

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

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

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RUNNING THE RACE

Part 2

Purpose

By Rayola Kelley

As the age of the dispensation of grace winds down, the days are filled with an intensity that can be felt, while spiritual darkness is growing more ominous. Because the greatness of this darkness is overshadowing the world we live in, we must ask ourselves if this present state has paralyzed us with fear, or are we becoming complacent because of indifference and hopelessness; or, are we preparing to run what remains of the "race" with the same intensity in order to complete the course?

In last month's article I wrote about how the Christian life is a race. The Apostle Paul said this at the end of his life, "*I have fought a*

good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7).

I will deal with the first and last part of this Scripture in later articles, but right now I want to focus on the second part of his statement, "*I have finished my course.*"

Not long after this statement, the Apostle Paul was beheaded for his faith. One minute he was present in his body, but in a matter of seconds, he was ushered into the glorious presence of his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8). Can you imagine the wonderful homecoming he experienced? How he must have been rejoicing as he looked into the beloved face of his Lord.

It is clear by Paul's statement that as he honestly faced the end of his physical life, he could say that he indeed had finished the course before ever stepping across the finish line marked by heavenly glory. As I read

Paul's statement, I asked myself if I would be able to make such a declaration. I'm aware that in the past I have spent valuable time chasing after worldly dreams, pursuing fleshly agendas, and taking various detours along the way in an attempt to make life fit according to my terms. As a result, at times my Christian walk was sporadic and powerless, and if I did manage to run towards some goal, it proved to be fleshly and worldly, which caused the victory to become elusive or temporary at best, while proving to be aimless in purpose, and utterly worthless in significance.

It was as I matured in my Christian life that I realized that the Christian race was not about competing with others, but running my own personal course, designed just for me by my Creator. Even though the goal is to receive the prize in the end, much of the Christian race in this present age has to do with staying the course, ever pressing forward in spite of the hardness of the path, while avoiding the ever-present temptation to waver from the ordained track.

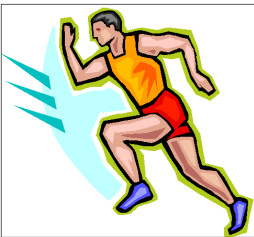
The challenge to stay the course is clear when it comes to running the race, but in our initial state as Christians, the idea of Christianity being a grueling race that tests resolve, character, and devotion is lost in the original zeal of immaturity and religious assumptions. It is not unusual for new Christians, when they learn that the Christian walk is a race, to attach romantic notions to it that fizzle out in times of testing, while others may make a mental note of it, but store it on some shelf for a later date. In time the mental note eventually becomes buried in the dust of lifeless intentions as the Christian settles down into a comfortable state of religion, parking in a particular pew, spiritually falling asleep while being enfolded in the security blanket of doctrine, and pacifying self with so-called "good works" such as attending church, giving a

helping hand, paying tithes, occasionally reading the Bible, and praying in times of desperation.

I can't help but ask, "Is this truly running the race?" To run any race requires forward action. However, there is a difference between simply "running" and "running a race." Running can be nothing more than physical exertion, while a race implies there are specific goals and a finish line. A person can run anywhere, run from something, or run towards something, but the one who is running a race has a set course that will clearly discipline the steps he or she takes.

This brings us to the next question. How many Christians are simply running (busyness) when it comes to religious activities, and how many are pacing themselves as they run the race? To me the biggest issue for Christians, when it comes to running the race, is not their unwillingness to be participants, but their confusion and despair in not knowing how to run the race. They do not know what is expected of them, and some fear they might become lost along the way because the path is unknown, uncertain, and untried.

The biggest reason for Christians not running the race is because they have never really learned to walk the walk. The discipline of running begins with learning the discipline of walking. Discipline is a big part of any race. When Jesus called believers to be His disciples it was to bring about the necessary discipline to prepare them to run the course set before them as His followers. Jesus clearly set the pace for every runner by becoming a living example of what it would mean to run the course, leading a believer in the right direction. The key is that believers must choose to become devoted followers of Christ. If they do not see Him leading, they will stop to avoid becoming lost. If He gets too far ahead, they need to speed up in order to keep Him in their sight, and if He



slows down, they need to make sure that they don't pass Him by.

Since there seems very little personal challenge for American Christians when it comes to the Christian walk, complacency has taken Christians captive. Sadly, much of this captivity comes out of pure "boredom." There is no inspiration or lasting satisfaction when it comes to the Christian walk. It is more of a weekly duty or an emotional "fix" that one must participate in to get on with life or get through the week, than a satisfying way of living. Instead of feeling fulfilled, lethargy becomes the norm, as seething frustration slowly seeps through the cracks of despair.

