

Inspiration from

Word for the week – volume 3

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Ask for good gifts

'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who is asking receives, and he who is seeking finds, and to him who is knocking it will be opened.' *'If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those asking Him.'*

Matthew 7:7-8 and 11

The action, asking, seeking, knocking is all active and present tense – meaning happening now.

Just like the persistent widow in Luke 18 – she kept doing two things. She was crying out to God and she was demanding her rights from the unjust judge. The message is keep going, don't give up. Just like her you may face an unrighteous situation in life or business - there is much evil about. Just like her, demand from our enemy that he gives way and call on the Lord for deliverance from the problem.

Keep a listening ear for any instruction from the Lord - your deliverance from danger might require an act of faith - that is something He tells you to do. Whatever, we can be assured of the victory if we don't give up and loose heart. There will be occasions when patience and perseverance are required.

The Lord's invitation is to come to the throne of grace to find help in a time of need, don't hold back. Born again, you qualify for the good and perfect gifts that come from the Father of Lights.

A couple of requirements - don't doubt the goodness and readiness of God to come to your aid, but ask trusting Him. Those that doubt that the Father will help receive nothing! Be very quick and generous to forgive anyone and everyone who comes against you - so the way is clear for the Lord to act.

It's best not to try to negotiate with the Lord, nor to try to demand from the Father anything you consider to be a promise from scripture. His action on our behalf is by grace - not because we are twisting His arm. The key note is to be humble - act in humility. Seek the Lord, He is ready and willing and able to come to our aid.

On the other hand we can demand that the devil does not interfere with us in any way, addressing him directly, taking authority over his works. Refuse him access to our lives, our work and our families and be ready to take authority over his works where he persists.

Eternal purpose

We are part of God's eternal purpose. Each one was created and called to be a part of His eternal plan. So are we playing our part or are we following our own desires? His eternal purpose is described in Ephesians 3 – *'to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church (that's us) to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.'*

We can be sure that Jesus will make all the resources we need to fulfil His purpose. Our part is to walk according to the Spirit – to do the things we see the Father doing, just like Jesus.

Intending to do something significant? Like building a tower perhaps! Better make sure you have the resources to complete the job. Luke 14:28-30. Jesus said that is worldly wisdom – He has given us a better way. The way of following the Spirit by doing the things He has prepared for us. If He has prepared 'building a tower' then, even though it may appear that we may lack the resources, nevertheless they will be made available to us through faith.

This then is the meaning of a walk of faith. First we absolutely trust our Lord and Saviour.

Then we do the things we are led to do, knowing that He will supply our every need to fulfil His eternal purpose – to demonstrate to the principalities and powers His manifold wisdom.

My 'tool box of resources' contains the keys to unlocking the way of faith. It contains a book - the bible, the ultimate guide to Him, His wisdom and His ways. It contains prayer, it contains praise, it contains authority and power over the works of the enemy, it contains God's favour.

Yes, my 'tool box' contains God's favour. This is a fundamental truth - He is for me and not against me. He sees me as His - that is His creation, His child, His servant on earth, His bride. His love for us will never fail.

And so we can dwell in His eternal purpose in which there is tremendous hope - hope that His plans for me and you are the very best; there is faith - faith that trusts and faith that hears His instructions and follows; and above all love - His love for us and our love for Him.

Oops, sometimes we trip up, we miss the mark. Get up - His love covers a multitude of sins, His blood has washed us clean. Confess, His faithfulness restores us and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Back on track, following the leading of the Spirit - it is His eternal purpose.

Threefold blessing

Jesus speaking - *'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.'* John 14:23

How are we to understand what Jesus is saying. They, Jesus and His Father, will come to us and make Their home with us? How does this manifest? Of course there may be more than one interpretation – here is one way of looking at it:

The Father is the source of all blessing. He has announced His goodwill towards mankind in Genesis – *'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.'* His blessing, which is manifest through Jesus, is the root we find in Revelation 5:5 where Jesus says, *'I am the Root of David.'* Meaning He is the source of all blessing for Israel and of course for us who have been grafted in. It is an important truth to meditate upon - the vigorous Root is empowering you and me.

The Son. His name is 'the Word' (*logos* in Greek) *'In the beginning was the Word And the Word became flesh.'* In James 1:21. He is the implanted word which is able to save our souls. That is able, by faith, to deliver our souls from all danger. This is practical –note it is save our souls not our human spirit which was eternally saved when we were born again.

The Spirit lives in my and your human spirit and speaks to us with His still small voice. He brings wisdom. He brings guidance. *'But if the Spirit of Him who raised Christ from the dead dwells in you (and He does dwell in all believers), He will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.'* Romans 8:11

To have the full advantage of this threefold blessing in all of life and work and business there are some guidelines:

First Love Jesus. For me that is, keep on loving Him more and more.

Second Beware unbelief – it is unbelief that caused some of the branches to be broken off – no longer attached to the root of blessing from the Father.

Third Beware doubt. James warns us that those who doubt the implanted word are unable to receive anything from the Lord.

Fourth Listen and communicate with the Spirit who indwells. He is charged with bringing us the words of Jesus. And will bring health to our mortal bodies.

Final thought. Jesus says, If we love Him we will keep His word. So we will treat the scripture of the New Covenant as a plumb line – a help to keep us straight. And we will hear the Spirit leading us and guiding us in all wisdom – words for us to keep and obey.

Then we will be truly blessed and be fruitful in all of life.

Time gentlemen please

If you were enjoying a drink in an English pub or inn as the evening wore on you would hear the shout, 'Time gentlemen please.' Time to drink up and leave as the licensing hours have expired. Any Englishman would know this is the case – just as any Christian should know that Jesus will return.

Scripture tells us Jesus will return with a shout (1 Thessalonians 4:16). It goes on to tell us that this day will not overtake us – if we read the signs we will know it is approaching.

The disciples were enquiring of Jesus, *'when will these things be and what will be the sign of Your coming?'*
(Matthew 24:3)

Jesus warned of wars, rumours of war, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, and deceivers, but said the end is not yet. Then He spoke of the fig tree – used in the bible to represent Israel – when you see the fig tree tender and putting forth leaves you know summer is near. So when we see all the things He mentioned previously - we know the end is near, at the door.

Luke records Jesus statement in full, *'when you see the fig tree and all the trees.'* Since the second world war Israel has been established as a nation - so have over 150 other nations also come into being. Time to recognise the sign Jesus gave of His approaching return.

So how do we react? It is definitely time to be found doing the works Jesus has prepared for us rather than doing our own thing.

It is definitely time for our life and work to be manifesting a walk of faith.

It is definitely time to be watching the signs.

The prophetic foundation of ICCC warned of the coming of the storm the world is now experiencing. It stated that God's blessing would not be removed from us - so we should expect blessing and guidance even in these difficult times and the times ahead. It stated that the coming of Jesus would be the final fulfilment.

'But you brethren are not in darkness that this day should overtake you as a thief.' We are sons of the light, so let us be watchful, alert to the days we live in and alert to the guidance and wisdom of God.

We are witnesses to the fulfilment of prophecy. We have seen the amazing re-establishment of Israel in 1948 - surely God's doing! We have seen and experienced all the things Jesus spoke of. Even many unbelievers know that the world cannot go on the way it is going.

We know Jesus will return. So it is definitely time to live our lives in the full and certain knowledge that Jesus is coming, as He promised, and the signs are that His return is fast approaching.

What will you be doing when the shout is heard and Jesus returns?

Will you hear Him say, 'Well done good and faithful servant?'

I see great trees....

and many smaller bushes. The big trees will protect the plantation when the storm is breaking loose. The trees and bushes are full of fruit and berries containing great power.

'Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodlyHe shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water.' From Psalm 1:1-3. *'The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree.'* Psalm 92:15 *'Blessed is the man who trust in the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters which spreads out its roots by the river. And will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.'* Jeremiah 17:8 *'That they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that He may be glorified.'* Isaiah 61:3

Let's consider the planting of the Lord for a moment. First The Root. There are two reasons why the root is very important. 1) It anchors the tree safely to the ground so it can withstand the storms and winds. 2) It is the source of the life of the tree. The root produces the sap which rises up throughout the trunk and branches bringing life and fruitfulness.

Jesus is The Root - we find that in Revelation 5:5 and 22:16. He is our steadfast security. He is the source of life for us. The safe place for us to be found is in Jesus The Root.

Here is a very profitable meditation. I am rooted and grounded in love in Jesus . Ephesians 3:17

'As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith.' Colossians 2:6-7.

Consider this - the 'sap' is rising from the Root. In me, in my being, in my body, the 'sap' of the blessing of Jesus is rising bringing wellbeing and health.

I see great trees - rooted and grounded in the love of Jesus as He dwells in our hearts through faith. (from Ephesians 3:17) Grounded is like a strong foundation.

I see great trees firmly grounded in Jesus.
I see smaller trees and bushes with fruit and berries of great power - as the life of Christ wells up in us, just like the sap of the tree, bringing His presence, His life, and His power in greater measure.

'As He is so are we in the world.' We have an anointing from the Holy One which abides in us.
1 John 4:17 and 2:20.

The Lord will use these for many remarkable miracles. The Lord is showing the Kingdom that cannot be shaken. He will send it down to all those who believe that the Lord is faithful and real, already here. It shall not be taken away from the Lord's people and will remain when Jesus comes.

Dear friends - dwell on this - the sap from the Root is rising in you. Be safe in the storm.

From nothing to everything

Here is some wisdom. Consider yourself to be nothing and to have nothing of value to the Kingdom. As is frequently quoted, 'You came into the world with nothing and you leave with nothing.'

In man no good thing dwells – Paul puts it like this, 'For I know that in me, that is in my flesh, nothing good dwells.' Romans 7:18

This is an excellent starting place because it is the place of humility and the Lord God gives grace to the humble, whilst resisting the proud. James 4:6

Now consider this. When you were born again the Holy Spirit transferred you from death to life and took up residence within. Now, in the Spirit, we have another dimension. This dimension is totally good, it is totally reliable, it has power. This dimension can work miracles. This dimension is the blessing of the New Covenant in Jesus blood.

