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Running the Race Part 11 THE PRIZE By Rayola Kelley

Recently, Krista had quite an experience. She had an opportunity to visit an assisted living home where she encountered a man who was struggling with his mortality. He confessed to her that he did not have long to live, and he did not know where he was going. In essence, she shared the Gospel with him, and told him that if he confessed his sins and believed and received Christ, he could be assured of being with Him forever. But, the man could not really claim that assurance. Before she left him, she asked him if he would like her to pray with him about it, upon which he agreed. She led him through the sinner's prayer and when it was over he had tears in his eyes. The next day the man's son shared how his father told him he would be leaving, but he knew where he was going. The following day the man passed into eternity with assurance. However, he made one statement to Krista that should cause each Christian to consider why they are here. "I have been waiting for someone to come and talk to me about this very matter." If salvation was the essence of Jesus' death on the cross, why did He simply not take each of us home as soon as we were saved? Why did He leave His church behind? The answer is found in the man's statement.



Painting by Jeannette Haley

In past articles I have been writing about running the race. Scripture shows that the race is in relationship to carrying the torch of the Gospel through the world. This torch is not just any torch; it is lit by the fire of the Holy Spirit. Its light is meant to penetrate the darkest places in the world by parting the darkness in man's very soul. I know this is true because this wonderful message parted the great darkness in my soul, and I have met people who make the same claims. (See *Acts 1:4-11; 2:1-4; 1 Corinthians 9:16-27; 2 Corinthians 4:2-6*).

If you were to ask me about the people in my life who stand out the most, they are the ones who had a part in my salvation. I still can see the face of the woman who gave me Chick tracks with the Gospel, the dental assistant who cleaned my teeth while sharing the Gospel, and the two cousins who shared the Gospel with me, as well as took me to church. These are the ones who were carrying the torch whose light penetrated my soul with the hope of Jesus, the hope of being saved from my miserable state, the hope of eternal life. As *Romans 10:14* reminds us, "*How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?*"

Then there are those individuals who were a part of my spiritual growth. Perhaps they taught me an important truth, dropped heavenly wisdom into my soul through some statement, or lifted my arms in prayer; and, there are those whose godly actions left indelible impressions upon me. Each of these individuals reminded me that as a Christian I have been entrusted with something of great importance, something that is a matter of life and death. It is a legacy, one that becomes part of a growing cloud of witnesses in heaven (*Hebrews 12:1*).

As Christians we must ask our-

selves, "Why are we here?" Is it just to be like the rest of the world, supporting some lifestyle promoted by the world while tacking on Christ or some religious exercise, or trying to survive the demands of each day, or maybe it is leaving a nest egg behind for our children, which is commendable, but will have no real lasting effect in light of eternity?

Today there are busy people who are trying to leave some type of legacy in this world, but there is only one real legacy that will leave an eternal impression in this world and the age to come, and it is associated with the Gospel. The whole reason Christians have been left behind is to carry the torch of the Gospel, while the Church is responsible to ensure that the torch is lit and remains so.

The Church is a body of believers, whose head is Jesus. *Ephesians 4* is clear about the makeup and purpose of the Church. It is for the edification of others to come into the stature of the fullness of Christ. As a body we are to grow up into Him in all things, bound by love, working for the benefit of the body as a means to reflect the life of Jesus' light to the rest of the world ((*Mark 16:15-16; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18*)). I am not here to debate the technicality of certain Scriptures, the commands surrounding the Great Commission or the latest methods. Scripture is consistent that believers, the Church, are responsible for sharing the Gospel, promoting the Gospel, and ensuring the furtherance of the Gospel in whatever arena its members are placed. We who belong to this body have been given the great commission to further the Kingdom of God in hearts and minds, which clearly points to the fact that the Church is not here to entertain Christians into some lulled state of false happiness in our pews, but to challenge them to obtain the real prize of heaven. The Apostle Paul stated, "*I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*" (*Philippians 3:14*).

Larry Spargimino in the "Prophetic Observer" gave this illustration in light of the parable of the wineskins found in *Matthew 9:15-17*, "Those who are new wineskins are on the move. They are obedient to the Great Commission. New wine will inflame a sense of mission and purpose. Old wineskins will sit within the confines of the church buildings and complain about all the bad people 'out there.'"