I don't like to use the word "bored," because when I was a child, my mother always warned me that she would give me something to do to silent my ungrateful attitude and fill my time with constructive activities; but, the fact is how many American Christians have seen the real move of God? How many are simply being entertained while being spiritually dulled down? How many in the upcoming generation have actually witnessed the power of God? How many are prepared to step up to the plate to be in the right position to carry the torch from the previous generation, or pick it up where it was dropped by one who has gone on to glory?

The questions could continue, but I am sure you get the point. The whole purpose of discipleship is so that the generations that follow us will be prepared to take up the torch of the Gospel and carry it to the finish line. That is why the Apostle Paul stated, "follow me as I follow Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1) More importantly, how many people who are following behind us actually witness us carrying the torch of the Gospel, while the love of God burns brightly in our hearts as the hot branding iron of godly devotion leaves an indelible mark on our souls, identifying us to our Lord and Master?

I have come to understand as a minister of the Gospel that my sole purpose in this world is to prepare others to carry the torch of the Gospel, whether it is in their home, job, or some arena in society. I am saved because others have carried that torch down through the centuries and

have passed it on to those who followed behind. That torch was passed to me by two women who were bold enough to share the Gospel with me and committed enough to faithfully carry the torch in front of me. It was clear to me that their Christianity was not something they tacked on; rather, it was something they believed, walked out, and were faithful to impart to others.

To properly consider what it means to run the Christian race, we must consider how we view the Christian life. Do we see it as a religious burden of do's and don'ts? Do we consider it a religious exercise that requires us to put on a certain hat, dress, and smile when we attend church to keep "God off our backs," while the rest of the time belongs to us? At such times we can be assured that we are not running a race; rather, *we are just putting in our time.*

If all we are doing is "putting in our time," why attend church? What is the purpose of going to church if we are not prepared to do business with God to ensure a right relationship with Him, and worship Him in Spirit and truth so that we can come out with a greater sense of who He is? The purpose of church is for the edification of the saints—to build up, encourage and exhort one another to accept our high calling and run the race to the finish line (Ephesians 4:16-17). *Hebrews 10:25* puts it this way, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

How many churches are nothing more than a social club? What are Christians feeding on when they personally interact with each other? At such times how many Christians talk about everything but Jesus? They share about things instead of sharing their testimony about Jesus and what He has done for them in the way of salvation and what He is presently doing for them because He is faithful. How much excitement about Jesus is present when Christians come together? Is the spotlight being constantly turned on Jesus in personal fellowship so that others are looking to Him, considering Him?

What will it take for those Chris-

tians who are not really running the race to be inspired to do so? The answer lies in purpose. Purpose has to do with focus. The Christian life is full of purpose—to ever make an eternal difference. It satisfies the spirit, inspires the soul, and ensures discipline when it comes to the body. In order to live it, Christ must be our focus. He must be the one we fall in love with, become identified to, and constantly lifted up before our eyes and others. Like David, we must fix our hearts on Him to ensure He remains our focus (Psalm 57:7).

In this world, it is easy to have a divided heart (idolatrous) that becomes half-hearted towards Jesus. A divided heart causes great conflict because it can only focus on one attraction at a time as it pursues one heartthrob at a time. It cannot be divided in loyalties without frustration. It cannot serve two masters without experiencing anger. A satisfied heart is one where the person has sold out, and consecrated all to the one true Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

Clearly, the main reason that Christians fail to run the race is because their hearts are often divided. A divided heart not only senses confusion and frustration, but it usually looks outward to the world to be satisfied. This is because the person has believed the lie that initial salvation or religious affiliation is enough religion. It may be true that one can get enough religious exposure, but one can never have enough of Jesus. Religion may be bound by doctrines, rules, and rituals, but Jesus is eternal. We can put much emphasis on certain doctrines, but we will never have the spirit that results in true fellowship, a fellowship that can only happen when people come together on one common ground for the purpose of edifying one another. That ground is Jesus, and it is on that ground where people will partake of Jesus together, experiencing true satisfaction.

The truth is we will be learning for ages to come about the mysteries that surround the Lord's grace that expressed itself towards each of us in His great redemption (Ephesians 2:7). It is for this reason that we are told to put our affections on things in heaven and not on things on the earth (Colossians 3:2). David put it this way,

“Thou wilt shew me the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore (Psalm 16:11). Jesus is the one who sits on the right hand of the Father. In Him we can know the fullness of joy and glory in the pleasures that are attached to Him. Putting our affections in the right place is the only way we can ensure that the Jesus of heaven becomes our main and preferred attraction. However, to determine the direction of our affections requires personal discipline when it comes to our emotions and feelings.