In this New Covenant dimension, of working in the Spirit, nothing is impossible – as the Spirit leads.

We can choose, day by day. Will I follow the leading of the Spirit today or shall I do whatever I fancy? Shall I live my life, run my business, do whatever I do according to the ways and wisdom of this world or shall I follow the leading of the Spirit?

James had some straightforward talking – '*Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?*

Whoever therefore wants to make himself a friend with the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Or do you think that the scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in you yearns jealously?" James 4:4-5.

Have we considered this – the Spirit is longing for our friendship, our fellowship this day and every day?
Even yearning jealously!

'His divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to glory and virtue, by which He has given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.' 2 Peter 1:3-4

Time for a new confession – ' At work, in life, I am a partaker of the divine nature and I am the recipient of exceedingly great and precious promises. As I follow the Spirit He will lead me in the things the Lord has prepared for me and He will anoint me with His presence and power. Nothing will be impossible as He leads.

Then we will be able to say with Paul

'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.' 2 Timothy 4:7-8

Conversation moved to bin

This is what happens to most E Mails because either they are not wanted or they are just rubbish clogging up one's in box.

Fortunately the Lord is not like that - He doesn't move our 'conversations' with Him to the bin. Sometimes it might seem that He takes no action - but we have to let patience have its perfect work rather than assume He isn't listening or won't listen to us.

Quite the contrary, He wants our communication. Call it prayer if you like, you will find exhortation to pray throughout the bible. In the early church it was one of the things they gave themselves to - apostles doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers. Acts 2:42

Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians was , *'Pray without ceasing.'* 2 Thessalonians 5:17

And to the Philippians, *'Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.'* Philippians 4:6

So prayer is VITAL ! The two principal words for prayer are *'deomai'* - meaning 'make your request' and *'proseuchomai'* meaning 'speak out loud.' It couldn't be easier! No special clothing, no special ritual, no qualification to be allowed to pray.

Just accept this invitation, *'Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.'* Hebrews 4:16. Come and speak up!

But watch your attitude - *'Without faith (that is trust) it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.'* Hebrews 11:6

In these days of storm and shaking prayer is very important and thankfully very simple - speak to your loving heavenly Father with your requests, in the name of Jesus, knowing for certain He does not just move your prayer to the bin. Wait and watch and follow any instructions He may give and see the results. My wife and I can testify to many answered prayers in all areas of life - health, business, wellbeing, family and in practical physical areas as well. The Lord God delights in His children and is quick to bless.

It may be that one is at a spiritual low point - it happens to the best of us sometimes. What then? Just the time to pray in tongues, to choose to praise and to remember you are a blood bought son. Rejoice, therefore in your salvation, pray without ceasing - easier in tongues than any earthly language - and in everything give thanks. This demonstrates in the spiritual realm that we love and trust the Lord God and it is pleasing in His sight.

Paul tells us that speaking in tongues we edify ourselves (1 Corinthians 14:4) - that is we build up our spiritual strength. No wonder he urges us to pray without ceasing. It has always been important but it is VITAL for us all in the days ahead.

3 - 2 - 1 Go

This is the usual count down for the start of the race. In Christian terms we could liken it to .. hear the gospel, be born again, be Spirit filled Go and be fruitful.

'Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.' (Or eagerly receives it.) 1 Corinthians 9:24 Paul was likening our life in Christ to a human race - run just for a perishable crown. By comparison our prize is incorruptible, undefiled, imperishable it does not fade away, reserved for us in heaven right now. 1 Peter 4:4

How to run? - Build on the foundation of Christ with gold, silver and precious stones, and/or wood hay and straw. Each ones work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work endures (the fire) he will receive a reward. If not he suffers loss, yet will himself be saved as if through fire. 1 Corinthians 3:11-17

So what is building with gold, silver and precious stones - surely that is working with the Spirit of God, doing the things He has prepared, and doing them by His guidance. Words of knowledge will play a big part in the process of working in the Spirit.

Wood, hay and stubble represent the things done in our own human power without reference to the Lord. Unfortunately we all fall into that trap some of the time.

Paul urges us to run the race with endurance, encouraged by the great cloud of witnesses, looking to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith. Want to know what to do? Time for prayer to the author and finisher of our faith - He has a perfect plan for each one.

Can we say with Paul, *'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge will give to me on that Day.'*

2 Timothy 4:7-8

Read the manual - the Lord has given us the scriptures to help us on our way - to use as a plumb line to keep us on track. 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.'

With the Spirit and the truth of scripture working together we can run a safe and fruitful race through life. Ready for that Day when all will be revealed at the coming of Christ.

The time is coming quickly - 3 2 1 'Behold I am coming quickly.' Are you ready?

I have fought the good fight

Paul makes the above statement when summing up his life as he writes to Timothy. (2 Timothy 4:7)

Paul has fought – that is he has contended with the adversary.

Peter writes making it clear that our adversary is the devil – *‘your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking who he may devour.’* 1 Peter 5:8 Peter goes on to say ‘resist’ – that means to set oneself against, be in opposition to, the enemy.

So now a question – when was the last time you actively stood against the works of satan? When was the last time you actively took the authority Jesus gave us over all the works of the enemy and delivered yourself, your loved ones, your work place and environment from satan’s work? Or do you just accept whatever befalls you and yours? Many loose out because they do not contend with the one who is roaming about seeking to cause trouble and loss – especially to the believers.

What do you do to play your part in God’s eternal purpose? Is the manifold wisdom of God being demonstrated to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places through your day to day life?

James writes to make it clear that faith requires works or it is as good as dead. He asks, can your faith deliver you from danger without works? James strongly infers that it cannot. He likens it to seeing someone naked and hungry and saying to them ‘be warmed and filled’ but doing nothing – quite useless, as good as dead !

Are we fighting the good fight?

Consider the persistent widow of Luke 18. Her persistent stand against the unrighteous judge (the devil or his minion) had the effect of beating him black and blue, until he gave up. She was demanding her rights - she was demanding that the unrighteous judge give up. Her speaking out loud against him had the effect of beating him black and blue. He gave up! Resist the devil and he will flee - yes he will flee.

How can we be sure of victory over all the works of the enemy? First we must know that Jesus won the complete and total victory over satan. Second we must play our part. Playing our part is not just saying, 'I am relying on Jesus,' or 'I am trusting in the Lord.' Both these things are good but they are not the whole story. What Jesus has done can be likened to being the legal authority for our victory. But that victory still has to be implemented - and Jesus has given us all the necessary authority to do exactly that. Our faith, our trust, without works is as good as dead, we are expected to act.

If we don't, play our part we loose. Look around at your life, family and work - can you see losses, can you see unresolved sicknesses, can you see things which are or have come against you? Have you dealt with them? Or do you continually suffer them?

My dog is after the crumbs

Preparing our food - the dog is there hoping for a crumb or two.

At the meal table - the dog is there under the table hoping for some crumbs to fall his way.

Loading the dishwasher - the dog is there ever hopeful for the odd crumb.

The Caananite woman had a problem. Her daughter was host to a demon. She also knew the solution to her problem. She recognised Jesus - she called Him Lord. When she came to Jesus the disciples tried to send her away and Jesus told her - I was sent to the children of Israel, adding it is not right to give the children's bread to the dogs.

However, our Gentile woman was not about to give up. *'Yes Lord, but even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs.'* Jesus said. *'O woman great is your faith! Let it be as you desire'* - and so it was. When she went her way and returned home she found her daughter free of the demon.

We can pick up some good advice from the account.

Dogs are very persistent, they persevere - they don't give up easily. Like the persistent widow of Luke 18 we are urged to be persistent both in calling on the Lord and in resisting the devil. Perseverance brings a result.

The woman had faith - Jesus called it great faith. *'Megas'* in the Greek meaning large, big, great. Her 'big' faith would have been counted to her as righteousness in the same way Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness.

So now we see her not just as Gentile but as one made righteous and thus counted in God's family.

Jesus is the place to go with problems. The woman knew her only hope for her daughter was Jesus. We are invited to come to His throne of grace in a time of need (Hebrews 4:16) but we often struggle trying to work it out ourselves. Better to put on humility and ask!

Jesus response - 'Let it be as you desire.' What a wonderful conclusion for the woman - her desire for her daughter was now met by the one and only One who could do it, Jesus her Lord.

We don't come to Jesus with our demands and our supposed rights, we come that we might find grace to help in our time of need. We come a loving Saviour, who sacrificed everything that we could be the recipients of all that He paid the price for, with our requests.

'Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer¹ and supplication² with thanksgiving³, let your requests⁴ be known to God; and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.' Philippians 4:6

1 prayer is 'speaking out loud' 2 supplication is 'request or petition' 3 thanksgiving is 'expressed gratitude' 4 request is 'that which you seek and ask for.'

With gratitude speak out your request at the throne of grace - -come boldly you are invited.

The gold standard

Have you noticed the bible is full of gold! In the Old Testament it is there nearly 400 times. The Lord God is setting His standard - the gold standard. Everywhere the people looked in the Temple there was gold, gold and more gold.

In the New Testament gold is only mentioned a few times. And here gold takes on a very human face - Jesus is seen in Revelation walking amongst seven gold lampstands - representing the churches of Asia. Now the focus is the people.

Peter expresses it like this - *'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice though for now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials that the genuineness of your faith, **being much more precious than gold** that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise honour and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.'*

I am more precious than gold! You are more precious than gold! The believing body and bride of Christ is like human gold that is better than the physical stuff.

In the Temple the gold spoke of high value, of richness and glory. How much more then will the human 'gold' of the body and bride be and represent the highest value, great riches in Christ and of the greatest glory.

Watch out – worship gold, just as the Israelites did in the wilderness, and our Father will not be pleased!

There is wonderful picture of how the people of God receive God's abundant blessing in the book of Zechariah chapter 4. We see a lampstand with a golden bowl on the top. There are seven gold pipes leading to seven lamps – reminiscent of Revelation. There are two olive trees dripping golden oil into the bowl so the lamps are continually fed with oil. These two are the ones who stand beside the Father – representing Jesus and the Holy Spirit. This is a picture of the golden anointing oil continually available to the children of God, through the blood of the Lamb and the anointing of the Spirit.

