

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

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

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THE ODYSSEY Part 20 DESTINATION By Rayola Kelley

We are now coming to the end of this particular odyssey. Discovering one's life in Christ is an incredible journey. There are always those places that have been marked by inspirational memories, times of growth, and overwhelming challenges. Admittedly, I have enjoyed remembering and sharing some of my personal experiences with you for almost the past two years. As you may surmise, that in spite of the ups and downs of mountains and canyons, the leanness of the valleys, the troubling waters of the world, the ever-changing terrain of challenges presented by spiritual detours and road construction, I would not change any of it. It is obvious that God has begun a good work in me and He will ultimately complete it (*Philippians 1:6*). Clearly, the humble saint's assurance is that their life is God's business and all of the successful work in his or her life will be His doing. In the end, He alone will receive the glory for the holy, useful vessels each of us have become (*2 Timothy 2:20-21*).



This brings me to the final leg of the journey: the destination. According to Scripture, in the near future, the clouds in the sky are going to part and believers will be brought forth in new glorified bodies (*1 Thessalonians 4:15-17*). It will be the final move for every believer.

This final move was brought to my attention lately. As most of you are now aware, we have relocated our residence. Even though we loved where we lived, we had to recognize our limitations in maintaining the "park" we were responsible for. After all, our fleshly tabernacles are being plagued by the challenges that come

with getting older. We may be still young in spirit and zealous towards life, but our body tells us that the strength of our youth has certainly been diminishing with time.

When I think of relocating, I naturally meditate about the destination. As believers we are sojourners in this present world (*1 Peter 2:11*). Since we do not belong to the age in which we live, we are simply passing through to reach our real destination. I am aware that each year brings me closer to the time when I will realize the fullness of my heavenly destination. Each earthly move also reminds me that I am getting closer to reaching my final home. Admittedly, I am excited about the end of my odyssey on earth and look forward to starting a whole new journey that will be marked by eternity and the glory of God.

This excitement is being more so brought to the forefront. As I witness prophecy coming true on the news, I realize that we are indeed close to that glorious event, the blessed return of our Lord. But, how many of us are ready for the final move? Present events are screaming at us, but how many of us still cling to the false hopes and promises of the doomed world we live in? How many of us are trying to hide our heads in the sand and hope for the best, while a tsunami is rushing towards us?

The idea of spiritually relocating reminded me that there is a preparation that must take place. Jeannette, Carrie and I sensed last fall that God was preparing us to move. We could not see any possibilities on the horizon because housing in this area is very limited. Since we felt the Lord's leading for us to move on, we began to knock on different doors by faith. The only door that opened to us was that of buying a house. We were all quite surprised about the prospect of purchasing a home. We could not see how we would be considered for a loan, and we admittedly did not want to get tied

down to a mortgage. However, God is in control of the doors that opened and closed before us, and we had to recognize and accept His provision and the route that He was leading us.

The truth of the matter is God's ways often prove contrary to our way of thinking. Most people are not prepared because they already have their idea of how it is going to come about. They are usually looking one way, while God is approaching it from another direction. Therefore, they fail to see what He is doing, preventing Him from guiding them in the right direction. Granted, there are those who talk much about Jesus coming, but each one has their own idea of what they will see and what they will miss. Such confidence will most likely prove to be amiss because these individuals have put faith in events or pet doctrines and not in the person of Jesus. We need to remind ourselves that the blessed hope will not be determined by what prophetic events might personally touch our lives; rather Jesus' blessed coming is **the actual** event that we need to be watching and preparing for.

It is natural for most people to think that if they take steps of faith to be faithful in what God has put on their hearts, everything will fall into place. The truth is that when genuine faith has been applied to a matter it is often met with the fiery testing of adversity. I have learned in the past that the testing of my faith has shown me the motive behind my actions, my attitude towards God, and my inner character. It is important to point out that what will precede Jesus' blessed coming will be a time of great trouble (*Matthew 24, Mark 13; Luke 21*). He even asked if He would find true faith when He came back (*Luke 18:8*).

The process that we encountered to secure the house we now live in was what we call a nightmare. We felt like ping pong balls being bounced back and forth by excuses, false

promises, and mass confusion. Every time we felt that we had taken some steps forward, we were knocked backwards by red tape that continually repeated itself like a broken record.