New Christians start out with worldly palates. Their emotions have been trained to be stirred up by sensationalism instead of the Spirit. Their feelings are triggered by sentiment or a false sense of expectation and euphoria instead of by the truth. As a result, a new Christian who is operating strictly according to emotion or feeling is not prepared to tune into reality and face the different challenges of life in light of Jesus Christ. When Christians insist on defining Christianity according to worldly palates, they will seek religious entertainment rather than true fellowship of the spirit. They will be attracted to worldly worship that makes the flesh temporarily feel good rather than desiring the move of God that causes the mind to soar upward, and the heart to align itself to the truth of God in unadulterated worship.

This brings us to another aspect of focus and that is what one values. We only put our focus on something we think is worthwhile. For example, we focus on those whom we love, we only consider those things we think are worth our attention, and we concentrate on that which takes on personal meaning to us. When we focus on something, we emphasize it, lift it up in our mind, and direct our affections towards what has become our preference. And, what do we prefer the most—the right to live life on our terms, the world, or the Lord? In *John 3:91-21* Jesus talked about those who prefer darkness over light because their deeds are evil.

This brings us to the final aspect of focus, and it has to do with vision. Wherever our focus lands, that is the direction we walk in. The challenge, when it comes to focus, is that some

Christians may unknowingly have eyes only for the world. Such focus is on temporary things; therefore, they can't see afar off. When they consider the unseen world, it becomes a confusing blur, a point of contradiction because one can never bring the world and Christ together.

The Apostle Paul talked about those who are blind to the light of the true Gospel in *2 Corinthians 4:3-6*. They may have knowledge of spiritual things, but it all seems foolish or impractical when it comes to putting it into action. If Christ is going to be our focus, we must have the eyes of faith to see beyond this present world and sensitive hearing to discern when the Spirit is speaking to us about spiritual matters.

The Apostle Paul encountered five reactions toward the Gospel in Acts. The first response we are going to consider came from Gallio in *Acts 18:12-16*. He was a decent enough official when it came to government matters, but he was *indifferent* to the spiritual matters surrounding God. He actually drove both Paul and the Jews away from his judgment seat because spiritual matters were not his concern.

The next response that needs to be pointed out came from a man by the name of Felix in *Acts 24:24-27*. He showed some interest, or maybe curiosity towards the Gospel. *Acts 24:25* even shows us that Felix was affected by the message that Paul shared with him, *“And as he (Paul) reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have convenient season, I will call for thee.”* (Parenthesis added.) Even though Felix was affected by Paul's message, he was a procrastinator towards it because he preferred his devious ways. He was hoping that if given enough time in prison, Paul would offer him a bribe.

The third response came from a man named Festus. Festus considered himself to be a rational man, and when Paul shared his testimony, he declared him mad (*Acts 26:24*). Spiritual truths are often deemed foolish by those who pride themselves with their worldly intelligence and rationality (*Romans 1:21-28; 1 Corinthians 1:26-28*).

The fourth response came from King Agrippa. He knew about Jewish beliefs and could have related to what Paul was saying, but he would not allow himself to be persuaded by the Gospel. The reason why is because according to history he was in an incestuous relationship with his sister Bernice (*Acts 26:28*).

The final group is made up of individuals like Lydia, Justus, and Crispus who believed the Gospel (*Acts 16:13-14; 18:7-8*). When you study the history surrounding Lydia, you know she carried the torch when her home became a meeting place for saints. According to the Revised Version, Justus was also called Titus, and some believe that he was the Titus who traveled with the Apostle Paul. Crispus was a ruler of a synagogue, and even though there is no record of what he did after his salvation, I can't help but believe that as a ruler he was already established to make a difference within the Jewish community.

Which of these groups are you associated with? I pray that every reader fully identifies with the fifth group—those who believed the Gospel, are saved by grace through unfeigned faith, and are faithfully carrying the torch in this dark world. †

CHALLENGING WORDS

“Christ's call is to save the lost, not the stiff-necked; He came not to call scoffers but sinners to repentance; not to build and furnish comfortable chapels, churches, and cathedrals ...in which to rock Christian professors to sleep by means of clever essays, stereotyped prayers, and artistic musical performances, but to capture men from the devil's clutches and the very jaws of Hell. This can be accomplished only by a red-hot, unconventional, unfettered devotion, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the Lord Jesus Christ.” – C.T. Studd

“Great minds discuss ideas; Average minds discuss events; Small minds discuss people.” – Unknown

“The Christian life does not fall upon us; rather, it is developed in us according to the way we allow it to be worked in our character, and the way in which we walk it out in our daily lives.” – Rayola Kelley

A PERFECT HEART IN AN IMPERFECT WORLD

Part 2

By Jeannette Haley

*“O GOD, my heart is fixed; I will sing
And give praise, even with my glory.”—
Psalm 108:1*

Now and then I find myself likening my heart, and that of others, to the ocean, with the greatest depth of the sea representing the innermost recesses of the heart, unseen, often misunderstood, and unobserved only



to God, while, by contrast, the rolling, tossing, flowing and breaking of the surface water, aptly representing human temperament, is what observers may discern to be the state of current conditions. Occasionally what bubbles to the surface from the lowest point of our heart can surprise us, frighten us, sober us, or even delight us as the case may be. Even though born again people, whose hearts are anchored in the Rock of ages, may suffer through raging waves of life's distresses that mount up in their fury, pushed by stormy tempests that howl in morbid anguish, yet for all that there remains a calm assurance deep within. Why? The answer is *God is*.