The oil is there for you and me, flowing ceaselessly, available for life and Godliness. Are we taking full advantage of it? It brings abundant living hope and an incorruptible inheritance. It is a better type of 'gold.' It brings power to share as Peter showed when he healed the lame beggar –

silver and gold I do not have but what I do have I give to you, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.' Acts 3:6

Are you receiving the power of the golden anointing oil at home, at work in life?

Word for the weak

You are just the person the Lord God is looking for! The world looks for strength, the Lord looks for believers. In this world there are many things to overcome – all sorts of things which work against us and come against us one way or another. Paul suffered so much buffeting from the devil that he pleaded with God to take it away. But the Lord said, *'No, My grace is sufficient for you.'* Another way of saying that would be, 'you have everything you need to overcome in Me.'

The Lord has all the strength needed for every situation and His strength is available to us. Not only that but His strength is made perfect in our weakness. In fact our own strength can easily get in the way.

Paul had clearly learnt the lesson because when he addressed the Ephesians he said, *'Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against all the wiles of the enemy.'* Note – all, not some, not most, but ALL.

If I am going to be able to stand in this rough tough world I am going to need all the armour of God, which is freely available by His wonderful grace. Without His armour I would be reliant on only my own strength – much better to recognise one's weakness and put on His strength.

What we think is important – our thinking can lead us astray.

'For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.' Romans 12:3

Jesus warned that in this world we would suffer tribulation – another way of saying, there would be problems. But then through John we are told, *'For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.'* 1 John 5:4-5

So we see we can partake in the victory Jesus won through the shedding of His blood, by faith. And this is exactly what the Father wants to see. He wants to see His strength being made perfect in our weakness.

So like Paul, we can say and rejoice in being a weak Christian, one who knows the Lord's strength and how to access it by faith. One who knows that the Lord God is ready and willing to help in our times of need if only we seek Him and ask. The Lord is not looking for strong Christians He is looking for those through whom His strength can be made perfect – those who recognise their weakness. This is part of God's eternal purpose - that through believers God's manifold wisdom may be demonstrated to the principalities and powers that set themselves against us.

'He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.'
1 John 4:4

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Available now? Am I available now to the Lord for His calling and pleasure? This is the meaning of 'being bought with a price.' I do not own myself! I belong to Jesus - He bought me with the price of His own blood. *'You were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.'* 1 Corinthians 6:20
Are you available now to the Lord?

When we consider what Jesus makes available now for us it puts into perspective what we have to offer Him -

Available now Romans 5:1	peace with God.
Available now James 1:5	wisdom - just ask
Available now James 1:17	every good gift
Available now 1 John 1:9	renewed cleansing
Available now Ephesians 6:11	power against enemies
Available now 1 Peter 1:3	abundant mercy
Available now 1 Peter 1:3	living hope

Available now an incorruptible inheritance

1 Peter 1:3

Available now much much more!

We could ask ourselves – who got the better deal, us or the Lord? He gets me/us as His own and I/we get a long list of benefits! I think we get the better deal!

Available now amazing love

what He has done is because of love. If I think I have anything to offer Him I delude myself – I have nothing worthy to offer the King of Kings. Nevertheless His genuine love isn't put off – Jesus wants to dwell with you and me in love. He wants to be involved in your life and my life simply because of love.

Jesus said, *'Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.'* Matthew 11:29 The yoke links two things together. I am joined together with Jesus, at home, at work, in every place all the time. The more we consider that as spiritual reality the more fruitful our lives would become. Yoked to Jesus we can bring to Him immediately the things that concern us. I remember a time in a meeting to deal with a legal matter. The meeting was becoming difficult. A short time out for prayer and the situation turned right round.

'Its good to talk,' is a slogan used by a telephone company in their adverts. It is especially true when we relate it to being yoked to Jesus – its good to talk to Him. He listens, He responds, He helps. He is always available now.

Rising above problems and storms

Jesus called them tribulations, *'In this world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I Have overcome the world.'*
John 16:33 Why did Jesus warn us – so *'that in Me you may have peace.'*

The English word tribulation has the meaning of problems, affliction, suffering – so it is wide ranging, and it is common amongst us, as believers, that we do indeed meet with tribulation of one sort or another frequently in life and business.

So how do we rise above these things that seek to afflict us? A first step is for us to realise that in this world we are in a battle. The enemies lined up against us are those people in the world who follow evil desires and passions, and a host of spiritual forces described by Paul to the Ephesians as principalities, powers, rulers of darkness of this age and as spiritual hosts of wickedness. Our own flesh will also seek to keep us away from Jesus - the very One who is our help in time of need.

Having understood the world is a battle ground we can now take up our position. When Israel faced powerful enemies they applied a strategy. In battle they first sent out the singers and the dancers to praise the Lord. When it was time to move the ark, being the symbol of the presence of the Lord, the procession was led by the singers and dancers.

So here we have our first essential – let the praise and worship of the Lord always be on our lips.

We would do well to see King David as an example for us. When David's wife Michal saw him 'leaping and whirling before the Lord,' she despised him. David's praise and worship of the Lord was extravagant!

So a problem arises, there is our first response. The Lord Jesus has already overcome the world, nothing is too difficult for Him – praise and worship on our lips puts Him in first place.

Paul lists the armour of God that we should be 'wearing' throughout life. For this short study we take it that we are wearing the armour of God for it provides us with our second response to problems.

The last item Paul listed is the 'sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.' This is what we need to enforce the victory over problems. How do we use it? 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.' And when we pray we listen for God's response for the sword of the Spirit is the rhema word of God - it is the word the Lord is speaking to us in response to our prayer. When we read about David he was usually quick to seek the Lord and the Lord told him what to do. Victory was the result.

This is faith. Faith comes by hearing God speak. This is the provision God has made for us to rise above the problems and storms of life.

Watch

Most people wear a watch and refer to it during the day – it enables us to keep a clear account of the time. How many of us are taking any notice of Jesus command for us to watch. (Matthew 24:42.) Why did Jesus command us to watch? Because we do not know what hour our Lord is coming. Jesus likened it to the master of a house - *‘if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.’* *‘Therefore,’* Jesus said, *‘You also be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.’*

Now that the storm is upon us we should take note. The walk by faith will not be taken away from those who believe, and then Jesus will return. Jesus return will not surprise those who watch. Indeed Paul advises us, *‘When they say, peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you brethren are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.’* 1 Thessalonians 5:3-4 Paul goes on to say we are sons of the light and not in darkness, therefore let us watch and be sober. If we watch we will know.

This is why it is so important to walk by faith. That is to listen and to make our plans according to the guidance we get from heaven rather than according to our human wisdom.

Consider the rich man whose land gave a plentiful harvest. His response - *'I will tear down my barns and build greater to store my crops and goods'* and then take my ease, eating, drinking and being merry. Fool! He didn't realise that he was about to die! Luke 12:18-21. Human wisdom led this man nowhere, for his soul was now required of him. What a different scenario there could have been if he had consulted the Lord and obeyed His voice. He could have been generous with his plentiful harvest and reaped eternal reward.

How foolish it is to rely on our human wisdom. How much better to have our plans and activities be an outward expression of our inward walk of faith! This is why the message of being led by the Spirit and of hearing God speak to us is so important, especially as we see the Day draw near. Faith comes by hearing Him speak to us - whether that comes by a voice, loud or soft, or by quickened scripture or by any of the many means the Lord uses.

Even many unbelievers realise that the world can't go in the same way. Creation is groaning because of the bondage which resulted from mankind's sin - labouring with birth pangs until now. (Romans 8:22) Birth pangs means a new birth is on the way. That is the point of being watchful - a new 'birth' is coming at the return of Jesus. We shouldn't be caught unawares - watch and pray and walk by faith.

Complicated simplicity

Our title looks like a contradiction in terms – but it is actually a statement of truth. The gospel is very straight forward – believe, put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Your eternal destiny will be secured as your spirit is born again and becomes filled with the Holy Spirit.

Simple, straight forward and easy to understand – we have become new creations with God Himself as our Father.

On more complicated ground, Paul said this to the Thessalonians, *'Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who will also do it.'*

1 Thessalonians 5:23-4

Here is the promise that the Lord will sanctify (set us apart) Himself. But we still experience all sorts of problems from inside ourselves and from outside influences. How do we live through these things victoriously? Is the problem me? Is the problem someone else? Is the problem the world we live in? Is the problem from our enemy? How am I to deal with every situation?

Sometimes we can deal with things easily but other times we have no idea and feel lost.

Complexity can rule the day with lots of 'what if' questions. Simplicity has the answer every time – take it to the Lord in prayer!

Business problem –take it to the Lord, relationship problem – take it to the Lord, money problem – take it to the Lord, problem understanding something – take it to the Lord, any type of problem – take it to the Lord. We are all invited. *‘Come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.’* Hebrews 4:16.

Why are we invited to the throne of grace – so that the Lord can deal with our request. Coming to Him shows our trust and expectation that He will hear us. Why would God answer and help us? Simply out of love. He created man for a love relationship with Himself. He knows our struggles in life on earth and has and will provide all we need through His grace and mercy. He can deal with the most complicated issues of life and business.

Right now, as the world reels from one thing to another, we need and will need His intervening help – and He will gladly give it. The walk of faith will not be taken away from believers.

Nevertheless, there is a ‘learning curve.’ Like any aspect of life we have to learn. This is why we are urged to be diligent to show ourselves approved. (2 Timothy 2:15) There is the need to rightly divide the word of truth - that is to understand the covenant we have been brought into by Jesus blood sacrifice, and not to get caught up trying to keep the old covenant because righteousness does not come through the law.

So lets enjoy the simplicity of coming to Jesus with our needs and seek the Holy Spirit to increase us in all aspects of truth to deal with the complexities of life.

Stand and keep standing

Problem that does not seem to go away? You pray. You resist the evil one and still the problem seems to persist. What next?

The apostle Paul knew all about problems that seemed to persist. When he asked the Lord to take away the continuing effects of satan's thorn. The Lord said, *'My grace is sufficient for you.'*

That is not to say give up and put up with it – rather it is to confirm that the victory has been won and is there for us to stand in.

