

# GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

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## THE REALITY OF GOD

### Part Five

By Rayola Kelley

The Bible talks about paying the price. Have you ever thought about what it means to personally pay the price? I can remember pondering the idea of what it would mean to pay some kind of price in my Christian walk. It was clear that the great cloud of witnesses mentioned in *Hebrew 11* were willing to pay the necessary price to gain a greater resurrection. However, I could not figure out what the price was that needed to be paid, nor did I understand what the real prize had to do with a better resurrection.

The problem is that many of us in our initial immaturity and naivetés towards the matters of heaven start out with romantic notions about the price we need to pay. We see the price in light of great sacrifices that will end with our names being brazenly engraved in the halls of heaven or in the book of life. In such immaturity, some of us initially see our prize as being personally exalted in the courts of heaven for our supposedly “great devotion” and “sacrifice.”

It has taken God more years than I want to count to knock some of those silly notions out of my head in order to replace the foolish ways of my thinking with sobriety. In fact, I can remember a time when I was swinging from the branches of fanciful notions to reach the heights of grandiose expectation. The reason I chose the acrobatic approach to my relationship with God is I wanted to avoid living on a plateau of familiarity where there is no real inspiration or discoveries. Even though I had made this decision from the point of zeal that lacked knowledge, I did not want to leave a print in the pew, while failing to make any spiritual impact in the kingdom of God. I observed in the lives of others that such mediocrity will eventually

cause individuals to succumb to a willingness to just accept what they already know, ending with them getting by on decayed manna, while trying to squeeze as much water out of empty or stagnant cisterns as they can.

I was also considering how my Christian devotion would look to those below me. I wanted to appear grand, wise, and devoted. However, there came that day when, as I was in mid-air, God allowed life to shoot the arrow of reality at me, severing the limb I was about to grab. Obviously, I hit the ground with the greatest thump. As I got up spitting rubbish out of my mouth and dusting off my disheveled countenance, I realized that most people were too busy with their own lives to pay much attention to me, and the few who were giving me any consideration seemed almost happy to see me finally fall off the pinnacle of my arrogance, and were actually close to clapping at my failed performance in cheerful glee.

Let us face it, we were not meant to be Tarzan swinging through the jungle of life with ease; rather, we were designed to walk through the jungles of mundane

mire, push back the endless bushes of daily routines in order to advance towards a spiritual prize that we cannot even see. During such times we often strive to seek for one moment of enlightenment or encouragement from some hill or mountain of victory or revelation that could give us an idea as to whether we are close to the prize.

The other reality is that if we try to swing above the mundane life, we end up being a Tarzan impersonator. Like the talented Carol Burnett who could make a great Tarzan call, we may make a similar call to tout our intention, but we will end up like George of the

jungle, smashing into trees, falling to the ground in a comical fashion, and trying to get up with some measure of grace intact. After all, we do not want to let anyone know just how damaged our halo is and how embarrassed our pride is as we try to limit the crow we may have to eat in front of others—and all the while secretly hoping we do not have to admit our foolishness, limitations, and failures.

It took me many years before I finally got it, and actually realized what I would gain by paying the price. It was not some great crown or even a plaque; rather, it was an unseen treasure that I could not even put a price on. It was precious beyond description. It was so simple, I knew those who started out as upstarts like myself would not initially get it. The prize is knowing God in a greater measure.

What does it mean to know God in a greater measure? It means you must be willing to go in some deep places with Him before you can appreciate the heights of His revelation. Most Christians want to simply experience the mountain tops and avoid the deep places that can bring one to utter despair and hopelessness. Granted, they want to know deep things about God, but they avoid being brought into deep places to gain a type of dependency on Him that allows them to know Him. They want to know great things about God, but they are unwilling to become disciplined mountain climbers to experience His greatness. However, it was in the deep places that I learned more about God's faithfulness and sweetness. It was in the deep places where I was prepared to ascend to the mountain-tops to receive the revelation that would transform my way of thinking and establish my inner being more solidly on the immovable Rock. I also learned that great discoveries of God were highlighted by the fact I was more aware of Him than of myself.



