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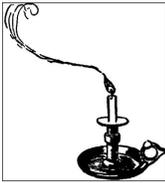
SPIRITUAL SURVIVAL

Part 16

The Thin Veil

By Rayola Kelley

Life is fragile. The Apostle Peter voiced the Psalms when he stated that all flesh is as withering grass, and all the glory of man is as the fading flower (1 Peter 2:24). James 4:14 tells us that our life is a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Job said that man born of woman is of few days. He comes forth as a flower that will be cut down (Job 14:1, 2). We are also told to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom (Psalm 90:12).



When I meditate on the fact that beyond the physical world is an eternity without end and time, I become overwhelmed. There is a certain awe that gently comes to rest on my soul as I realize that my time on earth will prove to be a short journey. I am reminded that in the physical world we are subject to time as it is broken down in moments, minutes, days, months, and years. Time reminds me that all matters done in this body, good, indifferent, or bad, will have an end to them and that we have a limited opportunity to discover the meaning and purpose for our existence. Even though we start out with high expectations in the height of youthful strength, we will quickly discover that time has a way of humbling our strength and quickly dissipating it as the measurements of time sweep past us in what appears to be a gigantic tumbling machine. As believers, our character and faith will be tossed around by the matters of life, but we will see that such times are designed to separate the dross of our lives from the silver of Jesus' precious redemption. It is from the

perspective of my preparation and heavenly citizenship that I remember I am a stranger who is passing through this present world, as well as a pilgrim who by faith is looking for my spiritual destination, a city made by the hands of God.

When we as believers think about our lives, we must remember that only a thin veil separates us from eternity. This veil is our fleshly body. This was clearly brought out in the case of Jesus. Hebrews 10:19-20 states, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say the flesh. It is through Jesus' sacrifice of His body on the cross that we can now enter into a new way that embraces the unseen and the eternal.

In the book, "The Survivors Club" it tells of incredible stories of people surviving the most remarkable circumstances. As you consider each story, you can see the providential hand of God. As a result, these people have inspiring testimonies that show that no matter how hopeless something may seem, it might become the very avenue in which the miraculous occurs.

This book also contains facts and figures as to the possible reasons these people survived such events. In one of the author's side notes he talks about an extraordinary helmet. In fact he refers to it as "The God Helmet". "The God Helmet" is an ordinary yellow snowmobile helmet, but what makes it different is that it is rigged with magnets and wires. The creator of it, Dr. Michael Persinger of Sudbury, Canada, straps on the yellow headgear to the one being tested in his soundproof chamber, and exposes the participant to weak electromagnetic fields similar to those generated by cordless phones and computers. Ninety percent of those who have exposed themselves to the test describe experiencing what Dr. Persinger calls a "sensed presence." Those who are

religious describe the "sensed presence" according to their beliefs, while those who are unbelievers felt a detachment and a floating sensation, while a handful detected ghosts and demons, and one person insisted the devil himself had invaded the chamber.

Dr. Persinger chalked these experiences up to the imagination. However, the imagination must have some former understanding or knowledge in which to associate or identify a present experience. For example, the imagination of those who did not believe in demons, would not suspect or imagine that they would encounter such an entity while being tested. Imagination also cannot produce senses. For the mind to experience ecstasy attached to certain activities a person must actually induce it in some way. Due to our flesh being a thin veil, I believe that like the affects of hallucinating drugs, Persinger discovered a door within the mind that, once it is opened, people see into the unseen dimension.

The truth is our lives and personal realities are fragile. 1 Corinthians 13:12 tells us we see through a glass darkly. We are all walking towards our physical demise to discover the eternal on the other side of the door. We are limited by a body that is subject to the workings of the world around us and foreign to the unseen world that awaits us. When I think that only a very thin, fragile veil separates me from that which is eternal, I cannot help but consider that each life is intended to leave a legacy. However, such a legacy will mean nothing unless it has been established in light of an eternal inheritance.