So when a problem seems irrational and persistent we can follow Paul's advice – we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

How do we stand? Put on the whole armour of God - that will enable you to stand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. We can use the armour Paul lists as a sort of checklist:

Am I standing in truth – do I believe the truth as laid out in the scripture? If not time to address any differences between my beliefs and biblical truth. And to align myself with the eternal truth.

Am I wearing the breastplate of righteousness? Stand up knowing you are righteous because Jesus has given that to you as a gift. You are not unworthy in any way.

Am I walking in the gospel of peace? Are the things I am doing in life consistent with the scripture? Or am I going my own way under my own power?

Am I lifting up the shield of faith - that is am I trusting the final outcome? Jesus has won the victory, and no matter what, I will enjoy that victory even if for the moment it feels like walking through the valley of the shadow of death - there is a table, a victory celebration prepared for me and I will come through to enjoy it. (Psalm 23)

Am I wearing my helmet of salvation? That is taking every adverse thought captive, keeping my mind free of unhelpful thoughts.

Have I received the sword of the Spirit? The sword of the Spirit is that word the Lord speaks to you - that word which defeats the problem. We often have to be patient and wait on the Lord for His special word to come - be patient and in the meantime keep standing.

Know this - the Lord loves every born again believer with an intense love. His will for you is the very best. His power towards you is unlimited. His desire for you is that you love Him above everything else - even life itself. The victory over evil forces is won - just as it was for Israel. The Lord spoke to Israel, giving them the promised land - all they had to do was to go in and possess it, that meant being certain of their Lord, and following His guidance and fighting when necessary.

So we stand and keep standing and in so doing we will inherit His promises and come to enjoy His victory and His peace.

Under severe pressure

Sometimes, hopefully only occasionally, we can come under severe pressure. How do we cope with it?

Fortunately we know for certain that the battle has already been won by the blood of Jesus – nevertheless we still need to experience the victory in earthbound practice. Here are some practical tools for dealing with severe pressure:

- 1 Always resist the devil – do this by keeping on speaking out against his works. If he is not involved in the pressure against you no harm is done. If he is involved, and he is likely to be, our resistance will bring relief - though persistence is necessary – see the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18. She kept up resistance and at the same time was calling on the Lord.
- 2 Make proclamation of the truth. Proclamation is like making an announcement. The importance of proclamation is it states our trust in the Lord. And it strengthens and helps guarding our minds. Choose relevant scriptures – for example, for money problems I would proclaim Philippians 4:19 *‘My God shall supply all my need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.’*
- 3 Come to the throne of grace to find help in accordance with Hebrews 4:16. Come with thanksgiving - for that is a positive statement of our trust in the Lord.
- 4 Come with praise on your lips. Praise is a powerful tool. Praise will defeat the spirit of heaviness

which can easily come upon us when we are under severe pressure. See Isaiah 61:3

- 5 Make time to practice the presence of God. That is special time when we focus ourselves on Him and on His presence in us, with us and around us. Find your way to that peaceful place - for some it may be praying, and praying in tongues, for some having worship music playing, for some meditating on a scripture. In that place be listening – the Lord may want to speak to you with His guidance and help. David meditated in his heart on his bed and was still before the Lord. Psalm 4:4. David found his place of rest even though he faced much in the way of severe pressure. We too can find that place of rest not relying on our own efforts as we rely on our Father.

Under severe pressure we don't feel like doing these things. Our flesh can just want to give in. So it will be a matter of making a choice. I choose to praise, I choose to come to the Lord with thanksgiving, I choose to resist the devil and I choose to come to the throne of grace.

I choose to renew my mind by proclaiming the eternal truth of God's word over my circumstances. I choose to make special times with the Lord where all my focus will be upon Him.

It is time to choose - we do come through difficult times (see Psalm 23:4-5) and we come through strengthened in faith and in testimony of the goodness of God. Make the best choice!

Investment returns

Every person in business knows the objective, or one of them, is to make a return, to make a profit, to earn a living. Indeed in two parables Jesus teaches us that this is the right thing to do. (The minas of Luke 19:12-27 and the talents of Matthew 25:14-30.) In both cases the scripture is talking of profitable and unprofitable servants. So a scene is set. The Master desires His servants to be profitable in life.

The Lord God has made a huge investment in you and me. All the gold and all the silver in the world would have been an insufficient investment. He invested the very life of Jesus His Son! So we may wonder, 'what sort of return on His investment is the Lord God wanting to see?'

Fulfilment of His eternal purpose. In Ephesians 3 Paul tells us that God's eternal purpose (or part of it) is that through the church His manifold wisdom will be made known to the principalities and powers in heavenly places. His manifold wisdom is that obedience to Him is of paramount importance – that is where His enemies failed. So He has given His church authority over all the works of His enemies. We just have to learn to apply that authority in day to day life as need and opportunity arise. This is a practical demonstration of the Kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Fruit. Jesus taught us that the Father is glorified when we bear much fruit in life and that marks us out as His disciples. (John 15) This is the outcome of a life led by the Spirit of God. As we work in the anointing He has given, led by the Spirit, in the works He has prepared for us to do – we will bear much fruit. This is a demonstration of the working of the Kingdom of God.

A bride. A bride without spot or blemish for the Son of God. It is a work in progress that started the day we were born again and will continue into eternity – becoming complete when we inherit, and are changed into, our eternal bodies.

A bride Jesus can tabernacle, that is dwell with, for eternity in the very place He has gone to prepare for us. (John 14). This is wonderful beyond our thinking or expectation – *‘eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’* 1 Corinthians 2:9

We may stop and consider for a moment – what a wonderful ‘investment’ we have made (or been allowed to make) by choosing to place our trust in Jesus. There may be difficulties, Jesus called it tribulation, in this world as we work out the salvation of our souls with fear and trembling in this life. This is nothing compared to the glory to come. It is preparation for the coming eternal life with Jesus in glory.

To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord

When things are tough in the world and all seems to be badly affected – what with global pandemic, economic disruption and fears of climate change – it can look anything but the acceptable year of the Lord and it becomes easy to loose heart.

Nevertheless this is Jesus telling us He is the fulfilment of what was prophesied by Isaiah, around 700 years before He came, and that He indeed came to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. We know it to be correct because we have the evidence that Jesus fulfilled the other aspects of Isaiah's prophecy – preaching the gospel, healing the broken hearted, proclaiming liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and setting at liberty those who are oppressed.

And He is still doing it today! Let's not loose sight of it. No matter that a storm can rage around us the truth has not changed. The acceptable year of the Lord is for all those who will recognise and receive Jesus. The acceptable year of the Lord is enjoyed by faith - that is by believing that the power of the Lord God Almighty is not diminished in any way, and that His invitation to come to the throne of grace in times of need is still open and valid today.

By faith mountains can still be moved. Jesus told His followers:

'If you have faith as a mustard seed you will say to this mountain, 'move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.' Matthew 17:20 Jesus is saying that just a little portion of faith is all that is required.

We know from the Apostle Paul that faith comes by hearing what the Lord God speaks to us – so this is a time for listening. (Romans 10:17) So now is not a time for doubt or unbelief but a time for drawing near to the Lord – bringing our requests and listening for His word to us.

The people of the world do not have this hope – so to them all can look bleak. We do have hope because we have 'Christ in us the hope of glory.' The Hebrews were urged to *'lay hold of the hope set before them.'* And *'not to cast away their confidence, which has great reward.'* Here is very good advice! Lay hold of the hope, be confident in the Lord - and receive the great reward. That is the reward of the Lord answering our prayers.

It is still the acceptable year of the Lord. The next line of Isaiah's prophecy 'and the day of vengeance of our God' is yet future and will not affect His lovely bride - the believing church. So we can be confident.

Encourage yourself, *think on these things; whatever things are true, are noble, are just, are pure, are lovely, are of good report, have virtue and are praiseworthy.* Philippians 4:8

Know this for certain – it is still the acceptable year of the Lord for you.

'God' is not a name

'God' is not a name it's a job description! The job - be the Supreme ruler - including of all of creation. It involved creating the earth and everything in it and upholding all by the word of power.

We know this supreme ruler - His name is Jesus. We know His Father - who has become Father to us as well. What a privilege we share - to know God, the supreme ruler by name and to enjoy fellowship with Him. So when we pray we come to one we know, we come in close fellowship which is why we can address by name - Jesus or Father rather than by His job.

This is the joy of the New Covenant. 'God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers, by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of glory and the express image of His person, an upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.' Hebrews 1:1-3

This is Jesus, my Jesus, your Jesus, our Jesus - the One who loves us so much He laid down His life to take away the sin that was dividing us from Him and from the Father. As the storm continues to rage around the world we, as believers, have the joy of knowing the Lord and of fellowship with Him to sustain us. Now is a time for developing our relationship - it is a strong antidote to the troubles of the world.

Yet there is even more. Romans 8:14-17 tells us we have become children of God to whom we cry our '*Abba, Father,*' and that as such we are now joint heirs with Christ. Now joint heirs with exceedingly great and precious promises, through which we have become partakers of the divine nature and inheritors of the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:1-11)

Yet more – by faith we can taste both the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. So we have full hope for the eternal future and full hope for today. When we have needs we are invited to the throne of grace where we can expect the Lord to speak to us, imparting faith. By faith Jesus is our healer, by faith Jesus is our provider, by faith Jesus sets us at liberty from all that would come against us in this life.

Lets learn and enjoy the way of faith. Trust the Lord completely for He cares for us, listen and receive the faith that comes by the word He speaks to us by His Spirit – the word we hear from Him. (Romans 10:17) The word that is the sword of the Spirit to defeat our circumstances.

Be intimate – speak with Him by name.

You are what you

It is said, 'you are what you eat.' No doubt a good diet, eaten in moderation, is very good for one's well being. The scripture tells us something of greater importance, 'you are, or become, what you think.' We might consider what we think to be hidden and to be private, to be known by no one but ourselves – but we would be wrong. Jesus showed that He knew what men were thinking in their hearts - their innermost beings.