We are told in Daniel that the antichrist will try to wear out the patience of the saints. This implies that there will be a season before His coming that will be plagued by what seems to be the bad guy winning the battles, righteousness will appear as if it is on the verge of becoming extinct in a world gone mad, and the blessed hope of Jesus coming back will be touted as nothing more than a fable (*Isaiah 5:20; Daniel 7:21, 25; 8:23-25; 2 Peter 3:3*). It is for this reason that Jesus instructs people to possess their souls in patience, and James reminds us of the patience of Job that can only be secured through faith (*Luke 21:19; James 5:11*). Scripturally, we are also told that many saints will be offered up for the sake of Christ on the different altars of the world, but the war will be won by our Victor who will come back as King of kings and ultimate Judge. Until then, we must possess our souls, by guarding our hearts, examining our motives, keeping the faith, staying the course, and being faithful to occupy as we prepare ourselves to stand in the midst of great darkness.

Without saying the obvious, relocating is a trying process when it comes to the world. It is for this reason I hate moving. However, when Jesus comes for us, the change and transformation will take place in the twinkling of an eye as the last trump sounds (*1 Corinthians 15:51-53*). The great aspect of this last move for the saint is that he or she will not have to worry about taking anything of this present world with him or her.

This brings me to another unpleasant aspect of moving and that has to do with moving all the worldly stuff. You find out how much stuff you have, and you pray the friends who help you with such a task will be supplied by a great measure of grace from above to weather the ordeal. Relocating material stuff certainly has the ability to test patience and devotion. Although during our recent relocation some things became a bit frayed, such as nerves and temperaments, I am happy to announce that

everyone survived it.

Every time we move I come to the same conclusion—we just have too much stuff. When you combine the stuff of a ministry with the personal belongings of an artist/author, author/massage therapist, and singer/teacher, the stuff that must be relocated can be overwhelming. Although attempts are made to get rid of unnecessary stuff, it seems like stuff has an incredible ability of multiplying when you go to pack it in boxes. You would like to leave all the stuff behind, but you realistically know you could not function without some of it. Hence enters the quandary, what do you need to function, what will you need to continue to function, and what will prove valuable in the future.

The truth is you cannot go forward unless you are ready to move or advance ahead. You cannot effectively move forward unless you first deal with your stuff. *Hebrews 12:1* tells us we must lay aside every sin that besets us in our journey. We must remember that the way to heaven is narrow and hard. Like Christian in the book, *Pilgrim's Progress*, we must allow the baggage of our past sins and the weight of our present burdens to roll off of our back so that we can continue our journey to our final destination.

Part of facing the present in an effective way entails learning the many lessons of life that confront us along the way. We all start out with foolishness in our heart. It must be rooted out with wisdom and discarded by experience. It is for this reason wisdom and experience can prove to be great friends during preparation to move.

In the past I relied on my strength to endure, but time has taught me that life will disperse my strength. Age teaches most of us that wisdom borne out of experience must now dictate how one is to advance forward. Wisdom recognizes limitations, while experience gives us valuable tools of how to get around obstacles without using our remaining strength. Due to many past experiences, we have learned a few shortcuts as far as moving from one place to the next.

The beauty about our final relocation as believers is that we get the great honor of leaving all of our worldly stuff behind. In the end, what will remain are the spiritual treasures that have certainly been stored up in the

realms of heaven by our Lord and Master. These priceless gems from heaven will grace the lives of saints and will reflect the beauty, distinction, and glory of the world to come.

In our latest move, we were also reminded of what it means to take possession of something. The house sat empty for three years. It is obvious that even a house thrives when life abounds in it. You could tell that the house had suffered much neglect, but it also had such potential and promise. Weeds and moles had taken over the once beautifully landscaped yard, robbing it of its beauty.

As believers we must take possession of our inheritance of eternal life. We must not neglect the salvation that cost God His best and cost Christ His all. We must recognize our potential in Christ and keep our lives free from the weeds of worldly influences and dictates. In order to arrive at our final destination, we must take dominion over our bodies, subdue and mortify the soulish ways of the old man, and ensure the daily renewing of our spirit. We must also make sure that the wicks of the life of Christ in us are constantly being saturated with the oil of the Holy Spirit, and lit by the passion of fervent, loving devotion.

The Bible is clear about the ultimate destination of a believer. We are heaven bound because we are spiritually identified to an eternal inheritance, while being robed in righteousness, and prepared to reflect the unhindered glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The odyssey through this world is fast approaching its completion for many of us. The questions are simple: are you personally prepared to advance forward to your final destination? Are you laying aside that which would burden you down, claim your affections, and entangle you in a web of bondage and destruction? Are you presently prepared to meet your Lord on the other side of glory, or in the sky?

In closing remember what the Apostle Paul said, "*Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing*" (*2 Timothy 4:8*). †

THE BIG QUESTION

Part One

By Jeannette Haley

"I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ... God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." – Matthew 22:32

"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints." – Psalm 116:15

"Come into my office, I want to talk to you." Bracing for what could be an unpleasant conversation due to the stand we were taking in a certain small community, Rayola and I each took a seat facing the pastor of the Baptist Church which, by the way, neither of us attended. After confirming that we weren't members of a certain cult that we had never heard of, he suddenly changed the subject. With a pained expression on his face, he leaned forward in his chair and startling us both when he blurted out, "What happens to a Christian when they die?"