This showed me that if I came out of an experience with more of an awareness of me than God, I had somehow maintained something of my old ways, therefore, failing to learn the lesson, experience the sweetness of His presence or fragrance, or discover greater depths of who He is.

The next question is what greater revelation of God do we need to receive? The answer is simple; we need to receive a greater revelation of Jesus Christ. The Bible is clear that if we want to know God more, we must come to a greater knowledge of His Son (*John 14:5-11; Ephesians 3:2-5; 4:11-20; Philippians 3:8; 2 Peter 1:8-10; 3:18*). Think about what *Colossians 2:9* says about Jesus, “*For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*”

Growing in the knowledge of Christ is a process. Each new revelation of Him causes God to take on a greater depth in His attributes and a greater role in salvation, producing a deeper desire to experience Him in more intimate ways. Sadly, many people do not have a hunger to discover Him in deeper ways. They do not have a hunger for such discoveries because they are not developing a hunger for the Lord; rather, they are maintaining either a taste for the world or hanging onto the fleshly appetites, or complacently settling for old revelations of what was. The only way a person can develop a hunger for God is by diligently exposing him or herself to His Word with the sole intent of walking it out in obedience, making the decision to follow Jesus into the ways of life everlasting and pursuing the ways of righteousness to ensure He is honored and glorified in his or her life.

There are three main revelations that serve as springboards for the Holy Spirit to bring greater enlightenment as to the character, work, and ways of God. I would like to take this time to share with you these three revelations.

**Savior:** The first revelation of Jesus I ever had was when I realized He was my Savior. I remember the time clearly. I was sinking in a quagmire of sin, drowning in a cesspool of hopelessness, and being pulled down by a whirlpool of confusion. I knew I had a sin problem but did not know the an-

swer to it until I was introduced to the Jesus of the Bible, the One who took my place on Calvary. I cannot tell you what a glorious relief it was for me to discover that God addressed my sin problem through His Son, providing the means in which I could be saved. Salvation means man now stands justified in Christ because his sins have been washed away by the very blood of Jesus.

From the springboard of Jesus being my Savior, I came to understand how He was God's sacrifice on my behalf and that He is the way to know the truth and discover real life. Because He was made a substitute for our sins, I now have an advocate in heaven. Sin clearly abounds around us and no matter in what way sin challenges us, whether it is the temptation of it, the influence, workings, or activities of it, we can turn towards our Savior and know that He is the solution to our sin. The key for believers is that when personal sin affronts them, they must honestly humble themselves and submit to the work of sanctification that needs to be done in them through the Holy Spirit (*1 Peter 1:2*).

Jesus' death reminds every believer that each of us has been saved by God's grace. Sadly, there are those who call themselves Christians that live like the devil while touting the philosophies and ways of the world. Such people cheapen the grace that was shown on the cross. Whether they believe they can get to heaven on the shirttails of others or because of religious affiliations and good works, these people in their blatant disobedience exploit God's grace while showing contempt towards His Word. Sins must be dealt with or man remains condemned in them. The Bible is clear that there is only one way in which sins can be addressed and taken care of to ensure that they have been remitted by the courts of heaven. Jesus summarized any other attempts to get to heaven other than through Him in *John 10:1* in this way, “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.*”

**God:** Jesus is the God-Man. In theological terms he is **Theanthropos**—one person with two natures. The union of Jesus' humanity

and undiminished deity is referred to by Bible Teachers as, “the **hypostatic union**”. As the Son of God, he has the same nature as His Father and is equal with Him in status. This union of natures is referred to as the mystery of godliness in *1 Timothy 3:16*. In *Titus 2:13*, Jesus is referred to as being God, “*Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*” (*Emphasis added.*)

As the seed of woman, Jesus is totally man, and is able to fulfill His position as High Priest (*1 Timothy 2:5*, refer to *Hebrews 5:1*). The concept of Jesus being God separates 99% of the cults from mainline Christianity. Some cults maintain Jesus was also the Person of the Father. However, the Bible is clear that there are three distinct persons who comprise the Godhead. It is clear that Jesus did not think it robbery to cease to be equal with His Father, making them two separate persons. The concept of three distinct persons making up one God is brought forth in different ways in the Bible including in light of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River and His resurrection.