Have you ever considered the importance of what you allow yourself to think? We don't have to allow all and every passing thought to take root in our thinking. Quite the opposite! After saying to the Philippians about the guarding of their hearts and minds, Paul urges them to think on good things. *'Finally brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just .. are pure .. are lovely .. are of good report .. if there is any virtue, and if anything is praiseworthy – meditate on these things.'*
Philippians 4:8

Paul described our enemy as the prince of the power of the air. So we should not be surprised that the airwaves, used by the media, are full of negative and 'fake' news. So many are thrown by things posted on the internet – especially so during this pandemic!

'Do not let your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.' (Jesus to His disciples –John 14:1)

When the Thessalonians were being troubled by fake news, supposed to have come from Paul, he urged them not to be, *'shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter.'*

Paul teaches the Romans that God will bring good out of every situation for those who love Him (8:28) Paul says to the Hebrews, *'Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for He who promised is faithful.'* (10:23)

So, my friends, *'do not throw away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.'* *'For now the just shall **live by faith.**'* We are not those who draw back to perdition, but those who believe to the saving of the soul.' (from Hebrews 10:35-39)

It is our constant message - live by faith. Trust the Lord. Hear Him lead and guide you. Do what He tells you to do. Doubting nothing. Follow the example of Peter - when the Lord, through a vision, told him to do something unexpected, he did so *'doubting nothing.'* (Acts 10:20, 11:12)

Now we know to keep our minds renewed, making sure that every thought is obedient to Christ and not following the ways of this world. We become what we think and as we renew our thinking in this way we become more and more Christlike. We become both blessed and a blessing.

You are what you think!

Abounding in faith

'As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.' Colossians 2:6-7

When all is said and done three things remain – faith, hope and love. Being immersed in these three we will abound - that is overflow with the things of the Lord, the things of His kingdom.

Today, we see the world in the turmoil of the pandemic. For the world there is now some hope in the development of a vaccine. For us we have a far greater hope the world knows nothing of. The pandemic is just one of the signs of the soon coming return of Jesus our Lord – Matthew tells us that in chapter 24.

The world will see the next sign, however that manifests, and still have no hope of eternal life.

We have the promise that, no matter what, our eternal inheritance is guaranteed to be secure. Not only that, faith will not be taken away from us – it will continue to be the evidence of what we hope for.

God so loves me and you He sent Jesus for us. His love is abounding, overflowing. We can enjoy His love. How do we enjoy His love? By giving Him our time and our attention whilst we pray for the Holy Spirit to fill us more and more with love for Him. So it becomes a giving and receiving of love.

The more our relationship with Jesus is deeply immersed in love, the more we will find ourselves abounding in hope. Not the weak hope of the world. But the sure and certain hope of His future blessing. Deeply in love, overflowing in hope, we are sons of faith. We are certain the Lord hears our prayers. We are certain the things He has prepared for us to walk in make the best pathway for life. We are certain He will lead and guide. We hear His voice. We find our experiences with the Holy Spirit increasing. We experience His help in all we do – His anointing working with us. We experience works of faith - as Jesus promised:

'If you have faith as a mustard seed you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.' Matthew 17:20

Is it like this for you? No. Then go back to the beginning – develop that love relationship with Jesus. The Holy Spirit is given to us to be another just like Him. The Holy Spirit will fill you with love for Jesus and fill you with understanding – ask and keep asking until you abound with love and then hope will overflow. You will become like a tall tree planted by the river, bringing forth fruit and prospering. Until He comes we have the promise that faith will not be taken from us - let's abound in it, full of love, full of hope, full of faith.

It's only a Goliath

The armies are lined up against each other, ready for battle. But, one absolute giant of a man, nearly 3 metres tall, stands challenging the Israeli forces, *'I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man that we might fight together.'* The whole army of Israel was dismayed and greatly afraid. This stand off between the giant Goliath and the army of Israel lasted 40 days until the youngest son of Jesse came and saw the conflict and heard Goliath's challenge.

Where the Israeli army was afraid young David was the opposite. *'Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that He should defy the armies of the living God?'* Here, in this one statement David declares the situation. The Philistine has no position with the Lord, no covenant, no right to stand against the covenant people of the Lord. He, the Philistine is nothing!

After a bit of persuasion (of King Saul) the contest is on. Saul's armour is refused. David goes to battle with a sling and five round stones. The battle is on, young David verses the immense Goliath. David had just been anointed by Samuel a short time before, and from that day the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. David is fearless and runs to meet the Philistine. He reaches into his pouch for a stone. He slings the stone with deadly accuracy. The Philistine is struck down and David cuts off his head with his own sword. A glorious victory for Israel follows. (David had 4 stones left over just in case Goliath's 4 giant brothers should turn up - they didn't.)

We can note and take encouragement:

We too are in a covenant relationship with the living God.

Like David we are actually reliant on grace (the five stones represent grace), not on our own strength and ability.

Like David, the Spirit of the Lord is upon us and with us.

Like David we can choose – are we like the Israeli army, dismayed and afraid – or are we like David, whatever is challenging us, why it's only a goliath!

Do we see the reality that David saw? He looked past the obvious problem and looked at the power and the anointing and the calling of God. What he saw was power and might beyond anything the Philistine could muster.

It is the same for us. What the Lord says, He will do for us, has all the power and might of heaven behind it.

Receive faith, listen in to the Lord from the position of complete confidence in Him.

We can be confident because, *'If He is for us who can be against us.'* Romans 8:31 *'We are more than conquerors through Him'* Romans 8:37

Let's learn from David. When he faced troubles he *'strengthened himself in the Lord, his God.'* 1 Samuel 30:6.

Let's do the same and like David will be able to say about trouble and problems, 'it's only a goliath' – no problem for the Lord! By faith, no problem for us either.

Have you any wine?

The first miracle we read about is when Jesus has left Judea and gone to Cana. He is at a family wedding, probably one of his brothers or sisters, as we see Mary directing the servants. There is a problem - they have run out of wine.

There is a lot of symbolism - this miracle is called the beginning of the signs that Jesus did. (There are 8 sign miracles in John.)

The symbolism starts with Jesus leaving Judea and going to Cana (which means His possession). The wedding symbolises the Christian era, as the Jewish era is drawing to its end - we note the water purification pots of the Jews are empty. However the wine has run out. Now we see a very practical miracle - Jesus has the pots filled with water and turns it into wine - not just wine but very good wine.

We can see two things of great relevance to us. One is the promise contained in the sign that there will be very good wine for the church - until we rise to meet Him in the air.

The other thing of great relevance is what the sign tells us about the very practical nature of our Saviour. We can take heart that when our lives, our businesses seem to be running out of 'wine' Jesus will come to our rescue.

The wine we take representing Jesus blood, is the cup of the New Covenant. The covenant of His continual presence with us and in us by the Holy Spirit. The promise that He is a very present help in a time of need. *'God is our refuge and strength. A very present help in trouble.'* Psalm 46:1

This miracle is full of hope. Hope for the church, the body of Christ and hope for each of us. Hope which says Jesus not only has the answer to our problems and needs but is also willing to be practical. Hope which says when we accept His invitation to come to the throne of grace in a time of need, He is there ready and willing to be the answer.

This miracle encourages us to rise above religion, which has a form of godliness but no power, into a living and vibrant relationship. A relationship in which we know that we know the Lord of all glory and in which we hear His voice speaking to us. Here is where we come to enjoy the wine of the covenant that He provides.

Here is the question, have you run out of wine in your Christian life? Has it become a sort of religious formality with no power? Has your love for Jesus become lukewarm? Is it time to repent and to stir up that which the Lord has put in you? Is it time to lift our expectations – Jesus is still and always will be the Lord of all glory. His promises are, Yes and Amen. His promised return is coming soon, meanwhile let's have our fill of the very good wine.

Intrinsically good

What do you think of the Lord God? Is He good? Is He always good? Can He be anything but good?

Jesus said, ' No one is good, but One - that is God.' So only God is good. We, who have become His by being born again, having put our trust and belief in Jesus, now have Him as our Father. An intrinsically good Father! A Father who knows how to give good gifts to His children. A Father whose gifts are good and perfect without the slightest imperfection. (James 1:17, Matthew 7:7-12)

We live in a world full of people who are not good. Jesus said only God is good - so by definition people are not good. However, in God's goodness He provided a way for us to become righteous in His sight - belief in His son and the sacrifice He made at Calvary.

As we live in a world full of people who are not good, it should be obvious that there will be many occasions when we come against bad events and bad attitudes. We have to be absolutely certain in our understanding that none of these bad things come from our Father. He is intrinsically good - that means He cannot be the source of bad and evil things. Then we can add to that - God does not test and tempt us. He does not send things to do that. (James 1)

Now we have ascertained - God is good, the world is full of people and things which are not good.

So when we are faced with trials and tribulations we can see that they comes from a fallen people and fallen world or from the enemy of our souls. This is the essential foundation to dealing with problems. God is not the problem – He is the answer. The moment we might think the Lord God has sent something to test us we have no defense, no way forward but just to put up with it.

God is so good – He fills us with His Spirit. He gives us power and authority over the works of our enemy. He invites us to His throne of grace in a time of need. He speaks to us. He gives us wisdom when we ask. He knows the answer to every problem, even the most technical matters, and He shares it with us. By faith He enables us to overcome in every and in any situation.

No wonder Jesus said, *'Abba, Father, all things are possible for You.'* And Paul, *'Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba Father.'* (Mark 14:36 and Galatians 4:6)

How is it with me and with you? How is our relationship with the Lord God. Is He *'Abba, Father,'* in our thinking and our attitude towards Him. Or are we like unprofitable servants who thought God to be hard and austere – digging their talents into the ground. (Matthew 25:14-30).

The Lord God is intrinsically good and He loves us – let's dwell in His love and grace.

Much, much more Our Lord God is the God of much, much more. (So Paul wrote to the Romans in Chapter 5) The first time he used the expression 'much more' was verse 9. Much more we have been justified by Jesus blood.

So what is meant by 'much more?' It's two Greek words - '*polys*' meaning greater in quantity and '*mallon*' meaning more increase. So the benefit our Lord God is bestowing on us is greatly increased in quantity. Our justification by the blood of Jesus is more than enough to save us from the wrath of God which will come on all the world in due course.