As a ministry, our goal is twofold: to keep the Gospel message at the forefront and to equip saints to be those runners who will faithfully carry the lit torch of the Gospel. Through the years, the Lord has provided us with team members who have been faithful to lift up our arms in support through friendship, prayers, and financial provision. I have not only had a great sense of appreciation for these silent partners, but I have been in awe of how God shows His faithfulness through His saints. They have taught me that regardless of whether my particular platform or calling is visible or not, I must always resolve to be faithful, with whatever arena God establishes me in, to do my part regardless of how small or insignificant it might be to others. These precious collaborators believe in our mission and have entrusted us to carry it out. What we often do in this ministry is our "reasonable service," but what our silent team members faithfully do behind the scenes is the sweet savor that reaches heaven, for there is nothing as sweet as the unseen faithfulness of a saint in the matters of His kingdom (*Luke 16:10-13*).

As Christians we must face the inevitable: our time on earth is short and we must redeem the time in light of our great commission to ensure we do not squander our time, energy, or resources. One day life as we know it will come to an end, but for Christians this present life points to the fact that the completion of our particular walk through this world was actually ordained before the foundation of the world, and the finish of this great marathon race that each of us are to run actually started over 2,000 years ago (*Ephesians 2:8-10; 5:15-17*).

As believers we were given a new life along with marching orders that required us to walk in faith, and provided us with "footwear" that would

allow us to run the race carrying the torch of the Gospel of Peace. As a church we know that we have been given the dispensation of grace to carry out our commission, effective gifts and talents to carry out our responsibilities, and the authority and power of His Spirit to be victorious in the end (*Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 12:4-11; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Ephesians 3:2; 6:15*).

As I wind down this topic of what it means to run the race, I must admit in all the years I have been involved with this world, I have never known a serious runner who did not run to gain the prize, a competitor who did not do his or her best to win the awards, and teams that did not give their all to win the ultimate trophy. In fact, those who did not have the heart to give their all, a disciplined mind to remain focused on the prize, and the will to see a competition through to the end were eventually weeded out.

I say all of this to challenge every Christian. My challenge is simple: are you running the race, and if so, is it to gain the prize? Salvation is a gift, but the prize is given upon finishing the course. *First Corinthians 3:13-15* tells us that our works will go through the fire to prove their quality. A person still can be saved, but their works consumed in the fire. I have always believed that what is left of our works will be offered back to the Lord. I don't know about you but it would be a point of shame to offer back to Him ashes in light of what He did for us on the cross.

I have met many Christian runners through the years. Some were obviously running with great urgency, but others were pacing themselves. There were other runners who were dealing with injuries, but still limping along, while there were those who were barely advancing forward due to weariness from the hardness they encountered, and occasionally I encountered those who needed to rest for a while before continuing on. Some were confused because there were mixed signs, others had become lost because they got off the path, and there were a few who were sitting in the middle of the path until they were encouraged by other runners to get up and continue the race.

There are various reasons why

the runners are at different points in their life. First of all, Christians are in different places because they are at various spiritual levels. Others are struggling because their church and mentors failed to prepare them to be runners and some runners are faithful to move forward even when confused and unsure, trusting that the Lord will get them where they need to be. But, the one reality is that such runners are not on the sidelines or playing armchair quarterbacks in old wineskins; rather, they are in the race. They may not be out in front and they may not be seen by men, but the Lord sees them being faithful in small ways, while entrusting them with being part of the greater picture while supporting other runners along the way. But, what is important is that these runners know their place in the race. They are not trying to run in someone else's lane nor are they trying to gain someone else's prize. They understand their place because they understand their high calling, and whether it is significant to others is not important because their vision is focused on the prize.

The real virtue each runner possesses who finishes the race is something I have already mentioned: faithfulness. As a runner, I can tell you there are many obstacles to overcome, and at times I could not see the finish line, but I always knew it was there. There were times when the real reason for my being here became clouded, but I knew the Lord would faithfully get me back on track. I lost my way at other times and the Lord used circumstances or people to put me back on track. At times He would even remind me of the importance and urgency for me to run the race.