This came to the forefront recently when I was once again reminded of how our lives are a mere vapor. During this recent time, I lost a dear friend, Vickie, and my aunt Frances. My friend and my aunt were two distinct people. They both left me with a different legacy in relationship to memories and impressions. They both physically suffered in ways that could not be described. As we are aware, our medical system stresses

quantity, but quality can be sacrificed during such times. For these two special women, the quality of their lives proved to be challenging. However, in the case of my friend, Vickie, she embraced life with zeal. I would often marvel at her as she took the challenges of her sufferings and turned them into badges of courage that made deep impressions on those around her.

My Aunt Frances, on the other hand, had to choose life in the midst of being ravaged by her personal sufferings. In essence, I believe she chose the quantity rather than the quality for the sake of others. Her heart's resolution was always to see her loved ones happy and satisfied in their lives. The things I remember about my aunt are those moments that would bring laughter. This laughter was in reference to incidents involving my aunt that came to the forefront during times of reminiscing. Granted, they were not funny to her when they occurred, but the momentum they created through the years made them almost a legend as they were retold during family gatherings.

The other thing I remember about my aunt is that she accepted me for who I am. There was no pretense between us. Even though we sometimes started out not agreeing with each other, we could always come to the table of reasoning because there were no expectations on either of our parts. We valued our relationship and accepted the love we had for each other to be sufficient enough to come to the place of agreement and appreciation.

The day of these two women's homecoming was also different. The day Vickie entered glory, she and I had studied the Bible together with Jeannette, Carrie, and another friend, Pam. I mentioned that one day, as believers, we will be resurrected in a new body. It was almost as if glory touched her face as she looked upward with the sweetness of hope towards such a promise. The promise seemed to cause her to soar on the wings of expectation. It was during this time that, as we prayed for her, we sensed God was going to raise her up in newness. We had no idea this promise was in reference to her heavenly homecoming celebra-

tion that would take place that very night. Before the clock declared another day, she was raised up in the glory and presence of her precious Lord to experience the new day that would mark her eternal rest.

For my aunt, I was told her granddaughter was playing Elvis Presley's Gospel Songs on her phone. She held her phone close to her ear. My aunt had managed to hold on for eight days without life-support. The number "eight" points to "new beginnings." Her eldest daughter told me she was given the distinct impression in the night that it would be her mother's last day on earth. According to my information, the song that was playing when she entered the door of eternity was "Take My Hand". There is no doubt that the Lord offered her His hand at that time and she could do nothing more than to let go of what was and take His hand to embrace what is to be for the believer, completing her earthly journey.

Because of Jesus, we never have to take any journey alone. Whether it is through this world or through the door of death, He is there to lead us. Granted the valleys may be dark, the canyons deep, and the mountains too high to climb, but the Lord knows the way through, around, or over each obstacle.

It has become obvious to me that life is an adventure where there is much to discover, but eventually the path we are on will come up to the door of physical death. Depending on whether we have received the gift of life or not, will depend on what we encounter on the other side of the door. We will either encounter the loving arms, incredible presence, and majestic glory of God or the throes of hell in its utter misery, spiritual ruin, and hopeless torment.

Death for most people is a morbid subject. Most live in denial about it. They do not want to face their mortality. Some believe they are beating the odds, while others are trying to keep ahead of it by running some unseen race, and there are those who believe they are going to beat it. Although the days we are living in implies we are in the last generation and Jesus is coming soon for His Church, we do not know what tomorrow holds for us personally. We must be ready to meet Him at all times, knowing we will not

pass this way again. Meanwhile, we must keep in mind that like the cloud of witnesses in *Hebrews 12:1*, we are leaving behind some type of legacy.