In the same verse (9) we are told that much more we have been reconciled to God through the death of His Son. Jesus sacrifice of His life was more than enough for us to receive the gift of eternal life and with it righteousness. Our reconciliation with the Lord God is for now and for eternity - it is more than enough. And it is all a free gift!

In verse 15 Paul tells us that much more the grace of God abounds towards us. '*Perisseuo*,' abounds, has the meaning more than enough. There is always more than enough grace for our every need and every situation - this is the Lord we love and serve.

Verse 17 tells us that much more we who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. Grace is more than enough for our every need and every situation.

Verse 20 tells us that even though sin abounds in the world, nevertheless the grace of God abounds much more. We all make mistakes and therefore sin sometimes in our life on earth - but God's grace is more than enough so that grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life. God's grace is more than enough to secure every believer's eternal inheritance.

We receive much more than enough - to be justified by Jesus blood, saved for eternity, able to access grace for every need so that we reign in life, and to cover our sins and mistakes. What wonderful provision the Lord God has made for you and for me!

Is there a catch? No, there is no catch. However there is the question - how much of God's grace do we enjoy whilst in this physical body? We became entitled to all God's grace when we first believed in Jesus and were born again, and we will enjoy the benefit of eternal life. In this life we are invited to receive grace for every need - how do we do that? By holding fast to our confession that Jesus is Lord, and coming boldly to the throne of grace where we can obtain grace and mercy.

So come boldly, asking the Father in Jesus name. Ask for what you need, trusting the Lord and listening attentively for any instruction from Him. This is the working of faith! Persist in it and don't give up- He has made more than enough provision.

Best wine – Cana vintage

A couple of weeks ago we asked the question, 'Have you any wine?' We took a brief look at the first sign miracle – the wedding at Cana, where the wine was running out and Jesus turned water into wine – not just wine, but the best wine, towards the end of the wedding feast.

The second sign miracle finds a nobleman, of royal descent, leaving Capernaum (means village of comfort) where His son was sick coming to Jesus at Cana. The nobleman implores Jesus to come and heal His son who is near death. Jesus says *'Unless you people see signs and wonders you will by no means believe.'* The nobleman – *'Sir come down before My child dies.'* Jesus – *'Go your way your son lives.'*

This sign miracle is for the church*, which we saw was running out of wine. The Nobleman represents the Holy Spirit who is the one who fathered all born again believers. His child is sick and near death. Jesus restores the child – to receive the best wine.

What do we learn from these two sign miracles. A time is coming when there will be such a move of the Holy Spirit as has not been seen before. No matter how good it was at the very beginning of the church, the best wine is kept to the end.

We can look forward to a period of time, probably quite short as the wedding must have been nearing its end, when the best wine will be poured out. – the Cana vintage.

The Master of the feast, probably representing the Holy Spirit, has approved the wine and declared it the best.

The new wineskins are prepared - the born again believers filled with the gift of righteousness and the Holy Spirit - that is you and me.

These sign miracles are full of hope. No matter that it may be difficult at the present time - when faith is being stretched to a limit - there is the promise of an extraordinary time ahead.

Now get ready - the best wine is on its way. A new spiritual vitality is coming. New spiritual gifts are on their way. Now is the time to be aware, this best wine will see a revitalised church ready for Jesus return - He is coming for His bride and this is not far away.

Jesus said, *'Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to the Father.'* Jesus is not coming for a bride who is nearly dead and has no wine. He is coming for His bride who are ready and expectant and enjoying the best wine - because He has Himself brought out the best wine which He has kept until now. The time is again coming to be filled (appearing drunk) in the Holy Spirit.

References - Cana wedding John 2:1-11.

*Nobleman's child John 4:46-54

* Or could be interpreted for Israel at the end of the tribulation

Still under guarantee

It's broken down – the car, the washing machine, the computer First question - is it still under guarantee? There follows a search for the paperwork. Oh No - it went out of guarantee a short time ago.

Such is the way of the world!

Our salvation is quite different. Let's check the paperwork!

'Having believed you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of His purchased possession' Ephesians 1:13-14

'Christ ... who has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.' 2 Corinthians 1:22

'Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God who has also given us the Spirit as a guarantee.' 2 Corinthians 5:5

'He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.' Philippians 1:6

'The Lord Jesus Christ will confirm you to the end.' 1 Corinthians 1:8

So far so good - the paperwork confirms my guarantee. But can it be withdrawn for any reason?

Let's check again:

'The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.' Romans 11:29
Still good!

But will my guarantee run out or will it last? *'Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.'*
John 3:16 Still good!

Is there anything that can prevent me from enjoying my inheritance? We have been, *'Begotten, born again, into a living hope, an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.'* 1 Peter 1:3-4 Still good!

Can anything get in the way? *'Neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is Christ Jesus.'* Romans 8:38-39. Still good!

That's it - a cast iron guarantee! It leaves only one question - is my guarantor reliable? Can He be trusted? *'If we are faithless He remains faithful.'*
2 Timothy 2:13 Still eternally good!

It is time to rejoice, time to be thankful, time to speak the praises of Him who is faithful even when we are not. It is time to know and to look forward dwelling with Him in the eternal realm. It is time to know the things of this world are unreliable and not to trust in them, but to trust in Him who is entirely reliable. *'Therefore my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable always abounding in the good work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.'*

What is heaven saying today?

The voice that comes from heaven is the voice of the Lord God. Sometimes it is easy to hear, sometimes it is not. But the message is consistent. Today the Lord God is saying to each and every one of us, His born again offspring, the same as is written in His word:

I love you. I always will love you. Your missing of the mark does not stop My love - heaven is still saying it - I love you.

I give you My peace - that special peace which is not like the peace the world gives, I give it to you freely and abundantly. My peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you. Still saying it.

Follow Me. That is what I said to call My disciples. Follow Me - I will lead you by still waters. I will restore your soul. I do not change - still saying it.

Follow Me - I know the plans I have for you, plans to give you a future and a hope. Follow Me, My way is specially designed for you - it is the best. Heaven is still saying it.

Resist the devil - he only comes to rob and kill and destroy - but I have given you authority over all his works. Focus on Me and on righteousness for this is the way of success. Still saying it.

Come to the throne of grace in a time of need - you will find grace and mercy to help. By prayer and supplication make your requests known with thanksgiving - My peace will guard your hearts and minds. Still saying it.

Be anxious for nothing. Everything is known to Me and nothing can separate you from My love, nothing can wrest you out of My hand, nothing at all. Be still and listen for My specific words for you. Be at rest, anxiety and worry won't add anything to your life. Still saying it.

Abide, dwell in Me and let My words dwell in you - then you will be able to ask the Father what you will, and everything you ask in My name will be done for you and you will bear much fruit. Believe and don't doubt and it will be done for you. Still saying it.

Think on the good things, the noble things, the just, the pure, the lovely. Think of things that are of good report and of virtue, and praiseworthy. Meditate on these things and you will experience My peace. Still saying it.

My hour is fast approaching - I am coming soon. I have prepared a place for you in My Father's house, all is ready. I am coming to take you there. Still saying it.

And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Even so Come Lord Jesus.'

Going in hot pursuit

'There remains a rest for the people of God.' Hebrews 4:9
Seems to be contradictory to our title – but as we shall see there is no contradiction at all.

We are urged to pursue, literally to go in hot pursuit of, love and to desire, literally to be zealous for, spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 14:1. Paul has just been teaching the Corinthians about spiritual gifts and ministries, then telling them that without love these things amount to nothing. So the conclusion of his message is to pursue, to go in hot pursuit of love and then be zealous for spiritual gifts.

Isn't that exactly what Jesus said when asked which is the most important commandment?

'Love the Lord you God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your heart. And you shall love your neighbour as yourself.' Matthew 22:38-9

So now we know how to fulfil Jesus commands - go after love in hot pursuit and be zealous for spiritual gifts. This is the way of love and our neighbours should certainly be blessed.

Now let's think about entering God's rest. What does that mean? *'For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.'* Hebrews 4:10

'Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.' Hebrews 4:11

So now we can put 'hot pursuit' and 'rest' together. Rest is ceasing from our own works - the things we think up and do. Hot pursuit is for the things spiritual - those gifts from God that bless, that change things for the better. In particular, for our personal blessing, words of knowledge in all of life and particularly at work are a wonderful manifestation of God's grace and mercy.

Likewise the gift of prophecy can bring life enhancing blessing to those who receive it. (Carefully handled of course - all prophecy has to be weighed and witnessed.)

All the spiritual gifts bring great blessing whether it be healing, miracles, faith, wisdom - whatever. No wonder we are told that the practical way of love is to be zealous for spiritual gifts. This way, through the working of the spiritual gifts it is the Lord God who acts. When we work just in our own strength what we do is very limited in effect. No wonder we are urged to cease from our own works!

Being zealous for things spiritual is another way of saying . 'Be led by the Spirit.' It comes down to a mindset which will always seek the Lord first. First thought, 'Lord what are You saying, what is your strategy, what would You do- in any given situation. So, no contradiction at all - the way of rest is to cease from our own endeavours and to do what Jesus said to His disciples, 'Follow Me.' That we do by being led by the Spirit.

In the waiting room

Frequently we would rather not be there! Take the dentist for example. Of course it's good to go regularly and have a check up – not so good when there is dental work to do. Necessary but usually not pleasant!

How about the railway station - there is the need to travel and often the joy of travelling perhaps on vacation. But when will that train ever come? Then there is waiting for results – job applications, examinations and so on. The waiting can be a worrying and stressful time.

Consider another 'waiting,' what we would call waiting on God. We can be keen to be doing things for the Lord or for the Kingdom – but we are called to be followers and to follow the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise we fall into the trap of works of the flesh – our own ideas. Thinking up something to do for the Lord can seem like a good thing, but without His anointing it will be just our works – works of the flesh. The bible refers to them as filthy rags!