The truth is we as believers are all part of this great race against death, the death of souls. I don't know about you but when I pass people, I wonder what path they are on: the broad path or the narrow path (*Matthew 7:13-14*). I wonder if they are prepared to face God in eternity or whether their death will be a door that opens to the great abyss. I wonder.... I would like to know everyone I pass is saved, and as Christians that should be our main concern. I can't save people, but I can avail myself to be a vessel, and instrument of God in

whatever arena and capacity I might find myself in.

Availability is the key issue when it comes to being used of God. Whether it is family, friends, associates, enemies, or the masses, our main heart desire should and must be to see people saved. I am not just here for those I like or think are worthy: I am here for God to reach the unreachable and save those who are lost and seem hopeless. I am available not because I am noble, but because I love God and God loves humanity. While I was yet in the loins of my forefathers, destined for a tormenting eternity, God commended His love for me and offered up His Son on my behalf (*Romans 5:8*). While I was yet lost, He found me, and when I was the most hopeless, He gave me hope. Although harsh, writer David Daniels made this statement, "It is hate to let the lost perish unforgiven and go to the lake of fire."

We often have an unrealistic concept of love. As we read in *1 Corinthians 13*, godly love is active, committed, pure, true, and faithful. It is hard to remember that the opposite of love is, in most cases, indifference. Indifference is a type of hate. Granted, it is not touting anger or vengeance, but it is saying, "I don't care what happens to you." True love cannot remain indifferent when life and death is the issue. True, godly love wants to see people saved; it wants to see people win the great race of life.

The question is what prize are we as Christians trying to gain? We already know it is not eternal life for we have been given that at our new birth experience. In *Philippians 3:8* the Apostle Paul talked about winning Christ. He went on to spell out what he hoped to gain in *Philippians 3:10*, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." It is clear that the Apostle Paul's main goal was to gain Christ, and a greater identification to and in Him.

In *Colossians 1:27*, the Apostle Paul made this statement, "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." On earth the glory of God is veiled, but as Chris-

tians we have been touched by His glory, are called to reflect His glory, and to always walk in light of His glory, but in the world to come, we will live in His unadulterated glory forever.

The Apostle Paul stated that there was more awaiting us in the next age to come. In *Ephesians 1:13* he talked about believers being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, and then he went on to say in *Ephesians 1:14*, "Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." We are redeemed and we are identified to an eternal inheritance by the presence of the Spirit in us, but when we finally come into our inheritance, we will receive the fullness of our redemption. In other words, our redemption will be completed in the future.

According to *Ephesians 2:6*, we have been positionally raised up in heavenly places in Christ, but *2:7* states, "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." God has shown each generation grace, but we will experience grace in greater measure when we reside in the midst of the Lord Jesus Christ who is grace and truth (*John 1:16-17*).

In *2 Timothy 4:7*, the Apostle Paul made this declaration at the end of his life, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." And, what reward was he looking for, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." When you finish your course will you be able to make the same declaration that you will receive a crown of righteousness because you ran the race in light of Jesus coming again?

In *Hebrews 11:35*, it talks about those who desired a greater resurrection when it came to the next age. Did these individuals of faith see this as a great reward for being faithful? The reality is we will only gain that which we prize the most and eagerly pursue. If we do not prize our heavenly rewards, we will never put the type of effort in to run the race and finish the course. This has and always will be

the great test of every runner and remains so for the Christian runner. What do you value most, Christ or this world? What do you desire most: to please Christ or yourself? What causes you the greatest concern, maintaining the riches of this world or losing sight of the value God has put on souls? What do you want to possess in the end, an earthly inheritance or a heavenly legacy?

We could try to imagine what the reward, prize, and crown is that is awaiting us as believers. No doubt the fullness of eternity will unfold before us in the next age as to the untold riches that we have in Christ. But, the Apostle Paul put it best in *1 Corinthians 2:9*, "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

There you have it. We can't begin to imagine what is awaiting us in the age to come, but I know one thing, Christ is waiting for me and I do not want to face a loving Savior and a committed Lord who is ashamed or disappointed in me because I did not love Him enough to run the race and complete it. In essence, my reward would be to hear Him say, "Well done." †

COMMENTS

"I remember being at a Bible study and The Passion of the Christ movie had just hit the theaters....[my husband] blurted out with no hesitation that it was written by a Catholic and for a Catholic audience. He and I had just listened to the late A.N. Martin admonish the movie so it was fresh on his mind. It took everyone by surprise but more than likely caused some to think on it." - WA