As I studied the intensity on his youthful "fresh-out-of-seminary" countenance, it began to dawn on me that he wasn't trying to test us, but instead he was seriously seeking for a satisfactory answer to "the big question." Rayola and I then proceeded to share from God's Word the certainty of heaven for God's saints.

This incident took place well over two decades ago, and the subject of where a Christian goes when he or she dies has not resurfaced in such an in "your-face-manner," although from time to time we would meet a Christian here and there who was confused over this subject. That is, until a Christian sister shared a stunning email teaching by a certain well-known author, speaker, mentor, and entrepreneur who has five degrees and a PhD, and who specializes in Hebrew and Greek word studies. He began by quoting *John 3:13* from the NASB, "**No one** has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man." [Emphasis his.] No doubt at least a few of his devoted followers gasped when they read what followed. He wrote, "The biggest problem with heaven is that *you aren't going there!* In fact, no one is. The thief of the cross didn't end up

in heaven when he closed his eyes. He is waiting for Paradise just like all the rest who sleep in the graves. But even when he wakes in the final resurrection, he won't get a ticket to heaven. Why? Because heaven is coming to earth and earth is the place where Man is intended to reside. 'I saw a new heaven and a new earth' does not mean you are going to float to that mansion in the sky. You were built for this paradise. It will be restored to its original design and you will enjoy God's presence here. But heaven isn't for us. Heaven is the realm of God and His angelic court. We pray for His will to be done here, on earth, where we are at home. There's no leaving. Get used to it."

He then gave a short "defense" of his position as follows: "Ever since the Church adopted that Platonic view of a dual universe, Christian followers of the Greek philosophy have been encouraged to think that heaven is the intended abode of the righteous. Yeshua apparently thought otherwise. His parables about leaving are aimed at the wicked, not the righteous. His declaration about the Kingdom is clearly focused on this world. And his statement that *no one* has ascended into heaven makes it pretty clear. The Greek is *oudeis*. It couldn't be stronger. Nothing, not a single one, nobody, not even one. None. Period. Heaven is *not* your destination. Plato isn't issuing tickets to God's realm despite the affirmation of Augustine and Aquinas."

After reading through the responses posted on his Web Site, I was even more shocked to realize that there are plenty of Christians "out there" who do not believe a born again saint goes to heaven to be with Jesus when he or she dies, nor will they ever "go to heaven". Therefore, the big question is, just where do Christians go when they die? If not heaven, then where? Charles Spurgeon said, "If there were no hell, the loss of heaven would be hell." George Whitefield said, "How sweet is rest after fatigue! How sweet will heaven be when our journey is ended." C. S. Lewis said, "Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither." Our Lord from heaven said, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you

and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you..." Matthew 5:11,12 [Emphasis added.]

Regrettably, in spite of his educational and intellectual accomplishments, the rule of *context, context, context* was completely ignored. When we read what Jesus said to Nicodemus in context, "*And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven,*" we see that He is speaking of what is spiritual, rather than earthly, and physical. Jesus told him, "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*" *John 3:3*. Of course we know that Jesus wasn't talking about physical birth, but spiritual birth. Again, Jesus stated, "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water [the Word] and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh: and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again*" *John 3:5-7*. [Note added.] No human spirit can ascend to heaven until he or she is born again of the Spirit, and regenerated by the Spirit. *Titus 3:5* says, "*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.*"

The key to understanding *verse 13*, are the two preceding verses, "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?*" To quote UK Apologetics on *John 3:13*, "So the real sense of Jesus' comment is this: The perfect knowledge of God is not obtained by any man's going up from earth to heaven to receive it - no man has ever ascended for any such purpose. Only Christ can teach us heavenly things, for no other being has ever ascended into Heaven, that is: **in order to receive and to bring back deep, spiritual teachings.** Christ alone was appointed to this."