In the waiting room with the Lord, waiting for His instructions, can be a profitable time. A time when we carry on with the normal things in front of us as per 1 Thessalonians 4:11 – *'aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, to work with your own hands ... that you may walk properly towards those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.'*

This will usually be walking in our calling. As we find contentment there we will find the Lord's anointing is present with us. If we ask in time of need, we will find the Lord answers even with things which seem impossible to us. His anointing makes all the difference.

Then there comes the times when it seems the wind blows and there is a special anointing. When the financial services part of my business had run down to a low level we asked the Lord, 'Should we close down this part of the business and save the costs?' Then we were waiting on the Lord for his answer. After a few days Marion (my wife) had a vision. It was a pond. The fish were swimming about then jumping up out of the water to catch passing flies. Interpretation - just swim about and when an opportunity comes take hold of it. That is what we did. We were at rest - we waited. Opportunities were going come (no effort on our part.) In the following 12 months we had by far the best year ever for that part of the business.

We testify the scripture is true. 'Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.' Psalm 37:7 *'Those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength.'* Isaiah40:31

The apostles were told not to go ahead but to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father. Acts 1:4 And Paul told the Thessalonians to *'wait for His Son.'* This is the best possible advice for a fruitful and profitable life.

Tell My people I love them

As I wait for 'Word for the week' I wonder what the Spirit will bring. Will it be faith or hope or rest or build on the rock or words of wisdom? This time the message is love – and much more than just 'human' love. Jesus love which transcends anything we experience even amongst the closest of friends.

Jesus love encompasses friendship – *'No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I hear from My Father I make known to you.'* John 15:15

This is a wonderful aspect of our relationship with the Lord - He talks to us through the Holy Spirit bringing Jesus own thoughts and the things that come from the Father. (John 16:13-15) When the Lord speaks we know the very mind of God. His true love brings us the things of heaven and the answers to our requests – His words spoken to us are the very source of faith, that is faith of the mountain moving variety. What a friend we have in Jesus!

A step deeper than friendship, wonderful though that is, love is a matter of choice. Choice that prefers the one loved to oneself. That is very clearly seen in Jesus sacrificing His life on the cross for me and for you. When we think more deeply we can envisage that it should have been me suffering the penalty of my sin and you suffering for yours – but literally He chose to take our place.

Tell them I know the day to day activities, the successes, the frustrations and the struggles of life. Tell them I am with them always. Tell them to abide in Me, to dwell in Me. In Me you will find your rest and your place of security. Tell them My love is still as strong as ever and forever will be. I have made the choice to love you and My choice is steadfast and faithful. Nothing will separate us. (John 15:1-8, Romans 8:39, 2 Timothy 2:13.)

Tell them your place is prepared. Just as I promised, I have prepared it for you. I will come and take you there - the time draws near. (John 14)

Tell them to love Me, and to love each other - just ask My Holy Spirit to fill you abundantly with love for Me and for each other and especially for your husbands and wives. It will be done for you.

We can walk in love - just as Paul urged the Ephesians in chapter 5. Put away all things unclean and be filled with the love of the Lord. The more we ask the more we will be filled. The more we are filled with love the more we will be able to walk in that love day by day. The more we walk in love the more fruitful we will be to the glory of God, who does all things according to His will.

You have no idea

The problem is - we are earthbound! We see only with our natural vision. Indeed what we see has some degree of beauty and some degree of glory - enough that Paul can say there is no excuse for not believing in the Lord God because of the wonder of creation. (Romans 1:20)

But the same Paul was taken on a visit to the third heaven, which he described as Paradise. He heard things too wonderful to repeat! His revelation was so exalting satan made him a constant target. So what lies ahead for each and every born again believer?

First things first - these mortal bodies will put on immortality and will not be subject to corruption. In an instant, in the twinkling of an eye this amazing transformation will take place - either at death or when Jesus returns to collect His bride. Why does this happen - because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 15:52)

And so what will we inherit? A place Jesus has specially prepared for us in His Father's house. He told the disciples He was going ahead of them to prepare - then He would come and receive them to Himself. My heavenly dwelling and your heavenly dwelling is prepared - incorruptible and undefiled reserved in heaven for me and you. (John 14:1-5 and 1 Peter 1:4)

Yet there is more - a special welcome is also being made ready.

The Lord has given us exceedingly great and precious promises through which we become partakers of the divine nature - now we get a foretaste, then the fullness, when

'An entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.'
2 Peter 1:11 There is something going on in heaven - a planning meeting perhaps, designing your and my entrance, which will be abundantly supplied. Let's look a little more closely to get the full impact. The word 'supplied' is in the Greek *'epichoregeo.'* *'Choregeo'* is the Greek word meaning to lead a stage chorus or dance and *'epi'* adds emphasis and fullness. Then abundance is added to the occasion. This will be a welcome beyond anything we have known before, or imagined, specially choreographed for each one.

We have no idea of what awaits us - *'eye has not seen, not ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.'* 1 Corinthians 2:9

We have been and are being prepared for glory - that is *'doxa,'* meaning glory, splendour, brilliance.

Whilst we are earthbound Paul instructs us, *'whatever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.'* (Colossians 3:24) Everyday, in life, at work, at rest we can focus ourselves on Him and do everything we do as unto Him - Jesus said when He comes, *'My reward is with Me.'*

I am looking forward to that glorious day. Are you?

Jesus always helped

People came from all over Israel and Jesus always met their needs - whether it be for healing, for deliverance or food to eat and wine to drink. A blind man received his sight when he washed in the pool of Siloam after Jesus had anointed his eyes with mud. Another blind man received his sight in two stages, first Jesus spat in his eyes and he saw men as trees walking, then Jesus put His hands on his eyes and made him look up - sight fully restored. On another occasion two blind men followed Jesus calling for mercy. *'Do you believe I am able to do this?'* He questioned. *'Yes, Lord,'* They answered. Jesus touched their eyes, *'According to your faith let it be.'* Sight restored! Matthew 9:27-31

With Jesus there was always a way. Sometimes He just spoke the word, sometimes He used a specific strategy.

Then Jesus said. *'I will pray the Father and He will send you another Helper.'* John 14:16. In the text that is another Helper of the same type. What will this Helper do? He will enable us to do even greater works (verse 12)

Did you notice, when Jesus was here physically He always had the exact strategy needed to fulfil people's needs? So now it is the role of the 'another Helper' to bring us the exact strategy to fulfil our needs. Jesus put it like this, *'He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is mine and declare it to you.'* John 16:14.

When we pray and take our needs to Jesus, as we are invited to do, then we should remember - Jesus will have the very strategy required to meet our need. Like when He walked the earth, that strategy might require that we do something specific. To get the wine for the wedding at Cana the servants had to fill the water pots and take some to the master of the feast.

To feed 5,000 the disciples had to take what they had and after Jesus blessed the five loaves and two fish He broke them and handed them to the disciples - they then had to continue the process, breaking and breaking again until all were fed.

This is why it is so important to listen for the Holy Spirit - for it is now His role to bring to us the very words and instructions of Jesus. So many prayers seem to remain unanswered simply because we have forgotten to be patient and to listen - so we haven't received the 'rhema' word from Jesus via the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, *'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word (rhema) that is proceeding from the mouth of God.'*
Matthew 4:4.

Praise the Lord for times we pray and just receive a quick answer. Praise Him too for the times He answers with a word to instruct us in what is necessary to receive the answer to our need. He always helps.

Are you properly dressed?

Going to work, going for a run, going to a restaurant? We are accustomed to dressing in the most appropriate clothes for the occasion. Have you considered there are special clothes for the Christian life?

One of the garments spoken of in scripture is the garment of praise (Isaiah 61:3). It is of great value in defeating heaviness and depression. Paul talks of putting on Christ and of putting on the new man, and of being filled with the Holy Spirit. One of the practical effects of that is 'making melody in your heart.' Singing to yourself, within yourself, praising and worshipping the Lord – it is of very great value in day to day life in the Spirit, building us up and keeping us strong in faith. (Ephesians 5:19)

To Paul the mysteries of the kingdom were revealed, and in particular the role of the body of Christ in demonstrating God's manifold wisdom to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. This task requires special clothing, as it involves standing and withstanding when the enemy attacks. So Paul says, 'put on the whole armour of God.' 'Put on' meaning 'clothe yourself.'

Paul lists the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace on our feet, the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation. These are the garments we need to be able to stand. Time for a personal review?

What do I believe? Is the bible a 'good book' or is it my guide to holy living - complete with all I need for life and Godliness. Is it 'God breathed' through the various writers so that I have the wisdom of God for my use and application? If I don't believe or accept the scripture then I have not girded my waist with truth - already I am not properly dressed for the Christian life!

He goes on - the breastplate of righteous. I have been made righteousness - no matter that the enemies, my own flesh, the world and the devil may try to persuade me otherwise. I stand firm - Christ has made me righteous. Surely I was unrighteous and lost but now I am definitely found, washed clean and filled with His holy presence through the Spirit. I am properly dressed!

Here is the 'acid test.' In daily life am I walking and living in accordance and agreement with this wonderful gospel which brings peace with God? Or am I a bit choosy - surely some of the scripture does not apply to me, or was only for the time it was written - or whatever other excuse you have for not living it. Am I doing the works God has prepared for me and listening for His guidance?

Do I trust the Lord God implicitly and do I keep my mind full of good thoughts? (Philippians 4:8) Am I properly dressed for the Christian life? Am I really properly dressed, or just pretending to be, whilst actually wearing the 'fig leaves' of my own thoughts and desires?

Anchored

The purpose of an anchor is to hold the vessel securely in all circumstances and particularly in a storm. In Acts 27 we read of Paul sailing on a boat caught in a severe storm - the sailors let down 4 anchors to hold the boat until daybreak.

The Lord God has provided an anchor available to each of us in our daily Christian life. Just like an anchor for a boat to be any use it must be deployed! What is this anchor? There are two things from God which are unchangeable, - His promise and His oath. How do we know about these things? By reading and studying the scripture.

God's promise is 'Christ in you.' There is nothing greater, nothing more powerful than the Holy Spirit permanently dwelling inside each of us, guaranteed never to leave under any circumstances. (Ephesians 1:13-14, 2 Corinthians 1:22 and 5:5, Romans 8:-9)

In Christ there are many, many benefits - nothing is impossible for Him. Every good and perfect gift comes from Him, every help is available to us as we come to the throne of grace.