"Basically The Shack just says God is love and he doesn't judge sin and there is no Hell. Definitely blasphemous." - ID

". . .most [cults] have originated in the USA because the USA has become HARDENED to the true Gospel, therefore, they are always 'searching' for some 'truth.' When they don't find something that fills their preconceived ideas, they just create their own gospel imitation." - FL

THE FORGOTTEN FOE

By Jeannette Haley

"The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

—John 10:10

How we love to quote the last part of this verse! What a wonderful promise from the lips of our Lord. Undoubtedly the "positive confessors," "possibility thinkers," and "enlightened thinkers" from their lofty pinnacles of "illumination" would surely agree; that is before going on to disdainfully launch a defense of why anything "negative"—such as the first part of this verse—is to be ignored, avoided and, if possible either re-written or forgotten altogether. This untruthful, unrealistic, positive worldview was birthed out of the womb of self-delusion, which is itself the product of unbelief and rebellion. All of Christendom is under assault from the father of lies who has charmed his way into mainstream Christianity while most of the organized Church, like the five unprepared virgins, has fallen asleep. Jesus warned



in Luke 21:34-36 *"And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."*

What are "all these things" that believers should be watching and praying that they may be accounted worthy to escape? To summarize verses 8-35 "these things" are as follows: deception, fear of wars, great earthquakes,

famines, pestilences, fearful sights and great signs from heaven; persecution, betrayal by family members, hatred towards Jews and Christians, Jerusalem surrounded by armies, slaughter of Jews, signs in the sun, moon and stars, distress of nations, tsunamis, heart attacks for fear, powers of heaven shaken, worldliness, drunkenness, cares of this life. Jesus is warning His people to be alert to their own heart condition (spiritual life) so that they will be prepared for His coming. David Grabbe wrote, "The Greek word translated "watch," at its most basic, means "to be sleepless," implying continuous and wakeful concern, such as being on watch when a loved one is ill. It means to be intent or to exercise constant vigilance over something, as a shepherd watches over his sheep or a leader watches over his charges (Hebrews 13:17). Watching signifies a state of being untouched by any influence that may cloud the mind; one "watching" guards against drowsiness or confusion. Hand-in-hand with "pray always," it denotes being alert for spiritual dangers and beguilements."

While watching for the signs of Jesus' return, we must watch for "spiritual dangers and beguilements" and pray to escape being deceived that we may be found worthy to stand before the Son of Man. Revelation 14:12, 13 says *"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.* Again, it is clear that it's not trials and tribulation that we need to escape; rather, it is satanic deception. If you think you cannot be deceived, you are deceived already.

In Revelation 3 we read the words of Jesus to the church in Sardis, *"I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."* How does a church which once was alive and active end up coasting on their past reputation while slowly dying? The church in Sardis is a good example for us to consider. These people had lost their edge which is a result of failure to watch and pray

against the enemy of their souls. Jesus told them *"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee"* Revelation 3:2, 3. Jesus also said, *"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy"* (vs. 4). The Lord always has a remnant of overcomers. Jesus told them, *"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment: and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels"* (vs. 5).

The church in Sardis, except for a few steadfast believers, had forgotten that there was a very real enemy to watch for and overcome, and Jesus was calling for them to remember what they had received and heard, to hold it fast, and repent. If we begin to forget what we have received from the Lord, the power of His glorious salvation, the Holy Spirit, and the truth of His Word, we will fail to keep it in our hearts and minds, and fall short of the glory of God (sin.) Such negligence lulls us into a spiritual slumber that renders us helpless to stand against the enemy of our souls. The Christian's only sword is the Word of God. If we lay it aside as irrelevant, neglect it, disbelieve parts of it, ignore it, and forget it, when the enemy comes to "steal, and to kill, and to destroy" we will find ourselves undiscerning and totally unprepared, unarmed, and helpless to overcome. *"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grind-*

ing at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” Matthew 24:37-42. [Emphasis added.]