In order to leave a lasting legacy, we must be preparing for the world to come. The question is how do we prepare for eternity in a physical realm? It comes down to our walk. Enoch walked with God and was translated. Noah walked with God and found grace. Joshua served as Moses' companion and eventually led the people of Israel to the Promised Land. Jesus walked to Calvary to secure our redemption. He walked toward His demise so we could have life. He walked a narrow way; therefore, He became the Way. It is for this reason that we are told to walk as Jesus walked and we will abide in Him (*1 John 2:6*).

It is all about walk. Our walk will determine what we expose ourselves to; and, what we expose ourselves too will establish who we become. It will also determine what we are being conditioned for. When I enter heaven, I want to be so full of the glory of Jesus that activities of heaven will be natural and fitting.

In order to get a sense of where I am spiritually, I have occasionally written my epitaph. This may seem a bit foolish, but it is my way of considering what type of spiritual legacy I want to leave behind. It is amazing how it has changed through the years. I realize that the change had to do with how much humility was present. My initial legacy pointed to greatness that the world ascribes to and not Jesus. As I matured, it became more about Jesus and less about me. My latest epitaph was summarized in one word, "Forgiven."

My epitaph may seem foolish but I realize that if it is spiritual, it will become part of the cloud of witnesses that prepared the way with their examples for those following in their footsteps. It will be consumed by the holy fires on the altars of consecration, leaving behind a greater reality of God to those who dare to follow the path less traveled.

Meanwhile, what must I do to keep on the narrow path that will lead me through the door of physical death into the eternal glories of the world promised to the saints of God? To me

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THE GREATEST PROPHET

By Jeannette Haley

Part 1

It is amazing to me how the human race views things. We all have a natural tendency to think that if something is bigger it's better, if people are healthy and wealthy, then surely God is blessing them, and if the sun shines on one group more than another, then they must be favored by God. Of course, we all know that our limited human "wisdom" and conclusions are generally faulty at best, and ridiculously wrong at worst.

Transferring our natural propensity to draw the wrong conclusions into the Christian realm of today, we see that there is an inclination to classify so-called "prophets" according to certain criteria such as a huge following, financial success, best-selling books, large television audience, unsubstantiated signs and wonders with stories abounding of miraculous healings, the dead being raised, and demons cast out, to name a few. People are so hungry for "something tangible," something "exciting," something "new" and something they can perhaps experience in their own life that they will eagerly drop everything to chase after their favorite prophetic guru. Jesus warned, *"For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect"* Matthew 24:24.

False prophets, as Johanna Michaelson so aptly put it many years ago, are literally "littering the countryside." We need to keep in mind that "prophet" means one who either forthtells or foretells something. Either way they put forth the impression that what they are telling people originates with "thus saith the Lord." Most of the false prophets taking center stage today are aggressive in their presentation, giving them the appearance of an expert whose credibility is beyond question. Therefore, when they begin to minimize solid biblical Christianity that has stood for 2,000 years on the sure foundation of God's Word, people who have never been discipled in the Bible, and who lack a solid foundation on the Rock, are easily duped by "damnable heresies." (See 2 Peter

2:1.)

Why are people so easily drawn to these false prophets, and other false "leaders," in our time? God's Word gives us the answer, beginning with 1 Corinthians 2:2, *"For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."* The Apostle Paul knew that if he veered from preaching and emphasizing Jesus Christ and His work on the cross at any point, then he would be leading people astray. Today there is a major shift from preaching the real Jesus of the Bible to presenting "another Jesus" that is more contemporary, more like us, more understanding of our moral deviations, more "fun," more "hip," more "progressive," loves us no matter how wicked and wretched we are, and who only expects us to embrace humanism and the social gospel rather than deny self, pick up our cross, and follow Him. This "new Jesus" that is being presented by false prophets is more "user friendly" and more appealing to our unregenerate, carnal self than the Jesus of the Bible who claims to be LORD, equal with God, the great I AM, God Incarnate, the Word, and the soon coming King and Judge of all the earth.