I am taking the liberty here to quote additional comments from UK Apologetics because it is biblically sound, informative, and very well-articulated: "The general sense of all this is well expressed here: John 1:18: *"No one has seen God at any time; the Only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."* Adam Clarke adds this: *"...But our Lord probably [also] spoke to correct a false notion among the Jews, viz. that Moses had ascended to heaven, in order to get the law. It is not Moses who is to be heard now, but Jesus: Moses did not ascend to heaven; but the Son of man is come down from heaven to reveal the Divine will."* So the whole point here is that nobody else has ever been appointed to go into Heaven in order to receive the spiritual truth which can save - Jesus alone was appointed to this! In his commentary, Gill said this: *"...No man had, or could go up to heaven, to bring from thence the knowledge of divine and heavenly things; in which sense the phrase is used in Deut. 30:12, and which may be illustrated by John 1:18; wherefore inasmuch as Nicodemus had acknowledged Christ to be a teacher come from God, our Lord, would have him know, that he was the only teacher of heavenly things, as being the only person that had been in heaven, and in the bosom of the Father; and therefore, if he, and the rest of the Jews, did not receive instructions from Him, they must for ever remain ignorant; for there never had been, nor was, nor could be, any mere man that could go up to heaven, and learn the mysteries of God, and of the kingdom of heaven, and return and instruct men in them..."* So this just about sums up the answer to this question. Jesus is most assuredly *not* discussing any question concerning the souls of the just ascending to Heaven at their death. I am aware that those who teach 'soul sleep' between death and resurrection often use this verse but - truth is - they are pulling it totally out of context in order to employ it in such a manner, and they must know that."

Due to the blunt "hammer blow" use of *John 3:13* by the educator as his opening and closing "statement," it is necessary to gain a full understanding of the true meaning of Jesus' words

lest we become suspicious of the "faith once delivered to the saints" and begin to "faint in our minds," losing confidence in our hope. Therefore, for that purpose, following are additional basic scriptural insights from midnightinamerica.net: "To properly understand any biblical text, you must read it in context, not isolated from it. John 3:13 follows on from Jesus' statement that unless humans are born again – regenerated by the Spirit of God – they cannot see the kingdom of God.

"You and I were born into an evil world, totally contaminated by satanic spirits and sin. They have filled us with wrong aspirations, wrong desires, and fuelled sinful tendencies in us. That fallen nature is abhorrent to God. So, unless your spirit is purified and changed you cannot enter God's spiritual kingdom. God is so holy, so pure, that you and He cannot coexist while that evil exists.

"So, you need to be born again. Nicodemus didn't understand what Jesus was driving at, and nor do many Christians today! But the truth is very simple. Because you and I have sinned, we need God's cleansing. Jesus paid the price by dying in place of us to redeem us from sin's penalty, which is death. Accepting, by faith, what He did, you and I can inherit the kingdom of God if we pursue righteousness. In this process, we are cleansed by the water of God's Word and by His Spirit, as Jesus said to Nicodemus: *...one is born of water and the Spirit...* (*Jn 3:5*). And as Paul wrote to Titus: *He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5)* You cannot ascend to God without that change that Jesus has made possible for us. You **MUST** be born again, your spirit regenerated.

"But for Jesus it was different. He didn't need to be born again, because He never sinned. He didn't need regeneration. He could ascend directly to the Father because He was pure, sinless, undefiled. He was the only human who 'ascended' to heaven without needing to repent, to die – to 'descend' first.

"We know that Jesus *physically* ascended to heaven. We have the historical account in the Bible (*Acts 1:9*). That was a physical type of His *spiritual* ascent. Jesus never sinned (*Heb*

4:15; *1 Pet 1:19*). His motives were so pure, and His aspirations so heavenly, that He could ascend right up into the holy of holies to be with His heavenly Father.

"What Jesus meant in *John 3:13* was a *spiritual* meaning, not physical. When reading Jesus' statements, always consider that any spiritual sense will be far more relevant than the obvious physical one. Remember Jesus' emphasis: "It's *the Spirit* that gives life [and meaning], the flesh profits nothing" (*Jn. 6:63*, not an exact quote). Look beyond the physical. Perceive the spiritual, and you will be closer to heaven."

Moving on to the subject of the thief on the cross, the email "teaching" stated, "The thief of the cross didn't end up in heaven when he closed his eyes. He is waiting for Paradise just like all the rest who sleep in the graves." Concerning this audacious statement, The Berean Call's email response to this supposition is, "The scriptural references to the events following the crucifixion may be relatively few, but what information we have would support the following scenario: Jesus died on the cross and took the repentant thief (*Luke 23:42-43*) with him to Paradise (the abode of the righteous dead in Hades, *Luke 16:23-26*). Upon His arrival there, he proclaimed the good news of his full and complete sacrifice for sin (*1 Peter 3:18-19*; *Ephesians 4:9*). Upon his resurrection he then took all the righteous dead to heaven with him (*Ephesians 4:8-10*)." (www.thebereancall.org) Concerning the qualifications and attitude of the "highly educated 'educator'" TBC also stated, "Though he "holds 5 degrees and a PhD, is a Hebrew and Greek scholar/teacher," his comments show the truth that all his education cannot substitute for a Holy Spirit directed examination of Scripture. Further, his too easy resort to sarcasm is further evidence that his approach relies more upon human reasoning than Scripture" to which we add a hearty "Amen!" If Jesus promised the repentant thief that he would be with Him that very day in Paradise, then that is what He meant! Jesus didn't say, "You will be soul sleeping 'with' me" or "You will be soul sleeping until I come!"