The church in Sardis had failed to the point that Jesus said it was “dead.” The question is what makes a church “alive?” Is it loud, contemporary music, an abundance of church activities, and outlandish entertainment? Is it participation in unbiblical, ancient, mystical “spiritual experiences” that are sweeping through the churches today? I appreciate what Kenneth Butcher, author of *The Church, What on Earth is it?* wrote about the church, “Be it in the early church of the New Testament where God’s presence was characteristically with His people in power, or be it in more recent times of genuine divine visitation, there were recurrent themes: preceding prayer; obedience to the Lord; the confession of and putting away of sin; surrender of heart; unity of spirit; willingness to suffer for Christ; and, ongoing sanctification.” And, “The change that is now needed has to be a work of the Holy Spirit which restores the members of *‘the body of Christ’* to her Head in the passion of *‘first love’*”.

We need to be “redeeming the time,” not wasting it in useless pursuits for “...all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, **Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.** Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” *Ephesians 5:13-17.* [Emphasis added.] Jesus doesn’t call sinners and saints to come follow Him for a nice little vacation. On the contrary, He not only calls us to be “fishers of men, but He is making us into soldiers in His army because we have a dangerous foe. “*Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” 2 Timothy 2:3, 4.* Every military man or woman is trained to recognize the enemy, know the ene-

my’s goals, methods of warfare, and subversive tactics. In Jesus’ army there is a never a time this side of heaven when a soldier can lay aside his or her sword and spiritual armor for some time out. Satan is always on the prowl. In *Job 1:7* we read, “*And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.*” Satan is still roaming the earth; he is not asleep, dead or gone! The Apostle Paul declared, *But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4.*

Right from the beginning this “thief” wasted no time in slithering into the Garden of Eden (which Adam was commanded to guard and protect) and through his lies and beguilement stole the innocence and purity of the first couple, killed their relationship with the Lord God which resulted in spiritual and physical death, and destroyed the peaceful, happy, and perfect life of all living creatures on the earth. All of nature was affected by man’s fall and sin. “*For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” Romans 8:22, 23.* The truth is, all of the environmentalists, animal rights groups, tree huggers, climate control managers, and earth worshippers put together will never be able to “save” this planet. Unbeknown to them, they are ridiculed and mocked by the “*god of this world,*” who is merely using them as pawns in his wicked game to deceive people and to defy the Creator and ultimately wreak havoc on the earth.

The assault on the Church, and God’s Word, is so massive, so deeply pervasive and so widely accepted it’s hard to know where to begin. Do you grab the monster by the tail (symptoms) or go straight to the heart of the matter (cause) in order to inflict a lethal blow with the sword of truth?

Someone might ask, “Just what is truth since everybody has their own truth?” The answer is the same, past, present and future, “*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” John 17:17.* Without truth, there is no standard by which to test (discern) the spirit of error. *2 Thessalonians 10, 11* warn “*And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*”

In the parable of the tares, Jesus explained, “*He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels” Matthew 37-40.* We are living on the breaking edge of that day.

Nevertheless, the fun-loving, seeker-friendly, purpose-driven, worldly, positive-confessing, man-centered, humanistic, slumbering church seems to have bought one of Satan’s most powerful lies, and that lie is this: Satan doesn’t really exist. He is just a figment of people’s imagination, a mythical figure from ancient times, a meaningless metaphor, a harmless entity, etc. If Satan doesn’t exist, then my question is who was Jesus talking to in the wilderness? (*Matthew 4*). Himself? Or, perhaps he was hallucinating? If this is true, and the Bible isn’t true, then Jesus was not God in the flesh, which means He could not save us, and we are without hope. But, praise the Lord, it IS true, and He WAS talking to Satan, and we need to remember His rebuke to the enemy when the enemy tempts us, “*Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” Matthew 4:10.*

The truth is Jesus spoke more about Satan and hell than He did about heaven; yet, the post-modern churches have decided to ignore what the Bible plainly tells us about Satan, or redefine him as a non-essential, insignificant, harmless entity, or disbe-

lieve he exists altogether. Some Universalists believe even Satan will be "saved" in the end, which is clearly the opposite of what Scripture teaches. *"And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" Revelation 20:10.*

Not everything is "positive" no matter how much you want to believe it is.