At Jesus' baptism all three persons of the Godhead were present. The man Jesus came to be baptized as an example of righteousness, while the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove to identify Jesus as the One sent by God, and the Father's voice was heard as He introduced His Son, fulfilling prophecy (*Matthew 3:13-17*, refer to *John 1:28-36* and *Psalms 2:7* and *Hebrews 1:8*).

At the heart of the Gospel is believing in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead (*Romans 10:9*). The Bible gives us insight as to which Person of the Godhead was responsible for raising Jesus. *Galatians 1:1* tells us the Father raised Jesus from the dead. In *John 2:19-21*, Jesus stated that He would raise up His body, and in *Romans 8:11*, it tells us that the Spirit of God raised Jesus from the dead. We see where all three persons of the Godhead were also involved in Jesus' resurrection.

When it comes to the Godhead, you cannot logic it out or understand it in light of personal understanding. It takes faith to accept the truth about the one true God. And, it is only upon

believing it that the Holy Spirit can unveil it to us in such a way that it becomes a truth. Even though we might give a simple, logical explanation of the Godhead based on creation such as the shamrock, the egg, or even the makeup of water taking on different forms but remaining water by nature, those who walk in unbelief towards the Godhead will think any explanation is stupid or far-reaching. They will not see it due to the darkness of unbelief over their minds. As Paul put it, the dark covering over such people's minds can only be taken off by the real Jesus of the Bible (*2 Corinthians 3:14-16*).

This brings us to the harsh reality that there are many people who profess to be a Christian, but who deny the deity of Jesus Christ. The problem with keeping Jesus as a mere man is that He would not have been an acceptable sacrifice who could take away the sin of the world. If Jesus was a typical man, he would have been born into a fallen nature, prone to sin, quick to justify it, content to live in a state of delusion, and would be under a sentence of death.

Jesus was born of the seed of woman, but He was first brought forth in the womb by the power of God (*Luke 1:34-35*). Before His entrance into the world by way of the womb, He was the Word, the living expression of God, who was God (*John 1:1*). He created all that we see (*Colossians 2:15-18*). Clearly, He already existed before Abraham and John the Baptist (*John 1:20; 8:56-58*). At a specific time, He was sent forth by the Father to bring about the plan of salvation that existed within the bosom of the Father before Adam fell into total darkness in the Garden of Eden (*John 1:18*).

Even though Jesus was deity, He went to the cross as man. In His humanity He did not allow Himself to be touched or influenced by the sinful disposition of man nor was he a slave to the appetites of the flesh or drawn to the false promises of the world. He was not bent on doing it His way or to give into the temptation to play the games of Satan and the world in order to be accepted or recognized (*Matthew 4:1-11*). He came for one purpose—to carry out the will of God in regard to the salvation of souls. He

was the perfect sacrifice of God, who became the only way to heaven, truth, and life.

*Lord:* The final revelation is that Jesus is Lord. The problem with the concept of Lord is that many people do not understand the reality of Lordship. In *1 Corinthians 8:6*, we are told that there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ. *Romans 10:9* and *10* tell us we must confess that Jesus is Lord in order to be saved, and *1 Corinthians 12:3* states, "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God called Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."

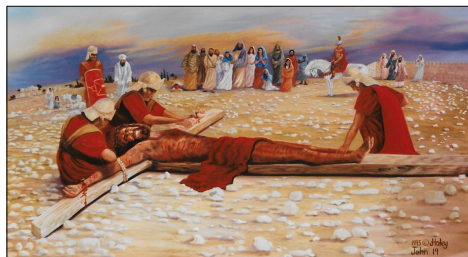
The Scripture in *1 Corinthians 12:3* is very interesting. There are people who call Jesus Lord, but they do so in ignorance. They have no real concept of what it means for Jesus to be Lord. However, *Isaiah 44:6* tells us the Lord (Yahweh) is the King of Israel, Redeemer, the first the last and the only one true God. In *Isaiah 45:21-22* we are told this Lord is a just God and only Savior and that there is none else.