Dare we accuse God of being far off and unconcerned by our plight, as did Jesus' fearful disciples when the wind and waves threatened to sink their boat, as they cried out "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" What happens to our faith when our hearts are melting in fear, and disappointment haunts our minds because our fervent prayers seem to have been carried away by the winds of adversity? Emotions may rage, like the foaming sea, tossing us helplessly into an abyss of darkness, yet in spite of it all, somewhere deep within our heart and soul

there remains a flicker of "knowing what we know", a flame of faith, a flame that cannot be extinguished regardless of the pounding lies of the Adversary, because *God is*.

The Bible records for all eternity the trials and tribulations of certain men and women whose faith shines from perfect hearts towards God as the stars shine in the heavens. With repetition we become familiar with their names, and the events that surround the testing of their faith, yet therein lays the danger that familiarity brings; that is, our spiritual eyes and ears become dulled down to the power of unchanging truth encapsulated in gems of Scripture. As obscurity begins to stretch the distance between ourselves and the priceless lessons, spiritual principles, and personal applications that the Holy Spirit longs to impart to our hearts, our spirits languish in a Sargasso Sea of lethargy that drips the poison of unbelief into our minds. Our ship may be in the water, and our sails hoisted, but there is no anticipation, or even yearning for the welcoming "wind" of the Holy Spirit to deliver us out of our pathetic state.

The problem today is the growing number of surface Christians who have no hunger or thirst for the deep things of God. Just "accept Jesus" and God will do the rest, and when you die, He will be so happy to see you, because you are so wonderful, and carry your limp, little empty soul to Heaven. Such people can be likened to "fair weather sailors" who will only venture upon the ocean if it is smooth, calm and shallow enough to wade to shore in the event their boat gets rocked. Deep sea diving to explore and discover the mysteries and treasures of the unfathomable sea is the farthest thing from their dismal minds and dead imaginations. Likewise, the pursuit of God, as with deep-sea exploration, comes with a cost few are truly willing, or prepared to pay. It can cost a person everything, as it did Job, who, in spite of the cost, maintained his integrity because his heart was fixed on the knowledge that *God is*. Job made these powerful declarations, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him" Job 13:15, and "But he knoweth the way that I take:

when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" Job 23:10.

Twice in *Genesis 5* we read "Enoch walked with God." (See *Genesis 5:21-24*.) From just four words in two short phrases we know that (because God is holy) Enoch had a pure heart, for no person can walk with our holy God if he, or she, is not in total agreement with Him. No person can "walk with God" in arrogance and pride, nor can we walk with God in unbelief, and sin. We read that Enoch walked with God for a total of three hundred years "and begat sons and daughters" (vs. 22). You have to keep in mind that Enoch did not walk with God in the perfect environment of the Garden of Eden before the fall; but rather, he walked with God in a fallen world that was sinking deeper and deeper into debauchery and evil—the same debauchery and evil that is being replicated in our present world. Yet, in spite of this godless situation, Enoch's heart was "fixed" on the Lord God, and after three hundred years of unbroken communion with his Creator, God "took him." Enoch was a man who chose to faithfully walk with God, a walk that undoubtedly took him through spiritual depths and heights that post-flood believers can only try to imagine.

Consider the perfect heart of the pre-flood era's greatest ship builder, Noah, Enoch's great-grandson, who "was a just man and perfect in his generations, and ... walked with God" *Genesis 6:9*, in spite of living in a time that was a prelude to ours in which "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" *Genesis 6:5*. If Noah had lacked faith and righteousness, none of us, including all animal life, would be here today. *2 Peter 2:5* describes Noah as a "preacher of righteousness," a preacher who no doubt preached the forthcoming judgment of the Lord to his siblings, his nephews and nieces, and their families, as well as friends, neighbors and to everyone within earshot. The very act of building the magnificent ark was a testimony to his obedience, and the coming judgment upon all flesh. No one could accuse Noah of not sounding the warning to humble themselves and repent before

it was too late. In that final moment when God shut Noah, his wife, his three sons and their three wives in the ark, it was too late for any “last minute conversions to righteousness.” So shall it be at the last trump. *“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” 1 Corinthians 15:52.*