The Apostle Peter warned *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith. . . ." 2 Peter 5:8, 9a.* I have heard preachers mock this warning from God's Word by telling their adoring fans that Satan doesn't have any "teeth" and he can only "gum" his victims; that Satan is harmless and only makes a lot of noise "roaring" because he is like an "old lion that can only roar." NONSENSE! Concerning Satan, William Schnoebelen writes in his book *Lucifer Dethroned*, "our culture will not tolerate such a concept, because it is too close to those infamous taboo words, 'sin' and 'hell.' It even upsets the theological apple-carts of many Christians who prefer to think of Christianity as an institution where you get saved, join a 'Bless-me' club, then attend multiple 'how-to' seminars and sermons on ways to improve your parenting, your wallet and your self-esteem. They forget that the world's **foremost example of self-esteem is Satan.**

"They forget that Christianity should have a prophetic voice in the culture – and not simply surrender to the culture's values. It is well and good for Christian preachers to rail against abortion or the homosexual rights movement. However, many of those same preachers have bought into the more subtle and dangerous values of the culture in ways that are far more insidious.

"They have bought into a secularist, marketing-oriented, media-centered, psychologically-based view of the church and its function. This view does not protect them or their flocks when the brimstone-laden winds of Satan begin to wail through their carpeted, air-conditioned sanctuaries

and whip their sheep into despair.

"Thus, we must be careful that our world-view and our expectations are Bible-based. We need to re-examine some of our presuppositions about the way the universe works. Above all else, we need to stop genuflecting before the false gods of secularism and '...science falsely so called.' (1 Tim. 6:20)."

Church, we need to wake up. The night is coming when no man can work. Let us not be like the children of Israel of whom it is written, *"...this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD: Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits" Isaiah 30:9, 10.* Jonathan Edwards said, *"We cannot believe that the church of God is already possessed of all that light which God intends to give it; nor that all Satan's lurking places have already been found out."* Woe to the church that forgets that *"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh" 2 Corinthians 10:4a.* Remember what Jesus said to the Apostle Paul, *"Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" Acts 26:17, 18.*

The Bible makes no apologies for warning and instructing the Church about Satan, sin, hell and repentance, but the smooth talking prophets of today fly under the radar of truth in order to be well accepted by the worldly-minded, "churched," "politically correct," "good" people in the post-modern church. As Christians, it's easier to forget that the Church has a foe. We all want to be non-offensive. We all want to make and keep friendships. None of us wants to be rude or crude, and most of us, as God's children, want to serve Him with a loving, kind and generous spirit. Sometimes we become so focused on always being upbeat and encouraging that we ignore, overlook or dismiss what another person really needs to hear for the purpose of

"doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" 2 Timothy 3:17. If we really love the brethren, and desire to edify souls and see captives set free, then we need to obey the admonitions of Scripture concerning confrontation, and not opt to become "men pleasers" more than pleasers of God. Let's face it, confrontation, even for the sake of love and truth, is not pleasant. Paul wrote, *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" Galatians 6:1.* In *Jude 21-23* we read, *"Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."* These Scriptures are clear that we all, as members of the Body of Christ, (and not just the pastor) have a responsibility to others, both believers and non-believers alike. We are all called to be "fishers of men." We are all called to "fight the good fight of faith" *1 Timothy 6:12a.* We are all called to "overcome" (See *Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26, 3:5, 12, 21; 1 John 2:13; 4:4; 5:5.*)

The question is have you forgotten there is a foe? †

COMMENTS

"As the Church goes, so goes the world." The church is all tied up in FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS, instead of what God's Word says." - FL

". . . just finished the newsletter and enjoyed it very much especially your article on the courageous women of faith. Also, I'm really liking Ray-ola's series on "Running The Race" and the victory we have in Christ. Thank you so much for always bringing us the Word of God to help in our walk of faith." - ID

"I read a piece I agreed with... Our nation hasn't been "saved" by Trump. We've been given a reprieve of sorts, a delay, a chance to repent. I'm hoping America will do just that; realize what we've been given and be appropriately grateful and worship the God of heaven for it." - AR

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

Q: "Is there a difference between being saved by faith and saved by repentance? I mean, can a person be saved by faith without repentance, or are both necessary for salvation?"