Without a proper foundation and understanding of who Jesus is as revealed in the written Word of God, people can formulate their own Jesus and make Him whatever they want Him to be. When I say the "Word of God," I am speaking of the real Bible, not a modern bunch of psycho-babble filled with humanistic and subtly veiled occult terms such as contained in "The Message" (Rick Warren's favorite "version" which is not a "version" at all, but rather from Peterson's ungodly imagination.) There are other so-called "modern versions" that are unreliable, dangerous and downright damaging to one's faith, understanding of truth, and the character of God.

Another reason people are so easily taken in by false prophets and people with their own agenda who strive to be a "somebody" in the church is that they possess no genuine love of the truth. (As a side note, proof of this is the incredible mess America is in today.) According to 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12, people are deceived by Satan with his power, signs, and lying wonders because they "received not the

love of the truth, that they might be saved." We can read the result in verse 11 and 12 which states, *"And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."* People who fail to love the truth are weak and unstable, which makes them easy prey for wolves in sheep's clothing.

People are also deceived and easily swayed from the straight and narrow because they do not consider that we are living in the time prophesied by Paul in 2 Timothy 4:3 which states, *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."* We see a great moving away today from the true written Word of God, along with sound doctrine because people are bored with the "old-time religion" of our spiritual forefathers, which includes countless martyrs who suffered horrendous torture, and were slaughtered for their faith and love of God, His Word, and the truth. Experience seekers want contemporary paraphrased, adulterated "versions" of the Bible; contemporary unanointed so-called "worship" music, contemporary feel-good "sermons" with a "positive" message that oozes with philosophical humanistic slop.

Knowing the dangers facing Christians, the Apostle John wrote, *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world"* 1 John 4:1. Testing and discerning is a command of the Lord to keep us from being suckered into believing that every religious thing that crosses our path, whether through the Internet, TV, radio, literature, books, music and you-name-it is authentic. We can all be deceived on occasion, and especially so if we think that we *cannot* be deceived. Discernment is a big subject, but it is absolutely essential to know the Word of God, know the Lord, know the Holy Spirit and how He works, and know God's will and ways for His people.

For your consideration, following are ten short guidelines that may be helpful to keep in mind when testing false prophets and the spirits within people:

1) Who or what is being lifted up? Jesus or the person teaching or preaching. Is the speaker proclaiming to be a "prophet" or somebody with "extra knowledge," or who is somehow "special," more "advanced," more "experienced" or who is beyond scrutiny? 2) What is the purpose, or point, the speaker is trying to make, and where is his or her teaching taking you? Is it Christ centered, or man centered? Is there confusion? 3) Is the Word of God being quoted, and if so, is it in context? Or, is the Word quoted accurately, but subtly punctuated with error? Is the Word of God being "added to," or "taken away from" (diminished) in any way? 4) Does the person have true humility, or is he or she operating from fake humility, or even outright pride? 5) Is the character and person of Jesus consistently upheld in His divinity? 6) Does the speaker bring forth the Gospel, preaching the cross with clarity? 7) Is the speaker soft on sin, or does he or she bring a clear message, specific definition, and exposure of what sin involves, such as sins of commission, sins of omission, sin of idolatry, pride, unbelief, rebellion, anger, jealousy, unforgiveness, covetousness, moral deviation (fornication, homosexuality, etc.)? 8) What do you sense about the person's spirit based on what you see in his or her eyes, tone, or other manifestations? Is he or she anointed (God's presence) or is there a seductive, counterfeit spirit in operation? 9) Is the fruit of the Spirit evident? 10) Are you left with a greater love for the Lord Jesus Christ, and God's written Word, coupled with a renewed commitment to seek, love, and worship Him in greater ways, and live for Him regardless of the cost? Or, instead, are you caught up with the speaker, feeling compelled to believe, follow, and support him or her in any way you can?

Consider Jesus' chilling warning in *Matthew 7:21-23*, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not

prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." In spite of our Lord's stern warning, many self-proclaimed "prophets" are taking advantage of people's lackadaisical attitude towards prayer, knowledge of the Bible, along with lack of interest in being "*rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith*" (*Colossians 2:7a*). Such people are likewise unwilling to examine themselves, mortify the flesh, and keep themselves accountable. Is it any wonder that Jesus asked, "*Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth*" *Luke 18:8b*?