As we consider these Scriptures in *Isaiah*, we must recognize that it is easy for people to declare Jesus to be Lord in a generic sense. However, for them to understand and believe that, Jesus as Lord, means He is the just God of heaven, the King of Israel, the only Redeemer and Savior of mankind, it takes the Holy Spirit to bring forth that revelation as truth in their hearts. For the individual to see that revelation, he or she must first approach the Word to believe what it clearly stipulates about Jesus being Savior, God, and Lord before the Holy Spirit can entrust the revelation to their hearts. After all, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (*Romans 10:17*).

Next month, I will deal with the concept of what it means for Jesus to be Lord in more detail. It is vital that people choose to put aside any misconceptions, indoctrinated ideas, or assumed notions about Jesus. After all, there are many Jesus's being presented out there, but there is only one Jesus who can save man from the consequences of sin, and that is the Jesus of the Bible.

The question is do you simply possess some type of head knowledge about Jesus or do you possess a heart

revelation of Him being the only One who serves as ALL we need now and will become ALL we need to possess at the end of our journey on earth? †



## QUOTES

"The love that keeps His commandments is the only way to remain in His love. In our whole relationship to Christ, love is everything. Christ's love to us and our love to Him is proved in our love to each other."

-Andrew Murray

"Religion today is not transforming people; rather it is being transformed by the people. It is not raising the moral level of society; it is descending to society's own level, and congratulating itself that it has scored a victory because society is smilingly accepting its surrender. God may allow His servant to succeed when He has disciplined him to a point where he does not need to succeed to be happy. The man who is elated by success and is cast down by failure is still a carnal man. At best his fruit will have a worm in it." - A. W. Tozer

"The clergy are the ordained priests and ministers who hold office in the church whereas the laity is everyone else; the other unordained church members, over whom the clergy have authority. This class distinction between ordained clergy and laity creates a severely damaging division in the body. It produces an elite ruling class, even an intelligentsia, which possesses a higher status than the other members of "the body of Christ" and authority to rule over them. Nothing in the teaching of Jesus or the Apostles countenanced such a division in the church. The notion of clergy and laity has no foundation in Scripture. It is an affront to the Holy Spirit and an offence to the body of Christ. The New Testament teaches that ministry should function on the basis of gift." - From *The Church—What On Earth Is It?* by Ken Butcher



## MOUNTAINS HIGH, VALLEYS LOW By Jeannette Haley



Mountains have always held a deep fascination for me. By mountains I mean “real” mountains such as the great ranges in Alaska, or the Rockies, The Tetons, or Cascade and Olympic ranges in Washington State where I grew up. Their rocky, rugged and wild terrain helped forge one of the opinions I’m so famous for; that is, so much of what other folks around the country call “mountains” are nothing but foothills to me.

In my vivid imagination I have climbed a thousand forbidden peaks, explored the beauty and treasures of nature in a million hidden crevices, crystal lakes like gems hidden in high mountain meadows, and stream-filled forests. From the safety of my sheltered existence I’ve discovered sights and sounds that no mountain explorer has ever seen. But then that killjoy of all dreamers by the name of Reality steps on the scene, reducing me to the confinement of just that—reality!

In everyday life, of course, there may be those rare interludes of ecstasy that can be compared to “mountain top” experiences of goals reached, battles won, accomplishments acknowledged, and success obtained. But even those memorable pinnacle moments give way to the shadowy valleys of daily life with its responsibilities, drudgery, and challenges. The truth is among the world’s vast population there is only a very small percentage of people who ever experience such “mountaintop” moments. People who do manage to get to the “summit of success” soon discover that they can-



not maintain and live in a state of euphoria forever in this life. Even the television romance shows that Hallmark produces demonstrate this fact of life. Generally they go like this: after nearly two hours of suspense between a man and a woman, (in which viewers gain five pounds anxiously munching on snacks) the whole tale finally culminates in mere seconds of an “emotional mountaintop” where at long last they finally kiss, or maybe there is a wedding, and that marks *the end*. We all love those happy endings, but most of us know that after the “mountaintop” experience of a grand wedding, there is no such thing as “they lived happily ever after” in the valley of real life.