Let us now consider *Luke 16:19-31* where we read the familiar story Jesus told of a certain rich man, and a certain beggar named Lazarus. While many contend that this is a parable, Jesus never introduced this story as a parable, or “interpreted” it as such; therefore, we need to be cautious as to how we “hear,” perceive, and respond to Jesus’ words. Jesus gave a clear picture of life after death where these two men are concerned—Lazarus was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: and the rich man went to hell where he was tormented. Jesus lays it all out for us—pure and simple—so simple in fact that even a small child can understand it; and, that is where the rub comes in for those who think more highly of themselves than they ought to think (*Romans 12:3*). Whenever a person exalts his or her own intelligence and education over the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, who has been sent to “reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” and who will “guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you” *John 16: 8, 13-14*, then that unwise (albeit “intelligent”) person has just exalted him or herself as God. This is self-worship, and it is idolatry. Without Christ, and without His Spirit, we are nothing.

The great commission of Christ to His followers is this: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” *Matthew 28:19, 20*. The teaching that Jesus tells us to do is concerning His commandments. And, where do we find His commandments? In schools of higher learning, in seminaries, in academia only? NO! His commandments are found in one place, and that is in God’s book—the Holy Bible. The Teacher is the Holy Spirit, who imparts the living Word into our hearts, minds and spirits where it can take root and grow and produce fruit. Without the Spirit all our learning, all our

intelligence, and all our doing are dead works at best and hellish at worst. What does God say about the wise? Look at *1 Corinthians 1:19, 20*, “For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” Verse 22 may concern the Jews and the Greeks (*For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom*) but today we have the same emphasis among the religious; that is, those who run after lying wonders and signs, all the while ignoring the plain teaching of Scripture and sound doctrine; and, the camp that crams their heads full of whatever tidbits of human “reasoning, “wisdom,” or so-called “revelations” they can find. Such are, “Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” *2 Timothy 3:7*. Jesus said we are to learn of Him (*Matthew 11:29*). We can only learn of Him in the full context of Scripture, and by the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Thus, if you would be wise, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal Jesus to you through His Word, and never partake of an “expert’s” teaching who is not truly born again of His Spirit, or whose teaching is man-centered, or whose teaching is strictly derived from a prideful, intellectual, humanistic perspective. Yes, God gave His church teachers, pastors, evangelists, prophets, and apostles (the latter being “sent out ones” such as missionaries). (See *Romans 10:17; 12:7; Ephesians 4:11*.) The key is, are they teaching and preaching the truth of God’s Word so that the Holy Spirit can reveal and impart it into people’s hearts?

Returning to “The Big Question,” let us search the Scriptures to discover what they have to say about “soul sleep.” Turning to *Genesis 5:24*, we read “And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.” Enoch was a godly man who lived before the Flood who was also a prophet. Tucked in the book of Jude, verses 14 and 15 we read Enoch’s thrilling prophecy, “And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied...saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly

among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” If all the saints are “soul sleeping,” then where do all these ten thousands of his saints come from?

In *Genesis 35:18* we read of Rachel’s death, “And it came to pass, as her soul was departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin.” Note that her soul was departing (going forth, abroad, out, up) (Strong’s #3318). Simply put, her soul was exiting her body, not going to sleep. The same is true of the repentant thief on the cross who was promised that he would be with Jesus in Paradise, that very day, not “soul sleeping” in the grave. Jesus never intimated to this man that he would “be with Jesus, soul sleeping in the grave.” In *1 Kings 17:21, 22* we read of Elijah raising the widow’s son from the dead: “And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child’s soul come into him again. And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.”

Death is separation. When Adam rebelled against God and ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, on that very day he became spiritually separated from God, and physical death began to work in his body. God had warned Adam, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” *Genesis 2:17*. [Emphasis added.] Paul declared, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” *Romans 5:12*. The separation of the spirit from the body is plainly expressed in *Ecclesiastes 12:7* which states, “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” Why would Jesus cry from the cross, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” *Luke 23:46b* if He was going into a state of “soul sleep?” Consider the first Christian martyr, Stephen, who “being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus

standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God...And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep" Acts 7:55, 59, 60. Thus we are to understand that Stephen knew his spirit was leaving his body as he committed his spirit to Jesus while his body "fell asleep."