The hills may "be alive" today with the sound of self-proclaimed prophets of every sort, but none will ever amount to a hill of beans compared to the biblical prophets for "*the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*" *2 Peter 1:21*. Thus we see that real prophecy was given by the Holy Ghost to holy men, not self-serving thrill seekers with their own corrupt agendas as we see today. In *2 Timothy 3:16, 17* we read, "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*" Since all Scripture is given by inspiration of God for our eternal benefit, and is the only God-breathed book in the world, then



shouldn't we treasure it above all else? All the forthtelling and foretelling we will ever need is contained within the pages of this one incredible book—the Holy Bible.

That leaves us with the question: Who was the greatest prophet? Was it Moses, the Lawgiver, or Elijah who represented the prophets, or the fiery Jeremiah, or perhaps the beloved Daniel who was given great revelations of future monarchs and kingdoms? Jesus gives us the answer in *Luke 7:28*, "*For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women*

there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

The greatness of John the Baptist, a prophet who did no miracles, never healed the sick or raised the dead, is a valuable example for the Body of Christ. In the next issue concerning prophets we will explore the life and lessons of John the Baptist.

May God grant to us His children a greater love for Him, and His Word. Amen. †

THE GREAT OBJECT OF LIFE

"The great object of life to many professing Christians, seems to be to become rich. Their chief end does not appear to be so much to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever--as to obtain and enjoy the present world! Wealth is the center of their wishes--the invariable tendency of their desires. Jehovah is the God of their creed--but Mammon is the God of their hearts! They are devout adorers of the God of wealth. *'But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.'*" *1 Timothy 6:9-10* - John Angell James, "*Hindrances to Earnestness in Piety*" - 1847

"The vague and tenuous hope that God is too kind to punish the ungodly has become a deadly opiate for the consciences of millions." - A.W.Tozer

"Some people are like wheelbarrows; useful only when pushed, and very easily upset." - Vance Havner

"We are fast approaching the stage of the ultimate inversion: the stage where the government is free to do anything it pleases, while the citizens may act only by permission." Ayn Rand

"Under capitalism, you have the right to succeed and the right to fail. Under communism you only have the right to starve." - Dr. Bob Glaze

the instructions surrounding the end days give us wisdom as to how we are to walk and stand. We must be watchmen over our souls and the truth. We must take heed as to what we are embracing in our hearts. We must learn to possess our souls in patience as we wait in abiding faith until His promises have been fulfilled. We must be looking up, knowing that His full redemption is drawing near. And, finally, we must pray always that we may be accounted worthy to escape the grave times of tribulation, and to be able to stand before the Son of man without shame (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21).

The month of November is a time when we can consider our personal status in light of what Jesus has accomplished for us. It is a time of Thanksgiving, and we should take advantage of it by thanking Him for the life He has entrusted to us and ask Him to establish that life and preserve it in greater ways.

Have a blessed Thanksgiving. †

QUOTABLE

"A Christian does not go to bed one night in fidelity to the Scriptures and wake up in the morning a full-blown compromiser. If compromise is going to happen, it will happen over time. The first step of compromise is the hardest. Who hasn't faced the choice to remain true to biblical principles or to take the easy road of compromise? The Spirit of God pricks our consciences when we face those choices. You know the voice; Scripture comes to mind, and if we listen, it protects us from making wrong choices. If we have taken that first step of compromise, subsequent steps become easier to take. The term "slippery slope" is a very good way to describe the road to compromise and modernism. Set one foot on the slope of compromise, and you'll find the rest of the downhill slide quick and easy." - Lou Martuneac

"The devil is not fighting religion. He's too smart for that. He is producing a counterfeit Christianity, so much like the real one that good Christians are afraid to speak out against it." - Vance Havner

TRUE CONTENTMENT

'But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing--we will be content with that.' 1 Timothy 6:6-8. We cannot really need more than food and clothing; and if God sees fit to withhold more--then we ought not even to wish for more. But our food may be coarse--and our clothing very common. What then? If we have God's blessing, if we enjoy His presence--we are better off than if we possessed a kingdom without them! If God gives us no more--then we ought to believe that more would be injurious to us. God either loves us--or He does not. He either cares for us and provides for us--or He leaves things to 'chance'. If we are genuine believers, then...