The parable of the ten virgins sounds a clear warning from our Lord that our hearts must “keep burning” in faith and expectation for His coming. Nominal Christians can be likened to the five foolish virgins who were unprepared to meet the Lord at His coming. Their half-heartedness resulted in eternal separation from the bridegroom. *“Afterward came also the other virgins, saying Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not” Matthew 25:11, 12.* Half-heartedness is the fruit of a divided heart. King David prayed, *“Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth; unite my heart to fear thy name. I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore” Psalm 86:11, 12.*

Of all the kings of Israel, King David stands as the king whose heart was perfect before the Lord, in spite of his many sins. We read in *1 Kings 11:4*, and *6b* that *“when Solomon was old . . . his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father.”* To keep in mind—in Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance “perfect” in Hebrew, “Tam” means, complete, pious, gentle, dear, perfect, plain (remember Jacob, a “plain” man?), undefiled and upright. A study of the life of King David as well as the Psalms he was inspired to write reveals a sensitive man with a pure heart. While some commentators conclude that his life can be compared to a roller coaster, in keeping with the “theme” of this short article, I prefer to compare him to the currents, tides and myriad of oceanic expressions, ranging from benign water, rippling softly upon the shore to the sudden

appearance of a rogue wave far out to sea. King David is an excellent example of a man who experienced extremes in the “highs” and “lows” of life, and everything in between, just as followers of Jesus have found themselves tempest tossed, persecuted, misunderstood, maligned, slandered, and given up to death through the centuries. The key is, no matter how wrong or impulsive David’s decisions may have been as he navigated on the sea of his life, nevertheless his heart *“went fully after the LORD”* and, like Job, David never denied Him in his heart, nor allowed his heart to turn against Him, for his heart was “fixed.” His secret? Repentance! *“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” Psalm 51:10, 17.*

How much is a perfect heart and an excellent spirit worth? Undoubtedly much more than all the sunken treasure the ocean can hold. Daniel, whom scholars calculate was maybe as young as fifteen years old when carried away into the Babylonian captivity is a shining example of a man with a pure heart, and excellent spirit. In *Daniel 1:8* we read *“But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.”* In *Daniel 6:3* we read *“Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.”* Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself with anything that was idolatrous, or unacceptable to the Lord, and he maintained that commitment throughout his entire life, even though the temptation was always before him to compromise with the world.

Daniel may have been a captive to a worldly king in a worldly kingdom, yet he guarded his heart in order to keep it perfect, pure and excellent before the Lord. The example of Daniel in comparison to the contemporary Christianity of today brings to mind the picture of a humble man, rowing a modest boat far out at sea, while steadfastly refusing the temptation to

abandon his rowboat in order to take advantage of climbing aboard a luxury cruise ship.

As we sail upon the seas of our times, imagine we are scanning the horizon in search of the true Church of Jesus Christ—the Church made up of members of the Body of Christ whose hearts are pure, fixed, anchored, committed, and established. Of all the vessels at sea, the biggest, most modern, beautiful, luxurious pleasure cruise ship, loaded from top to bottom with every kind of carnal pleasure known to man, cruises into sight. Would your heart beat with high anticipation that this is surely the successful Church Jesus died for? But, before you climb aboard and settle in for a pleasure cruise, look again. Consider the great sea of lost humanity, and then answer this question: Could Jesus’ true Church possibly be found among the little, unassuming, weathered vessels, battered by the storms of life, which are, nevertheless, still faithfully fishing for the souls of men?



You decide. †

THE HIGHER CALLING QUOTES FROM SPURGEON

“Oh, Brethren, it is sickening work to think of your cushioned seats, your chants, your anthems, your choirs, your organs, your gowns, and your bands, and I know not what besides, all made to be instruments of religious luxury, if not of pious dissipation, while ye need far more to be stirred up and incited to holy ardor for the propagation of the truth as it is in Jesus.”

“Someone asked ‘Will the heathen who have never heard the Gospel be saved?’ It is more a question with me whether we—who have the Gospel and fail to give it to those who have not—can be saved.”

“Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter.”

“Let each one of us, if we have done nothing for Christ, begin to do something now. The distribution of tracts is the first thing.”

“God save us from living in comfort while sinners are sinking into hell!”

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

Q: *Why didn't Jesus heal everybody at the Pool of Bethesda?*

A: There is a misconception that Jesus went around healing all the sick, and this particular incident in *John 5:2-9* proves that such a notion is misplaced. The first thing we must note is that those who were sick often sought Jesus out. It appears that most of them had heard about this Jesus and when he was in the vicinity they would often cry out to him like blind Bartimaeus in *Mark 11:46-52* and the ten lepers in *Luke 17:11-19*. In the case of the bedridden man who was brought to Jesus in *Mark 2:3-12*, the key is that the sick man was brought to Jesus because of the faith of his companions, reminding us that we must bring the sick to Jesus in our prayers in sincere faith. (See *James 5:14-15*.) It is clear that in most of the healings that took place, Jesus was sought out by those seeking healing for themselves or others.