Mountains themselves can represent a lot more than inspiration for artists and photographers, and the challenges of physical prowess, exploration, and athletic ability. Mountains offer valuable spiritual lessons, truths, insights, and applications. Consider the mountain upon which Abraham faced his greatest test. In *Genesis 22:1, 2* we read, “*And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt [test] Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.*” Can you even begin to imagine how you would respond to God if He asked you to sacrifice the one dearest to your heart? Yet Abraham never faltered or argued, but set out to obey to the letter what God asked him to do.

*Jack Zavada, a career writer and contributor for About.com* gives these points of interest from the sacrifice of Isaac: “God had earlier promised Abraham that he would make a great nation of him through Isaac, which forced Abraham to either trust God with what mattered most to him or to distrust God. Abraham chose to trust and obey. Abraham told his servants ‘we’ will come back to you, meaning both he and Isaac. Abraham must have believed God would either provide a substitute sacrifice or would raise Isaac from the dead. This incident foreshadows God’s sacrifice of his only son, Jesus Christ, on the cross at Calvary, for the sin of the world. God’s great love required of himself what he

did not require of Abraham. Mount Moriah, where this event took place, means “God will provide.” King Solomon later built the first Temple there. Today, the Muslim shrine The Dome of the Rock, in Jerusalem, stands on the site of the sacrifice of Isaac. The author of the book of Hebrews cites Abraham in his “Faith Hall of Fame,” and James says Abraham’s obedience was credited to him as righteousness.”

Abraham called this place Jehovah-jireh which means “The Lord will provide.” And, provide He did. Not only the ram caught in a thicket by his horns that God provided for the burnt offering in the place of Isaac, but He has provided His only begotten Son for your sins and mine. This mountain also served as a place of promise, prophecy, and great blessing for Abraham. (See verses 15-18.) Upon this mountain Abraham received a revelation of God’s plan of salvation. “*By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure*” *Hebrews 11:17-19*.

After this, Abraham returned to the valleys and plains where he had to face the loss of his beloved wife, Sarah. There is no escaping the fact that while most of us long to dwell on “mountaintops” of revelation, elation, and joy, it is in the valleys and lowlands of everyday life where we are called to walk out the revelations given in mountaintop moments with God.

In *Exodus* we read the thrilling account of God meeting with Moses on Mount Sinai where he received the Ten Commandments and the Oral Law. Concerning the Ten Commandments, (which are the foundation of our civil laws,) A. W. Tozer wrote, “Because we live in a period known as the age of God’s grace, it has become a popular thing to declare that the Ten Commandments are no longer valid, no longer relevant in our society. With that context, it has become apparent that Christian churches are not paying atten-

tion to the Ten Commandments. But Dwight L Moody preached often in the commandments. John Wesley said he preached the commands of the Law to prepare the way for the gospel. R. A. Torrey told ministers if they did not preach the Law they would have no response to the preaching of the gospel. It is the Law that shows us our need for the gospel of salvation and forgiveness! It is accurate to say that our binding obligation is not to the Old Testament Law. As sincere Christians we are under Christ's higher law—that which is represented in His love and grace. But everything that is morally commanded in the Ten Commandments still comprises the moral principles that are the will of God for His people. God's basic moral will for His people has not changed!"

This thrilling and monumental time with God wasn't enough for Moses, however. Moses wanted more—the more he met with God, the closer he wanted to be to Him. Remember, when Moses first encountered I AM in the burning bush, he hid his face from Him: *"Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God."* This is quite a contrast to what we read in *Exodus 24:9, 10* (after Moses had received the Ten Commandments from the Lord on the mount) *"Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: Also they saw God and did eat and drink."* Even after all his encounters with God, Moses beseeched the Lord to see His glory! God put him in a cleft of the rock (which represents Jesus) and passed by, proclaiming, *"The LORD, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty...."* *Exodus 34:6b, 7a. "And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped" vs 8. "And he was there with the LORD for-*

*ty days and forty nights...."* *Exodus 34:28a.* Oh how the Church today needs a vision of the LORD in His glory! A vision that will cause her to shine with the brightness of holy fire that draws people to Christ, and worshipers to worship God in Spirit and in truth!

