there is the clinging hope and prayer that 'this time' He will not leave again. Not that He ever really does! He's always present with us. But to lose the sense of that glorious communion, that manifested presence is simply too great a loss to bear.

One tough, one taste and it seems that we are lost to Him forever. We pursue Him, the Living God, the Spirit of God, to the end of our lives. What was once so dear to us becomes as froth and tinsel when compared to these 'alone' times with Him.

In memory I go to a book written by Amy Carmichael called, "Mimosa." It's a story of a girl from India, and the story is told of her that, 'one look at Him and she was His forever.' And she didn't even know His Name.

Amy had her own trysting place with God, a bed filled with illness and pain, from which she ministered faithfully to her beloved India for twenty long years. Amy, who, as a child, asked God to give her blue eyes. But when she lifted her head and looked into the mirror they were still brown. She wondered that God had not answered her prayer, until He spoke gently to her and said, "I did answer, Amy. I said, 'no.'"

The child Amy who went to bed at night, smoothed a place beside her

on the bed and said, "Please, God, come sit beside me."

I wonder how the yearning heart of God can bear it to see His children too caught up with the pressures and 'hurries' of this age to stop and say, "please, God, come sit beside me."

The late A. W. Tozer caught such a vision of the longing heart of God that he penned the words, "We have a God who longs to be longed for, yearns to be sought after."

Today I ride easy, reflecting on all the past thoughts. The Holy Spirit taught me long ago that it's God who always makes the first overture. We think it's us! The thought comes, "I think I'll go pray for awhile." And we suppose that was our very own decision. It wasn't. He placed that thought in our minds and then gave us a heart to respond. None of us would ever have a thought God-ward except that He first placed it there. "We love Him because He first loved us." And every thought, every desire, every service accomplished for Him is because He made that first overture.

The mountains beckoned like big silent friends, and the mobile home park was still too close. The dirt trails went into a giant circle 8, up, down, around and away. But it took skill and concentration, and today was a day for relaxing, not tensing up.

Another motorcycle roared into view just ahead of me, the rider leaning up and forward as he leaped a rise. His helmet bobbed up and down for a moment and then he was lost from sight.

I sighed with thankfulness, moving more and more deeply into the vast expanse of desert. So free in the Spirit! So wonderful, the presence of God in the universe which He had created. So powerful. So filled with beauty. I stopped my Honda and cut off the ignition. It was so quiet. The tiny yellow heads of the greasewood bushes nodded gently in the breeze. It was exhilarating. Headly.

"Oh Lord," I whispered, "I'm so glad the Holy Spirit doesn't get old. Thankful that there's no generation gap in Him. So grateful that people can stay young in spirit when they stay close to the Spirit of Life!"

*~To Be Continued~*