God certainly does love us!
He certainly does care for us!
He certainly does provide for us!

He has
numbered the very hairs of our head,
fixed the bounds of our habitation,
and
promised to supply all our needs!
He cannot have left anything to 'chance'.

Let us then be content with such things as our heavenly Father gives us. Let us learn to be content in every state and condition. Let us bear in mind that it is written, *that "all things which pertain unto life and godliness,"* are given to us through the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. So that knowing Jesus--we may expect all that is necessary to a godly life--and we ought to be content with that! - James Smith, "The Pastor's Evening Visit" - 1802-1862 — James Smith was a predecessor of Charles Spurgeon at New Park Street Chapel in London from 1841 until 1850. Early on, Smith's readings were even more popular than Spurgeon's! "My **object** is to lead the mind . . . from **SELF** — to Jesus; from sin — to salvation; from the troubles of life — to the comforts of the gospel. My **aim** is to humble the sinner — and to exalt the Savior; to strip the creature — and to place the crown on the head of God's free grace! I cannot ascribe too much to Jesus — or too little to man!"

QUIZ TIME

RELATING TO THE CHURCH

Can you name what the following used to be called in years gone by?

Church building _____

Audience _____

Auditorium _____

Podium _____

Stage _____

CHRISTIAN TERMINOLOGY

"Fallen nature" _____

"Accept Jesus" _____

"Go to church" _____

"Pay tithes" _____

"Trinity" _____

"Rapture" _____

TRUE OR FALSE

The Bible doesn't say that a person's name can be blotted out of the Book of Life. _____

The mansions in the Father's house mentioned in John 14:2 are literal mansions we will live in. _____

Christians must be overcomers. _____

Not all of the Bible is written to us, but it is all written for us. _____

The Great Commission is about social justice. _____

Jesus has made the redeemed kings and priests unto God. _____

The Jewish Sabbath always fell on a Saturday. _____

ANSWERS

Meeting hall; congregation; sanctuary; pulpit; platform. Fallen disposition; receive Jesus; we are the Church; N.T. offerings, alms; Godhead; second coming. F, F, T, T, F, T, F

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

SHOULD A CHRISTIAN EVER BE SICK?

Q: *When Isaiah 53:5 talks about being healed by Jesus' stripes, does it point to physical healing?*

A: There are those who believe that the healing mentioned in *Isaiah 53:5* strictly points to physical healing for believers. Therefore, these individuals have a tendency to maintain that if a Christian is not healed, it means he or she is in sin or void of sufficient faith. These individuals can sometimes prove to be self-righteous, indifferent, and judgmental towards those who dare to be sick.

In order to put this subject in perspective we must reason together in light of the full counsel of God. To take one or a few Scriptures out of context and develop a whole doctrine on them is dangerous. The fact is if something is truth, it will remain standing when challenged. If it is not truth, it will collapse in light of the full counsel of God. If the above belief is part of the Christian foundation, it will be confirmed by the examples found in the Word of God.

We must keep in mind that both physical and spiritual death came by way of a curse pronounced on Adam in the garden. Death points to separation. Physical death points to the spirit and soul separating from the body, and spiritual death is separation from God. In the case of the flesh or body being put off, physical death will come to almost every individual except for the exception of Enoch, Elijah, and some individuals who will be changed in the "twinkling of an eye" at Christ's coming. If physical death does not occur via an accident or a massive stroke or heart attack, it will come by way of some type of illness that can prove to be prolonged due to such diseases as cancer. This is a fact of life. As Scripture states, the sun shines on both the saved and unsaved, as well as the rain of challenges that fall on both.