A: There is only one way to be saved and it involves both repentance and faith. Jesus was clear in *Luke 13:3, 5*, "Repent or perish," and the Apostle Peter stated in *2 Peter 3:9*, that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." The Apostle Paul was clear, "For by grace are we saved through faith" (*Ephesians 2:8*). There are two types of repentance, one leads to salvation and the other is that of worldly remorse that turns into self-pity, and leads to destruction (*2 Corinthians 7:10*). Godly repentance that leads to salvation is actually a response of faith.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (*Romans 10:17*). God's Word is clear, man must repent, turn from his wicked ways, and face a righteous God in order to seek His forgiveness for sin and receive salvation for the soul by receiving God's sole provision that addresses the great offense of sin: Jesus Christ. However, the action of repentance is an action of faith responding to the great revelation of God's grace. It is for this reason salvation is truly a gift of God at every level. Man in and of himself has no genuine faith. A measure of it is given by the Lord as man chooses to simply believe that a matter is true because God said so in His Word (*Romans 12:3*).

The faith to believe is a choice of man, not the work of man. It is the response of man in light of the conviction of the Holy Spirit that will produce a true conversion to that which is right and true (*Matthew 18:2-4; John 16:7-13*). Repentance is a type of conversion because it changes a man's mind and causes him to turn from his former ways in order to be converted to a new, different way. You cannot be converted without true repentance, but you can display a type of repentance and still not be converted to something (*Hebrews 12:16-17*). True

conversion comes out of brokenness over sin (repentance), and involves a complete transformation of the mind or attitude towards a matter in order to walk in it (*Romans 12:1-2; Philippians 2:5*).

The problem is that people are blinded to their need to repent and be reconciled back to God (*2 Corinthians 4:1-6*). Unless the fallow ground of their hearts has been first prepared by the Spirit to see such a truth, they are not prepared to repent. However, if the heart has been plowed up, usually with challenging circumstances, it can now be pricked by the sharp sword of the Word, which will awaken the conscience to bring indictments to allow the person to see the hopelessness of his or her plight (*Hebrews 4:12*).

And, what does the Bible say: that in Adam we are all dead in sin and sin separates each us from God and the life He has ordained for us. Since we are all in a fallen condition we are not only dead in sin but we are all guilty of committing sin, falling short of the glory of God, and the wages of those sins is death, and eternal separation from God. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth of His Word is not in us (*Romans 3:10, 23; 5:12; 6:23; 1 John 1:8, 10*). This clearly is the bad news. Mankind abiding under the judgment of the very wrath of God, but the good news is we can flee His wrath, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (*Romans 5:8*). (See also *Matthew 3:7; John 3:36; Romans 1:18; and Ephesians 5:6*)

Remember, God's Word is the seed and once the word is dropped into a soul whose fallow ground has been broken up and prepared by the Spirit, it deposits a measure of faith with it (*Matthew 13:1-23*). It is upon hearing the Gospel that the Holy Spirit can take the message of the Word and convict man of his sin and his need for salvation, causing the measure of faith within the heart to take root as man is convicted in his heart and turns in repentance towards God to believe the message, and in doing so receive His grace through the gift of eternal life.

To emphasize repentance in the wrong light will leave a person condemned, to present faith in a heretical

manner will make it reprobate, and to take away the harsh reality of sin and man's need to truly repent and choose the way of faith is to frustrate God's grace and cheapen it (*Galatians 2:21*). Man preaches repentance so that faith can take root and a person can receive God's grace.

All great evangelistic meetings will begin with bringing forth the reality of sin and its consequences in order to plow up the heart and stir the conscience. Once conviction of sin causes a desperate person to turn from destructive ways in repentance towards the only hope of salvation as a means to flee the wrath to come, faith connects that person to the answer as he or she believes the good news and receives it in the heart as being so.

Redemption has been completed, the Gospel commissioned, grace offered, repentance called for, the way of faith a choice, and salvation the gift of God. Salvation is simple but powerful; complete and not divided by different messages and causes, and free, but requires the action of turning (repentance) and the assimilation of believing (faith).

We have the Word of God to explain salvation by connecting all the dots, but we must have the conviction and desperation to turn to face the light, the ears of faith to hear, the eyes of hope to see, and the heart to receive. Salvation is not an intellectual exercise but it is a revelation of what Jesus did on the cross for each of us that is received in the heart by faith as being so. The Apostle Paul made this statement in *Romans 10:10*, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." †

VANCE HAVNER QUOTES

"Nobody saw anything wrong with religion at Bethel until Amos came to town. Nor did anybody see what ailed the Judaism of our Lord's time until He walked in Jerusalem. It takes a prophet to show up religion when it becomes a farce instead of a force."