It is in the times alone with God and His Word that we are prepared to descend into the valleys of lost humanity, where the harvest is ripe. Our example is Jesus, who *"...when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray"* *Matthew 14:23a, Mark 6:46; and Luke 6:12.* Then there is the mount of transfiguration where Jesus took Peter, John, and James to pray. The Bible tells us, *"And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem"* *Luke 9:29-31.* After Moses and Elias departed, while Peter was speaking of how good it was for them to be there, *"there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him"* vs. 34, 35. To stay upon this mount with Christ is what the believing soul desires above all else. Yet, the bulk of the Christian's service to our Lord is in the shadowy valleys of demonic strongholds, walking in obscurity, and remaining faithful to whatever is before us, while looking for His return.

Mountains not only point heavenward, but they represent being closer to heaven. Mountains offer a vantage point that can expand one's perspective, and scope of vision. And, "mountaintop" experiences with God bring a stark contrast between the spirit and the flesh—between that which is eternal and that which is temporal; between that which is vital and that which is nonessential; between that which is holy and pure from that which is polluted and unacceptable.

A closer look at *Psalms 23* reveals a progression in the believer's life, through both mountains and valleys. First, it is established that the LORD is my shepherd. That makes me His sheep, and being His sheep, He pro-

vides what I need so that nothing is lacking. From this foundational point, He makes me to lie down in green pastures—pastures that are lush, and green and safe. Consider God's beautiful promises to the scattered sheep of Israel, *"For thus saith the Lord God; Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries; and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God: Ezekiel 34:11-15.*

This is also Jesus' desire for His called out ones (Church), to be fed the pure Word of God, *"line upon line, precept upon precept."* His commission to Peter was to "feed my sheep." Our spiritual food is the ever living, ever "green," ever growing, ever nutritious, ever life-giving Word of God, and then we are to "lie down" in this lush green pasture of life, resting (trusting) in it as fully satisfied sheep. Jesus feeds His sheep "upon the high mountains" where they are in constant communion with their shepherd as they learn of Him. Then we read in verse 2b of *Psalms 23* *"he leadeth me beside the still waters."* Still waters represent a place of refreshing, peace and rest. Still waters offer reflection so that we can look into this mirror to see what kind of a person we are, and if we can see the likeness of Christ. The water also represents the Holy Spirit, and the rivers of living water that Jesus promised to those who receive Him. *"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should*

walk in newness of life" Rom. 6:3, 4.

How beautiful it is to then experience the restoration of our soul from the ravages of sin, as He leads us "in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake" verse 3. Such paths are narrow, and often steep. Sometimes we may question if we are truly on the right path, but as long as we stay close to the Shepherd, He will direct our steps. "All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies" Psalm 25:10. "He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path" Proverbs 2:8, 9. His sheep must learn that all He does is for His name's sake. Everything is for His glory, not ours. He is the only One that men should see, as did the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration "when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only" Matthew 17:8.

The first three verses of Psalm 23 are a beautiful harmonious melody of "mountaintop" experiences. But then, in the middle of the Psalm, we hit a minor key and find ourselves suddenly plunged into a deep, dark valley of death. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...." Verse 4a. Ominous, mysterious, and dark may be the shadows that lurk in valleys. There are shadows of disappointment, loss, sorrow, betrayal, sickness, and weariness. Yet the saint who knows the Lord as his or her shepherd, the one who has been in the high places with God and whose soul is nourished, revived, and restored by His Word, who is filled with the living water of the Holy Spirit, and who has obediently followed Jesus in paths of righteousness fears no evil. Such a person knows that the shepherd is with him or her, and receives comfort from His rod of correction and staff of protection.

It could be very tempting at this point to consider another trip up the mountain. But God has other plans, and those plans take place in the valleys where our enemies dwell. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over" verse 5. God prepares

a table for us in plain view of those who oppose us as Christians. Here they can behold how God has prepared His table for His people—the fruit of the Spirit, the bread of life, the living water, and the wine of the Holy Spirit. They can be drawn to the light of Christ within us that shines forth, and taste the saltiness of our lives. "O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him" Psalm 34:8.

Still in the presence "of mine enemies...thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over" Psalm 23:5b. Anointed from above with the Holy oil for service to the Lord of lords— anointed and set apart as an abundantly overflowing cup in the hands of the Lord. And the result? "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" verse 6.