The fact that these individuals sought Him out or called to Him was an act of faith on their part, but when it comes to the man at the pool he was not seeking Jesus out because his faith was in the pool being stirred by an angel rather than an actual encounter with Jesus. This is true for many in America today. I do not know how many American Christians first seek God in fervent prayer, praying with expectation, ever ready to submit to His will in a matter. Like the man with the son under demonic influences in *Mark 9:17-29*, there may be those who have hope (wishful thinking) that God will heal or deliver, but who lack the expectation that He would personally touch them or someone close to them.

Scripture shows that physical healing often was associated with people who had chosen to believe Jesus could heal them. As with the woman with the issue of blood, He is usually their last and only hope of being healed and definitely requires a supernatural intervention (*Mark 5:25-34*). Such individuals have nothing to lose by seeking Him out and everything to gain if they do encounter His healing touch.

The problem with Americans is we have our various "pools of Bethsai-

da" that we look to just like those in *John 5*, hoping that there will be some type of stirring by heaven above that would supernaturally bring us healing, while all the time looking to a worldly pool instead of looking up. Occasionally, we become desperate for healing, but once the desperation flees, we are back to the place of considering what worldly options are left for us to pursue. It is true that the Lord can use these other avenues to bring healing, but the other harsh reality is that when it comes to healing among many in the American Church, the Lord is rarely sought and if He is considered, it is because He is the only option left.

There are other aspects of healing that we as Christians must keep in mind when considering this subject. The first point is that there are three types of healing: physical, spiritual, and death itself. For example, take physical death. For the saint it is leaving behind the former life of suffering, challenges, and struggles and walking through the door into the glory of God. *Psalms 116:15* says, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints." However, for those left behind, it is a great loss. Even though in God's eyes the death of a saint is heaven's gain because another child has come home, it leaves a gaping hole in the hearts of loved ones left behind, frayed emotions that are unpredictable and a tormenting vacuum. We may intellectually know that at the end of this journey is great hope and expectancy for us to see our loved one once again, but we still must walk through the devastation it leaves behind, choosing to hold onto the Lord's hand.

In most cases we think of the miracle of healing in terms of physical healing, but the greatest type of healing is the spiritual healing that takes place when a sick, lost, dying soul has received salvation. Many Christians claim the part of *Isaiah 53:5*, "and with his stripes we are healed" in terms of physical healing and not the deliverance of the soul from the various bondages of the flesh, the world, and Satan. The Apostle Peter in *1 Peter 2:24* is clear that this particular reference of being healed with Jesus' stripes has to do with the salvation of our souls and not physical illness,

"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree that we, being dead to sins should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." Keep in mind that souls devastated by sin harbor broken hearts, are wrestling under tremendous bonds, and are bruised (*Luke 4:18*). It is for this reason that those seeking spiritual deliverance sought out Jesus as well, such as in the case of the Syrophenician woman in *Mark 7:24-30*.

It is clear that the greatest healing has to do with our souls being washed, cleansed, and redeemed from the claims, workings, activities, and consequences of sin. This brings us back to the purpose behind physical healings. These healings often had to do with confirming the message or the faith of a person. For example, in the case of Jesus' second miracle of healing the child of the nobleman in *John 4:46-54*, the nobleman was seeking to believe Jesus, and chose to believe His word before actually seeing the sign that his child was healed. His faith towards Jesus was confirmed by the healing of his child.

However, seeking to believe and asking for a sign as a point of proof are two different things. Many were seeking a sign, but it was not to believe Jesus; rather, they wanted to put Jesus to a foolish test (*Matthew 12:39*). They had no intention of believing Jesus. They had a "wait and see" attitude to see if Jesus and His teaching fit into their narrative. Jesus said of such people that they were a wicked generation.

Simple child-like faith allows God to show Himself mighty through miraculous interventions, but signs were never meant to be a source of faith (*Matthew 18:2-4*). Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (*Romans 10:17*). In other words, God did not heal to show off or prove a point. Healing was a means for God to cause people to consider the source of healing and not the act itself, and it is for this reason that healings, along with being delivered from demonic oppression, often serve as powerful signs. These signs will follow and validate the preaching of the Gospel (*Mark 16:15-18*). Sadly, we do not see this happening on a grand scale

in America, but it is happening elsewhere in the world.

This brings us to another aspect of healing: it must be done for the glory of God. God sometimes uses abrasive tools such as illnesses to bring forth a greater testimony and refine the calling and ministry of a saint. *Psalm 34:19* tells us, "*Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.*" Afflictions can be illnesses, persecutions, and losses as demonstrated in the book of Job, but as we can see God allows them, knowing that the saint is trustworthy in handling them if he or she looks to Him. Eventually He will deliver each of us out of our afflictions according to His will and timing.