This concludes Part 1 of "The Big Question." In Part 2, we will look briefly at the "Did Jesus Die Spiritually?" controversy; words of wisdom and hope from Oswald Chambers on the subject of death; and further examination of key Scriptures on the subject of heaven, soul sleep, and eternal life.

I leave you with *Zechariah 14:5*, "...and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee." Will you be there? †



"The Return" by Jeannette Haley

HUMILITY

By Andrew Murray

"Humility is perfect quietness of heart. It is to expect nothing, to wonder at nothing that is done to me, to feel nothing done against me. It is to be at rest when nobody praises me, and when I am blamed or despised. It is to have a blessed home in the Lord, where I can go in and shut the door, and kneel to my Father in secret, and am at peace as in a deep sea of calmness, when all around and above is trouble."

"Pride must die in you, or nothing of heaven can live in you."

"Here is the path to the higher life: down, lower down! Just as water always seeks and fills the lowest place, so the moment God finds men abased and empty, His glory and power flow in to exalt and to bless."

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

WHO IS THE PRIEST OF THE HOME?

Q: *I am in a dilemma. I have been told my husband (a Christian) is the head and priest of our family. I have waited for him to lead, but if anything is accomplished on the spiritual level it is because I initiate it. I am frustrated with the whole matter. I know I have a call on my life, but my husband shows no interest or spiritual inclination towards spiritual matters. I don't know what to do or where to turn. Is there any Scriptural advice you could give me concerning this matter?*

A: You are not the first Christian woman that has been faced with this dilemma, and you certainly will not be the last one to struggle with it. The Scripture is clear that the man is indeed the head of his wife and children, but there is no real scriptural backing that he is to serve as the priest of his family (*Ephesians 5:23*). (Keep in mind the priest's responsibility is to serve God on behalf of man and represent God's interest and concern to man.)

The Apostle Peter tells us each saint is personally placed in a royal priesthood and Timothy and Hebrews stipulates that only Jesus serves as the High Priest between man and God (*1 Peter 2:5, 9; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:25-27*). Remember that priests minister in temples, and although the home should be a type of sanctuary for the family, it is not the official temple of God; rather the saint's body serves as the temple of God (*1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19*). This simply means that each believer must minister before God in his or her temple. The one time a saint serves as a mediator occurs when he or she intercedes for others through prayer and supplication (*Ephesians 6:18*). Therefore, in prayer a husband may serve as a type of mediator for his or her family, but he has no real authority to serve as a personal high priest for the home.

There is no debate that the man is the head of the family unit. According to Vine's Expository, "head" in this text means leadership by example. Because Jesus serves as the man's example and pattern in regard to being the head of the house, hence enters the example of Jesus loving each of us

first in a sacrificial way, which will result in us naturally loving Him. Jesus' servitude prepared the way of righteousness for His followers and His sacrifice served as the means of redemption. He leaves each of us an indelible example of what it means to walk in the ways of divine love and acceptable righteousness, while choosing the excellent road of self-denial and sacrifice to reach greater heights in our spiritual lives.

This brings us to the obligation of men in the family. There are many expectations put on men that are not always realistic. In candidly talking to men about their plight, there are at least three major challenges they have made reference to through the years. The first challenge involves the cultural influence. So much of manhood is defined by culture and not the Word of God. It has caused much confusion for the men who are striving to be godly men, and their wives who do not understand their inward struggle.

The second struggle has to do with the fact some men, or perhaps many of them, compartmentalize their many duties. For example, they may have a compartment for God and religion, another for family, another one for work, and so forth. Each compartment has different requirements and duties to fulfill. For some men the main duty they have to fulfill in regard to God and religion is simply go to church once a week. Once that duty is fulfilled, they are no longer obligated to do anything else until the next Sunday when church rolls around again. This can prove to be very frustrating to the wife. It is vital that a wife avoids judging her husband based on his type of response towards religious matters. I have met many men who fulfill what they consider their duty towards God and religion while quietly maintaining a deep abiding trust in Him.

The final challenge for husbands has to do with the wife's expectations. Christian women can have some unrealistic expectations as to what it means for the husband to be the head of the family. It is not unusual for women to put much pressure on their husband to live up some fanciful notion, and when the husband fails to do so, the wife can become frustrated

and judgmental towards the husband. It is for this reason that wives must make sure that their attitudes towards their husbands scripturally line up in spite of how they perceive their husband's religious life.