As we consider the examples we have, the Apostle Paul stated that he had a thorn in his flesh. He went on to state that, "*Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me*" (2

Corinthians 12:9c). "Infirmity" is another word for illnesses. In the case of Trophimus, one of the Apostle Paul's companions, it is said that the apostle left him in Miletum due to him being sick (2 *Timothy 4:20*). Epaphroditus, another Christian brother and companion of Paul was, "sick nigh unto death." However God showed mercy on Epaphroditus and raised him up, sparing Paul of the sorrow that would come with losing him (*Philippians 2:25-27*). We also have the words of James, that instructed elders to anoint and pray for the sick. Clearly, there were sick among the early Christians. There is no mention that such illnesses were associated with sin that needed to be rebuked or unbelief that needed to be addressed.

When you study the lives of committed servants of God, you see a diverse picture. Consider George Muller and Hudson Taylor. Muller outlived two wives and four children. He had great health all of his life. Although Hudson Taylor outlived his first wife who died at a young age, he was in frail health and had to take to his bed at various times which made it difficult for him on the mission field.

There are many stories of saints suffering with prolonged illnesses and pain caused by injuries. Although suffering can take in a broad arena of subjects including persecution and ill-health, the Bible is clear that if we suffer with Him, we will reign with Him in glory (*Romans 8:17; 2 Timothy 2:12*). For me, God has used the fine instrument of prolonged illness to enlarge my faith. I discovered what it means that when I am weak, He proves Himself strong. We all have a cross to bear and a course to walk that has been designed to test our faith while establishing our lives in Christ. It is true that God can physically heal and deliver us, but sometimes He allows us to go through trying times such as prolonged health issues to establish us with a greater testimony of His abiding faithfulness. Consider the case of Joni Eareckson Tada. She was paralyzed by a diving accident as a young woman which left her a quadriplegic. She battled through depression and doubt, but has emerged victorious. In 2010 she was diagnosed with breast cancer, and underwent a successful surgery

and is hopeful of a positive prognosis. There is no doubt that her testimony has brought hope and consolation to countless disabled people around the world.

When you consider what it means for Jesus' stripes to be a healing antidote, you must consider that the reference was in relationship to the effects of sin upon the spirit and soul. Sin can wound the spirit. As *Proverb 18:14* declares, "*The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?*" Jesus talked about how sin affects the soul in *Luke 4:18*. Sin causes us to be spiritually poor, breaks the heart, puts us in an unseen prison, blinds us to spiritual truths, and bruises our very person.

This brings us to how Jesus' sacrifice can bring healing to our inner being. Granted, upon salvation we are delivered from the death sentence of the Law. Forgiven and endued with a new life certainty can set our spirit free. However, complete wholeness and restoration of the soul often proves to be a prolonged process. When Jesus was quoting the prophet Isaiah about those who had dull hearing and closed eyes, He stated that the only way they could be healed was by being converted (*Matthew 13:14-16*). We must be converted to the ways of righteousness for our closed minds to be completely transformed and the eyes of our heart fully opened to the ways of God.

In closing, we must learn that faith is about trusting God in every situation no matter what challenges or obstacles face us. The problem with people who limit God with doctrines that require Him to perform in certain ways to keep them from experiencing different aspects of life (because that is the "benefit" of being a Christian) will often find their faith shipwrecked as the lofty waves of their doctrines hit the shorelines of reality (*1 Timothy 1:19*). Whether God uses the fine instruments of prolonged illness or uses other challenges to fine tune the faith of His people, He is still the One who is in control of the type of spiritual weather patterns that come across the bows of our lives.



**HAPPY
THANKS-
GIVING!**

*O give thanks to
the LORD!*