The Mount of Olives is only 2,684 feet in elevation, but what a famous mount it is! From this mountain Jesus was taken up into heaven (Acts 1:9-11) and to this mountain He shall return. What a day that will be! "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south....And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: In that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one" Zechariah 14:4, 9.

Are you prepared for that day? Have you met with God "on the mountains of revelation" through His Word and by His Spirit? Have you walked it out in obedience through the shadowy valleys of your life? "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

Whether we are on the mountains high, or in the valleys low may we remain steadfast in the faith, redeeming the time, and always looking for His appearing. Amen. †

## COMMENTS

". . . It's an opportunity to express how much I get out of your words of wisdom. I keep them and enjoy them again." - ID

"It's so wonderful [Carrie's Old Time Religion CD] to hear the beautiful words and music of these great hymns—most of which the younger generation sadly don't even know! Can't believe GSM was started 25 years ago! You've been a wonderful testimony to so many people along the way as you've moved from place to place serving the Lord faithfully through hardships and heartaches plodding on and on! Thank you dear ladies for your service to Him and for letting Jesus' light shine through you to all those around you!" - WA

"Thank you for all you do for the Lord. I read the last newsletter you sent on the Reality of God and Adding and subtracting and it was such a blessing and really help me answer questions that I have had for a long time. Thank you again and please send me the courses. I would like to share with others especially in my Bible study Class we are starting this year in our neighborhood." - New Guinea

"What a joy it is for us to enter into your life and teaching. Not only does your ministry touch us but we are also blessed with your friendship!" - WA

Hello Jeannette. We don't see each other much but I think of you often and marvel at the way our lives have crossed paths in the Lord's work. I was glad to see the paintings on your website. I really think the Moses painting is a great one and was glad to see it as the lead picture. I don't know if you know but the model for that painting is now pastoring a church in Woodinville and has called his church "Cleft in the Rock" after the passage in the bible and that painting.

I mentioned the Epiphany painting last week in my sermon. I believe those ideas in that painting are very important theologically and need to be represented in art.

Please greet Rayola for me. I've listened to a small bit off the website and hope to hear more. - Pastor Joe, Cedar Park Church, Bothell, WA and Chapel of the Resurrection

## RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

### GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY?

**Q:** *I get confused about God when I read how He hardened Pharaoh's heart in the time of Moses and sent a lying spirit in the mouth of the prophets of King Ahab to set him up to be defeated and killed in battle. Is there any way you could help me understand why a loving God would encourage such matters?*

**A:** The one aspect of God that is the hardest to understand is His sovereignty. It is easy to flaunt His love, appreciate His faithfulness, be humbled by His mercy, and rejoice over His grace, but His sovereignty is something that is unknown to us and hard to relate to. However, it is what governs much of what we see when it comes to leadership and certain people being put in place at certain times. However, what we can be assured of is God will use whatever instrument is available to bring about His purpose.

We are told in *Romans 9:15* that God will show mercy to whom He will show mercy, and then in *Romans 9:17-18* it says, "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

It is clear by the Scriptures in *Romans* that Pharaoh was actually an instrument of God. Because of his rebellion towards God, he forced the hand of Moses, tested the resolve of the children of Israel, and brought the judgment of God down upon him and his people. As a result, God's name was lifted up and declared throughout the earth. In fact, His name became a name to fear because some forty years later, a harlot by the name of Rahab told the spies that she knew the LORD had given them the land and then she went on to say in *Joshua 2:10*, "For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, who ye utterly destroyed."

Clearly God's reputation followed Him even decades later.

It is clear that God placed Pilate in his position, knowing that the Roman leader would give way to the wishes of the religious people to crucify Jesus. Jesus made this statement in *John 19:11*, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin."

And there is Judas Iscariot. He was a thief, yet he was entrusted with the purse. Did Jesus know he was a thief and would be the one who betrayed Him? Of course, He did. He even pointed Judas out the night He was betrayed and said this in *Matthew 26:24*, "The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born."