Each believer has his or her own life in Christ. Those closest to us will not always be able to share in that calling, causing our inner life and service to become a personal matter between God and us. If you have a call, give God permission to reveal the manner in which you can fulfill your call in your present status. You need to avoid seeing your marriage as a hindrance to your call, and know it might be a valuable point of discipline and protection. Seek God to open the right doors of ministry, while being open to His wisdom to know how to properly balance your responsibilities towards your husband and family. Keep in mind that God alone knows how to bring about a person's calling while enabling him or her to maintain the integrity of his or her relationships.

When Christians find themselves doing this type of balancing act, they need to remember what King David did in regard to Saul, "And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him" (1 Samuel 18:14). †

THINK ABOUT IT

(Quotes from Leonard Ravenhill)

"There's one thing we need above everything else; it's something we don't talk about these days. We need a mighty avalanche of conviction of sin. We're living in an unprecedented day (when) evil is no longer evil. We've changed the terminology--iniquity is now infirmity; wickedness is now weakness; devilry is now deficiency."

"Jesus did not come into the world to make bad men good. He came into the world to make dead men live!"

"Do you go to church to meet God or to hear a sermon about Him? How many come to church expecting a confrontation with Deity?"

"The best title of the (professing) church of God today, in my judgment, is 'Unbelieving Believers.'"

"There isn't a 'Pentecostal' Church in America. If there is, tell me where it is."

HIS ASCENSION AND OUR UNION

By Oswald Chambers

"And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." - Luke 24:51

We have no corresponding experience to the events in Our Lord's life after the Transfiguration. From then onwards Our Lord's life was altogether vicarious. Up to the time of the Transfiguration He had exhibited the normal perfect life of a man; from the Transfiguration onwards—Gethsemane, the Cross, the Resurrection—everything is unfamiliar to us. His Cross is the door by which every member of the human race can enter into the life of God; by His Resurrection He has the right to give eternal life to any man, and by His Ascension Our Lord enters heaven and keeps the door open for humanity.

On the Mount of Ascension the Transfiguration is completed. If Jesus had gone to heaven from the Mount of Transfiguration, He would have gone alone; He would have been nothing more to us than a glorious Figure. But He turned His back on the glory, and came down from the Mount to identify Himself with fallen humanity.

The Ascension is the consummation of the Transfiguration. Our Lord does now go back into His primal glory; but He does not go back simply as Son of God; He goes back to God as *Son of Man* as well as Son of God. There is now freedom of access for anyone straight to the very throne of God by the Ascension of the Son of Man. As Son of Man Jesus Christ deliberately limited omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience in Himself. Now they are His in absolute full power. As Son of Man Jesus Christ has all power at the throne of God. He is King of kings and Lord of lords from the day of His Ascension until now. †

BEING A MAN

"Manhood is strength under control and shows it in honorable ways." - Rayola Kelley

"There is nothing more rare, or wonderful in our present day than encountering a true Christian gentleman, for such a man will have the refined mannerisms, disposition, attitude, and trustworthy character of Christ." - Jeannette Haley

QUOTABLES

In his sermon entitled: "True Saints, When Absent From the Body, are Present with the Lord" Jonathan Edwards argues for the great future privilege and hope of believers in Jesus Christ. He first buttresses 2 Cor.5:3 with Phil.1:20,22-24: "...so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life, or by death....But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor. Yet what I shall choose, I know not. For I am in a strait between two; having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ for it is far better: yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake." For our citizenship is in heaven and not of this earth. Edwards says: "The souls of true saints, when they leave their bodies at death, go to be with Christ, as they go to dwell in the immediate, full and constant sight of him in his blessed and eternal employment of glorifying the Father." Only then are we released from the bondage of our sinful flesh, eternally glorifying the Father without hindrance in His glorious presence. †

"When a man is not deeply convicted of sin, it is a pretty sure sign that he has not truly repented. Experience has taught me that men who have very slight conviction of sin, sooner or later lapse back into their old life. For the last few years I have been a good deal more anxious for a deep and true work in professing converts than I have for great numbers. If a man professes to be converted without realizing the heinousness of his sins, he is likely to be one of those stony ground hearers who don't amount to anything. ... I believe we are making a woeful mistake in taking so many people into the Church who have never been truly convicted of sin. Sin is just as black in a man's heart today as it ever was"

(D.L. Moody, "Results of True Repentance," from *The Overcoming Life and Other Sermons*, 1896). †

"People want to be religious but, they don't want to be Christian. They want to be spiritual, but they don't want to be realistic. They want great insights, but they don't want to be obedient and practical in walking them out." - Rayola Kelley †

SPEAKING OUT

When Jesus said that, “*No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.*”; John 3:13 NASB he was on Earth, subject to time and it was true at that moment. When we die, when we depart from this life, we exit time. Until Jesus ascended, Paradise (both the part where Lazarus was, and the part where the rich man was, including the great gulf fixed between), were located in the center of the Earth. When Jesus ascended, that was the first time saints went to heaven. It was true when Jesus said it. Remember, those who died under the Old Covenant, are saved the same way we in the age of Grace are, but the sacrifice had not been made (the Lamb, Jesus) so they could not ascend to heaven. Hebrews 11, by faith it was accounted to them as righteousness. The actual remission of their sins did not occur until after Christ shed his blood and died. Thus they could not be in Heaven yet. Remember also that there were many resurrected and seen walking around when Jesus rose from the tomb but before the ascension. When HE finally did ascend, so did they. They didn't continue to walk around down here, and apparently they were recognizable by those who witnessed them just as Jesus was.