Sadly, many Christians think that Christianity gives them a pass when it comes to afflictions. They fail to consider that God is allowing them in His Body and at such times we need to seek His face for wisdom, comfort, and understanding. We need to know if He is allowing it in our lives to go deeper in us to refine the life of Christ in us, or maybe He is preparing us for our high calling, enlarging our testimony so that we can be used by Him in more effective ways, or it could be a point of chastisement to get our attention.

Here is an important aspect of God's intervention in any matter. It will prove to be a test. Jesus basically asked the blind man in *Matthew 20:30-34*, "What would you have me do for you?" People fail to realize that if Jesus miraculously heals them their life will change in some way. He does not heal people so they can continue to live like beggars or go back to the old way of doing something; rather, He heals them so they can live for His glory. Sadly, like the nine healed lepers that failed to thank the Lord for their healing, there is little or no acknowledgment from recipients that God indeed has healed them. They often go back to the world without considering why God touched them. In America there are also those who would also foolishly accredit their healing to their faith and not to God's sovereign mercy and grace.

In *John 5:14* we get an indication that when God heals it is not just for the benefit of the recipient. Naturally it should bring rejoicing, but the other

side of it is that it should bring sobriety. In *John 5:14*, Jesus gives the man at the pool this warning, "*Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*" People want relief from the illness, but not deliverance from their ways. Again God does not heal people so that they can walk back into the dead ways of their old life and the world, but He heals so that the recipient can walk according to his or her calling and His will. After all, it is all about conforming us to the image of His Son (*Romans 8:29*). †

COMMENTS

"Loved your newsletter this month as both you [Jeannette] and Rayola talked about the heart. It is a very sobering reminder that Jesus needs to be real to us. Rayola pointed out that as Muslims are becoming more prevalent in our communities, we need to be just as vigilant as they are. We can't just tack Jesus on, He needs to be All and All in our hearts, in our conversation and the inspiration behind our life if we are to be the light and witness of the true God and Savior of the world. Great article Jeannette on a perfect heart. We should decide daily to pick up our cross, denying the self-life to follow Christ by allowing him to shine the search light on our hearts to reveal and cleanse us of any sin that so easily can beset us. I love the scripture *Matthew 5:8* you quoted, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God". We must daily allow the Word to cleanse and wash us and the Holy Spirit to renew and fill us up. Thanks for delivering the Word of God to us and always challenging us to go deeper in the Word to come higher in Him." - ID

"In my humble opinion, it's [Christian Mingle] just another THING that's been "Christianized" to try to make it look legitimate! . . . If they were TRULY Christian, and TRULY wanting a mate, then they would be on their face asking God to bring the perfect one to them (or show them who/where the mate is) and waiting until God did JUST THAT!" - FL

"He [Tozer] is exactly right that the old hymns had doctrinal depth to them and the words had great meaning."- ID

(COMMENTS, Con't.)

"I know the scripture says by the foolishness of preaching it pleased God to save those who believe (*1st Corinthians 1:21*), but it says the foolishness OF preaching (meaning the preaching of the gospel is foolishness to those in darkness) not FOOLISH PREACHING. And that is what most of today's preaching is, foolish preaching. I wonder how many crowds these false prophets of today would draw and how much money they would take in if they were to start telling people to repent of their sins and turn to God, or they are going to face the judgement of God upon their souls. How many people would be "sowing" into their ministries then? How many people would they be able to get to fall over "slain in the spirit"? How many people would be in Joel Osteen's basketball arena church if he were to apologize to them and tell them he has been wrong AND that he has been preaching a false gospel AND that they are not okay with God AND that they are on their way to hell AND that they need to turn from sin AND turn to God by faith in THE REAL JESUS CHRIST OF THE BIBLE! How many people would sing T.D. Jakes praise and pack out his Mega-Fest (Mega-Mess more like it. This man has an unholy mixture of the world and church in his conferences) meetings and buy his books and cd's if he were to tell them that he is a false prophet AND that he has been duping AND deceiving the masses for years with his corrupt, watered-down version of the Christian faith." MD

QUOTES TO PONDER

"See why so much preaching and teaching is wasted, and worse than wasted: it is because the church will not break up their fallow ground. A preacher may wear out his life, and do very little good, while there are many stony-grounded hearers, who have never had their unplowed hearts broken up. There is a mechanical religion enough, but very little that looks like deep heart-work." – Charles Finney

"Church members in too many cases are like deep sea divers, encased in the suits designed for many fathoms deep, marching bravely to pull out plugs in bath tubs." – Peter Marshall

ALERT TO CHRISTIANS!