"Popularity has killed more prophets than persecution."

SATAN'S COSMIC TANTRUM

By Jill Martin Rische

Whoever thought an entire country could disappear down the rabbit hole? If only we were headed to Wonderland, like Alice and her rabbit! But America is going someplace far darker. The spirit of this age is furious and we are seeing a cosmic tantrum. Who could imagine that witches cursing Trump would be a top headline on Fox News or that media outlets would actually print the spell, with handy hints on how to curse your President? In what reality does assassination lunacy go mainstream?

America -- and now the world -- has lost its collective mind because the prince of this world is enraged. Satan unleashed all his wealth and power, and he lost the battle for America. The result is a level of hatred most of us have never seen in our lifetimes. It is off the charts, foul-mouthed, irrational, and violent. We are living a preview of Revelations 12:12, "Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

Satan's plan for America was globalism, humiliation, and defeat. Forces were aligned to take Israel out after the U.S. betrayed her and the United Nations voted to condemn her.

Only God knew that eight years of careful Obama sabotage would be rolled back in an instant. There is no doubt that on November 8, 2016, God intervened in a stunning way, reminding all of us that He raises up kings. (Daniel 2:21) *Satan's agenda was seriously harmed by the November election results but he is not going quietly into the night.*

Make no mistake -- this is war. It will not get better, it will not go away, and we are all in it. The spirit of the age cannot be ignored. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, inconti-

nent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:1-4).

Let's consider how Lucifer is demonstrating his cosmic tantrum:

* The rise of the Satanic Temple, carefully cloaked in atheism and designed to gut Christianity in the schools and courts of America, now gloats in mainstream media stories. Who could have imagined after school Satan clubs?

* Last June 1, several of Europe's leaders attended the dedication of the Gottard Base Tunnel in Switzerland. They viewed six hours of a satanic ceremony televised around the world! Demon possession headlines show up on a daily basis. Exorcists report they are extremely busy. Wicca or witchcraft is spreading exponentially.

* Demonic anti-Semitism has skyrocketed. Desecration of graves is common. Jews are removing any outward sign that they are Jews.

* UFOs and huge, floating "orbs" are spotted regularly outside the International Space Station. It's become so common, they turn off the cameras until the phenomena stops.

* The arch of Baal is celebrated in many cities. This was a symbol of evil throughout history but now it is honored.

* Occult "Spirit Cooking" dinners are hosted by Hillary Clinton's Satanist friend, Marina Abramovic, and attended by John Podesta. If you think they are the only ones doing it -- think again. Hollywood loves "Spirit Cooking." This is very dark occult. Don't even look it up if you are sensitive.

* Satanists at Clemson University just had a shocking ritual.

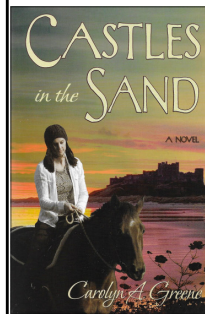
The spirit of this age is everything the Bible warned us it would be. Dr. Walter Martin puts it in perspective, "It is imperative that we return to the biblical standard of righteousness. It is righteous to preach Jesus Christ. It is righteous to reprove, to rebuke, to exhort. It is righteous, it is holy, it is just, and it is good to stand against the prince of darkness. And Christians, if they're going to be strong in the Lord and the power of His might are going to have to recognize that challenge and respond to it."

We've crossed the threshold of

spiritual warfare on a global scale. Get ready to see the world rocked in a big way. The good news is that Jesus is coming back for us! We don't know when but we know that all these things are birth pangs -- and they hurt. It's hard to live in the swamp and keep your life free of the dirt and smell of evil. It's scary to think our families are targets. It's depressing to live in a vale of tears, but God is greater. As Pastor J.D. Farag said . . . these very events are indicators that our Lord's return is very near. *We are the winners.* We carry the flag of the King on the battlefield, rallying the troops to Him. In the face of the enemy's rage, it is vital to put on the whole armor of God, get out there, and fight.

Prayer is the key to strength, courage and victory. The Word of God is the sword that will drive evil back, and that includes the wisdom that comes from studying it. We are stuck here, for now, fighting the spirit of the age -- the prince of this world and all his forces -- but we are not alone. "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.... Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:18, 27) †

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