Put on your science cap and even though I didn't get as far as physics in my scientific studies, (didn't need that for RN degree) we now understand that there really aren't actually two things called space and time, but rather one thing that could simplistically be called spacetime. Is the fellow right who says we (soul) lay in the grave in a state of sleep until resurrection day? Well, depends, on whether you are speaking from the perspective of the saints and God and Christ, who are right now outside of time, or from the perspective of those of us who still are here bound by time. Where is the person who was laid in the grave? Absent from his body, present with the Lord. Outside of time. Time has not continued to pass for him, there is no "wait" involved.

When we were kids we slept such a deep and peaceful sleep that

we often did not have any awareness of time having passed. Did you ever fall asleep on the couch when you were little, surrounded by the adults, only to wake up "in the next instant" in your own bed with the sun streaming in? That is probably the closest we come in this life to being able to comprehend this absence of "time".

Think of death as the portal, a doorway, when we die we exit the doorway, and are now in eternity. We like to think of eternity as a plane, think of a ruler which goes on as far as the eye can see in both directions, and our life is like one little inch on that ruler. But in reality, that's not exactly how it works. Time is a different "place" than eternity is. When we die, if we are saved, we move into a place where time is irrelevant. So it's like death is the "intersection" where we "catch up" to those who are in eternity, and as we step through, we leave those other folks back there still subject to time.

To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. When we exit the body, we also exit time. Even David understood that his child was with the Lord when he died, and David would see him again. To the thief, Jesus said "this day wilt thou be with me in paradise". He didn't say heaven, because paradise didn't get taken to heaven until Jesus ascended.

Resurrection is not about going from a suspended state, to heaven, it is about the change of our body. Right now we are like the larvae/pupae stage, we cannot yet comprehend what we will be. But when we see Him, we shall be like Him. We have no ability to imagine it any more than a fetus in a womb can imagine life after birth. God simply doesn't tell us a whole lot about heaven. We know more about the "city foursquare" than heaven.

It is never as "simple" as we try to make it. God, eternity, time, quantum physics, string theory, it's all pretty huge and complex and amazing and infinitely higher than our limited capacity to comprehend. That is why Christians end up with so many and seemingly very different ideas of things, and I continue to say that we are neither as right as we think, nor are others (who disagree) as wrong as we think they are. I say that only

in terms of those who apply themselves to study the scripture. Those like that [Hebrew/Greek scholar] tossing around "Plato" and overly enamored with his own "knowledge", might never "get it".

The church will inhabit the New Jerusalem, and the Jews hold the title deed to the Earth. Keep in mind too, that there is the first heaven, (the sky where birds and airplanes fly), the second heaven (the supernatural realm, the vastness of space, the habitation of angels) and also the third heaven which is the throne room/dwelling place of the Most High.

But you are right, you will NOT hear preachers expounding on that verse. It is one of those that when I started really digging in and studying for myself, I came upon that and it really pulled me in, I studied it out on my own because I literally couldn't find anyone who could satisfactorily explain that to me. I would have to dig through some old stuff to find my notes and write up something that included the supporting scriptures for all of that (if I even still have it) but that is the understanding that I came to when I did the diligence on it.

. . . . Randy Alcorn, in my opinion, took a lot of liberties in his Heaven book. Like my Dad always said, Jesus said "in my house there are many mansions, I go to prepare a place for you..." That doesn't say we are each getting our own mansion. He always was irked by that assumption.

It really has nothing to do with Plato and his "Dual Universe" which has only to do with the "material vs the non-material". We are talking realms. Dimensions. There are not simply three, four, five dimensions. There are many more, and possibly infinite. Probably infinite, considering God's intelligences is infinite!

- By blogger Sandra Lloyd, VA
servehiminthewaiting.com

PRAISE

"The reason faith plays a major part in genuine praise is because the acceptable sacrifice of praise will come forth in the midst of trials and tribulations. It is indeed hard to praise God when everything is going wrong, but faith is not determined by circumstances."-*Hidden Manna* by R. Kelley, pg. 102