This brings us to why did God choose such people? Well, we know that they were all warned, but chose to ignore the warnings. Pharaoh cried uncle a couple of times but tried to hold on to the children of Israel, Pilate washed his hands of the matter with Jesus even knowing that He was innocent, and Judas repented of betraying an innocent man, but each of these men's actions already opened the floodgates of events (*Exodus 9:27-35; Matthew 27:1-5, 17-26*). All that remained were the ultimate consequences. This brings us down to what made these men candidates for their time.

I believe there is a twofold answer. The first one has to do with these men's heart. Pharaoh's heart was already lifted up in pride, making it hard in the first place. Pilate was a man-pleaser, always trying to make peace, even if it was with the devil to advance his own political ambitions, making him half-hearted towards things that did not serve his purposes. Judas Iscariot had a worldly heart that was idolatrous (greedy) toward the things of the world.

The second part of the answer is that these men did not love the truth. (See *2 Thessalonians 2:10-12*.) When people do not love the truth God will send some type of delusion to test their hearts in order to reveal the deception of their own heart (*Jeremiah 17:9-10*). *Proverbs 4:23* instructs us to "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are

*the issues of life,*" and *Proverbs 23:7* tells us, "for as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." The reality is God's ways will reinforce a hard heart condition in its delusion, cause the weak heart to become heavy, and break a worldly heart, but if a person continues to hold to his own reality about something he will become harder against truth, more fearful towards it, and like Esau, after squandering his birthright for a bowl of lentils, and Judas Iscariot, after throwing away his spiritual legacy for some silver coins, will in the end find no place of repentance to change the tide (*Hebrews 12:16-17*).

It is important to point out that God in His sovereignty not only knows what a person's heart condition is, but what decisions he or she will make because of it and the circumstances he or she will find him or herself in. Even though these wicked vessels (or instruments) are designated for God's wrath to come, He will place such individuals in certain positions to fulfill His greater purpose.

A good example is the present day wicked leadership that is clearly ushering in the second coming of Christ. You can see how God has handpicked each of these leaders to bring about His plan. Although they are arrogant and deluded enough to believe they are the captain of their destinies, they are nothing more than vessels destined to taste the wrath of God. They are being used to fulfill prophecy, which includes the mystery of iniquity coming to full bloom so that God can judge it once and for all. But, as Jesus stated about Judas Iscariot, "Woe unto them for being used in such a fashion."

We are living in exciting times. As Christians, we already know that in this world Christians may appear to lose battles along the way, but in the end we will come back on the winning side to watch all of God's enemies put under His feet. Meanwhile, we need to remember, nothing happens outside of God's sovereign purpose. †

#### QUOTING RAYOLA

"Sound doctrine without moral righteousness is worth nothing. The premise of pure doctrine is moral righteousness through upright living."



## 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.

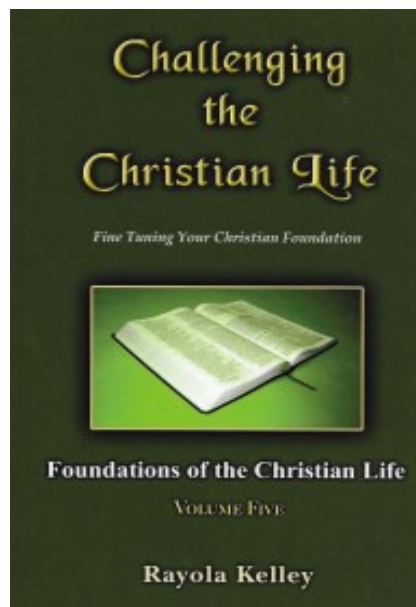
On the Mount of Ascension the Transfiguration is completed. If Jesus had gone to heaven from the Mount of Transfiguration, He would have gone alone; He would have been nothing more to us than a glorious Figure. But He turned His back on the glory, and came down from the Mount to identify Himself with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

“Let a man be determined to give over his hateful self-life to the death of the Cross; let him but know the reality of that inward dying; and all suffering from without will fail to move him.” - *Beyond Humiliation—The Way of the Cross* by John Gregory Mantle, pg. 43

## Challenging the Christian Life

by Rayola Kelley



When people think of challenges, they often relate to physical challenges. It is true that we mortals are challenged on the physical, emotional, and mental levels. However, most people do not realize they are also challenged on a spiritual level.

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