After **Curtis Bowers**, a former Idaho state representative, wrote a letter to the editor about the drastic changes in America's culture, it became the feature story on the evening news, people protested at the Capitol, and for weeks the local newspapers were filled with responses.

He realized then that he'd hit on something. So, he began to investigate and found an abundance of evidence proving how the Left is advancing a "progressive" socialist agenda. Bowers explains just how well this agenda has been implemented in his documentaries. He tells us what he is desperately trying to get Americans to understand: The left wants you to think that the cultural changes that have taken place since the 1960's have done nothing but progress us forward, toward a brave new world. This film will show that the brave new world they seek is nothing more than the failed policies and ideologies of the communism that enslaved over a third of the world's population during the 20th century.

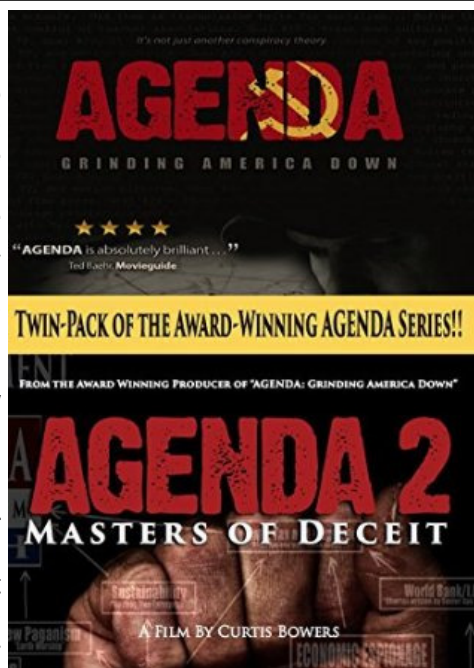
It will show that they've done everything in their power to dumb down our children, undermine our families, rewrite our history, and promote obscenity and immorality everywhere that they can. It will show that most people on the left aren't communists, just the useful idiots Lenin spoke of, who are being used to promote a socialist agenda which is the first and necessary step toward communism. History has proven beyond any doubt that the free enterprise that freedom produces provides more for anyone willing to work than any other system. So why would the left still be pushing a socialist agenda? It's really just microwave communism. There are only two possibilities. They are either ignorant, or evil.

* * *

The reason I called this film *Agenda*, is because I wanted to make a clear distinction between what I was researching, and all the conspiracy theories out there. The dictionary says a 'conspiracy' is an evil plan formulated in secret by two or more persons. But an agenda is simply a list of things to be done. At every turn of my investigation, I've found agendas by people and groups of the left, outlining their plan in their own words. They've been doing most of this right out in the open.

Some of you might be thinking these Marxist ideas aren't the most serious threat we face. What about militant Islam? Or open borders? The national debt? Or even China? Well, I agree that America is facing many serious threats right now. But the reason I believe this agenda is the most dire is because it's destroying us, on the inside. Through political correctness and dumbing down, it's causing us to lose our ability to call evil evil, and stand against it. I fear for our country. If we go along with business as usual, not informed, not aware of what's going on, then the very small minority that have a plan and are great at organizing the uninformed and misguided will make sure their plan is carried out.

(Available on line.)



A TRAGIC TRUTH By Marvin J. Rosenthal

It is utterly tragic that humanity disdains so great a treasure as the Word of the infinite God. The Bible is ignored, ridiculed, and rejected by the great mass of unregenerate humanity; is little more than a dust collector for a large segment of those who call themselves Christians; and is often preached more *about* than *from* by we who call ourselves conservative, evangelical, fundamental Christians. It is too often preachers—of which I certainly am one—Who are guilty of using a text as a springboard to dive into our own thoughts or applications, or giving an application from a biblical text without first interpreting the text considered.

At other times, we totally ignore the historical, grammatical, and cultural background out of which a particular passage comes. As a result, many who name the name of Christ are biblically deficient, notwithstanding many years of instruction in Bible-believing churches. And then, per-

plexed, we wonder why so many of God's people are spiritually anemic, unstable, following divergent doctrines, and making shipwreck of their lives. This is not an unrealistically harsh appraisal of the present hour—but it is, the Bible declares, an indication of the nearing of the end of the age (2 Timothy 3:1-7; 4:1-4).

Today, there is not so much a need to defend God's Word as there is a need to proclaim it. Perhaps Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the prince of preachers, said it best. When asked if he defended the Word of God, Spurgeon responded "Yes, the way I would defend a lion. I just open the cage and let it out."

God's Word is eternal; it is true; it is alive and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. It need only be pulled from the scabbard and bared for use by a courageous band of believers; its hot, flashing blade will do the work. The Bible is the only thing that can stop the insane, out-of-control, spiraling descent of the planet Earth.

(Excerpt from *Zion's Fire*, VOL. 27, NO. 2, pg. 21)