This knowledge and certainty that Christ is in us and will never leave nor forsake us is described as **our hope which is an anchor of the soul.**

This hope keeps us stable and secure. This hope is freely available – all that is necessary is to know and apply the scripture. Not only is this hope an anchor but also it has the effect of entering His Presence within the veil. Consider Hebrews 6:19 - *'This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast and which enters the Presence within the veil.'*

When we know this is so we can face all the world throws at us with a response of praise to our Lord God. Because we have hope taking us into His presence within the veil, we can make the choice to praise and worship – we know He will help. In Psalms we are told that God inhabits the praises of His people. When we praise the Lord God regardless of (or even because of) the situations we face, His presence comes into the situation.

It is essential, like the anchor for the boat, that we deploy our hope. We can't do that if we doubt the scriptures and the promises of God. That means acceptance and belief in the fact that the scriptures are 'God-breathed.' It is His word, containing His promises and all we need for life and godliness. It is not for us to judge His word, it is not for us to doubt Him. All is prepared ready for us to accept and believe and to act on.

So how is your soul - is it tossed about by every wind of doctrine? Is your soul moved by fear of what men or the devil or circumstances may do? Time to be serious about the Lord God and His promises. Time to put on your garment of praise and enjoy His presence within the veil.

Carried by the wind

Sitting, looking up through the glass roof of the conservatory I could see, from time to time, birds flying in the very windy conditions. There were those going with the wind, flying along with little effort, graceful and making good speed. There were those trying to go against the wind, struggling, making slow and 'painful' progress - sometimes giving up and turning to go with the wind.

It reminded me of my Christian life - times of going with the wind of the Spirit were times of graceful progress - seeing the purposes of God and flowing with Him in that by the power of the Spirit. There were also times of struggle and fruitlessness as I tried to go against the wind.

That reminded me of a couple of bible characters who had the same experience. There was Jonah who knew what the Lord God wanted him to do and set off in the opposite direction - only to find difficulty and disaster. Then there was Saul - finding it hard kicking against the goads. God's grace met him and completely changed him - name and all, as he became Paul and the author of much of the New Testament.

So how do we respond to the obvious question - are you going with the wind in daily life and business, experiencing His anointing carrying you along?

Or are you 'kicking against the goads' like Saul? Sometimes it can be difficult due to our human nature. We often like to think we know best and often we want to do that which we want to do. In Christ we have been given complete freedom – liberty. We could think of that as independence – but it is not intended to be independence. It is freedom and liberty to be dependent on the Lord God – dependent on the empowering of the wind of his Spirit, by choosing the leading of the Spirit in life and in business.

Of course God's enemy becomes our enemy and schemes against us. But the scripture tells us that God always leads us in triumph. So when the pressure is on it is time to sing and to shout the praises of God because we know He always leads us in triumph. Indeed scripture tells us that God inhabits the praises of His people. Looking across the valley are two wind turbines turning speedily in the wind. Now we see the wind producing power!

That is the point, *'He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world.'* Praise is the key to unlocking God's power in any time of need, any time of pressure from the enemy or from the world. How profitable to let the wind of His Spirit bring us the very words of Jesus, leading and guiding, together with the power to fulfil everything He says!

For me and my house we will go with the wind and not against it. Lord we know the wind blows where it wants – please blow here over my house. What about you? Do you want to go with the wind?

Pulling down strongholds

'For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds.' 2 Corinthians 10:4

What is a stronghold? Simply it is an unbiblical thought that has established in one's mind. Strongholds empower our wrong thinking giving it added strength until it is pulled down. How do strongholds come about? If we take on, even unwittingly, unbiblical thinking it is the door which allows a stronghold to develop. The issue becomes one of truth or lie!

It is our enemy who builds arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. The knowledge of God is our personal relationship with Jesus and all He has done for us as stated in the scripture. Anything not aligned with that is a lie. So if the scripture tells us we are sealed with the Holy Spirit anything denying that is a lie. If our minds tell us we are unworthy or not good enough for Jesus - that is a lie because the scripture tells us He has given us the gift of righteousness, making us worthy.

So we can see where there is potential weakness - it is in what is allowed to ponder or dwell in our minds. Unbiblical thoughts cannot be avoided - they are everywhere in the world and in business. It is what we do with them that is important. The concept of 'making money for the Kingdom' is a good example of wrong thinking that can lead to trouble and failure. The Lord God does not need your or my money!

He is our Jehovah Jireh – we are not His supplier. However, He does expect us to be generous with what we have, little or much.

The antidote is to study and pray to receive a good understanding of the truth – and then to live and to think by it. The practical application is to take captive every thought to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5) This is like taking prisoners of war!

If Jesus says He loves you, and He does, anything with a different message is a lie. If the scripture says your salvation is guaranteed, and it does, anything saying differently is a lie. Do not allow lies in your mind – you have control!

The process for pulling down a stronghold. We have weapons at our disposal as stated above. Having recognised wrong thinking the first step is to change one's mind and to proclaim the truth – repeatedly as required. If the attack continues singing praise to the Lord will be effective, as the Lord inhabits the praises of His people. Praying in tongues is a way of taking control over one's mind as it is inactive when we pray in tongues.

Lies are satan's domain. Let's have nothing to do with them. Be strong for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. Take control of what you allow in your mind – be strong and ruthless against lies of the enemy.

Escape, escape

Every born again believer has made the 'great escape' - that is the escape from darkness and death. Sin had worked its power over us until that power was broken by Jesus paying all the due penalty on our behalf through His sacrifice at the cross. This is the good news of the gospel to all who recognise Jesus as the Son of God and put their trust in Him and what He has accomplished. Yet there is more. *'No temptation (or testing) has overtaken you, except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.'* 1 Corinthians 10:13. Let's not think this verse is in any way saying God has sent the temptation (or test) - that is specifically denied in James 1:13.

Our own desires can draw us away from God's plan for our lives and entice us into sin. (James 1:14) Of course the world and the enemy will add their voice to any wrong desires we may have. James goes on to make it very clear that, *'Every good and perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.'* (1:17)

It is easy, and common amongst us, that sometimes we get things wrong - the consequences are that these wrong desires give birth to sin and sin grows and manifests death. We find ourselves out of alignment with the Lord and loss - of health and well being, and blessing, become our experience.

But God, is faithful. There is always a way of escape. The escape route is by grace as Paul was told when he was asking the Lord to stop the activities of satan. The Lord told Paul, 'My grace is sufficient.' By grace there is a way of escape: -

'Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God, and the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in through Christ Jesus.'

Philippians 4:6-7. This is a call to action. Prayer (*proseuche* in the Greek) means 'speak out loud towards,' in this case towards the Lord God.

Supplication (*deesis* in the Greek) means an entreaty, an expressing of need.

Speaking out loud is an important element because it indicates that you mean business with the Lord. You want Him to show the way of escape, whether it's a problem of health, or of provision, or of anything else. It indicates that you are coming boldly to the throne of grace to find help in your time of need. (Hebrews 4:17) Will God answer - yes of course. See Jerimiah 29:11.

God's thought towards His people are always, *'thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.'*

So come boldly, be confident in God - *'don't throw away your confidence, which has great reward.'* Hebrews 10:35

Let's use God's way of escape when trouble and difficulties arise.

The most important thing

Every Christian should know what is THE MOST IMPORTANT THING - yet one hardly ever hears about it in the context of our relationship with the Lord.

Paul writes about it to the Corinthians in that well known chapter 13 in his first letter. He tells us that three things will abide or remain. He names them as faith, hope and love. We hear a lot about faith, and faith coming from hearing God speak, and about having faith in God.

Then we hear quite a lot about hope - that certainty of future blessing that is ours because of our relationship with the Lord.

Paul states that the most important of the three is love. Staying in the context of this verse that is our love for the Lord. Our faith in the Lord, our hope in the Lord and the most important - our love for the Lord.

The first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind, as taught in the Old Testament, and confirmed by Jesus Himself - Matthew 22:37.

So, now the question. How does loving the Lord manifest in my and in your life. Is it taken for granted as a known position or does it have some outworking? Many years ago I realised that in my case it was the former. I recognised that in a relationship that was just not good enough so I asked the Holy Spirit to fill me with love for Jesus and frequently do that to this day. What does that mean? It means my mind is constantly filled with love for Jesus - many of my thoughts are fixed on Him and other thoughts that come along are measured against love for Jesus - it makes renewing the mind a much easier matter.

Then love is a heart issue as well. David was described by the Lord as a man after His own heart. What does that mean? It means David sought the Lord in the most intimate way and that meant he would do all His will. When the commandment to love the Lord was given it first requires us to love the Lord with all our heart - to make Him the most important thing in life. Then the commandment moved to soul - which encompasses our will, our emotions and our minds.

More and more love for Jesus, our Lord, is the requirement. It brings more and more knowledge of Him and certainty of His love and care for us. We become more and more full of hope and so we trust the Lord more and more. In this way faith can abound - we expect to hear the Lord speak through His Spirit as He promised.

The more we are in love with Jesus the easier it becomes to control our emotions and to renew our minds, and the more our will aligns with His will for our lives. There will still be all sorts of problems in life on earth but we will be much better equipped to overcome them.

Bearing fruit

Fruit bearing is one of the most important expectations of the Christian life . It is Jesus hope and expectation that we will bear much fruit – so what did Jesus mean by fruit? We find the answer in John 15 where Jesus describes us as branches and Himself as the vine. By themselves the branches can produce nothing – in the vine fruit bearing becomes possible.

Jesus tells us that if His words - that is the things He is speaking to us right now – abide in us, we can ask and it will be done for us. Jesus said, ‘man does not live by bread alone but by every word coming right now from the mouth of God.’

Jesus did what He saw and heard His Father doing. Hearing what Jesus has to tell and instruct us is the same. We hear Him and we follow His instruction - result, fruit. In all of life and especially in business this is the most important principle. We ask for guidance, we ask for wisdom and the Lord generously gives – now it is up to us to take what He says and apply it. Beware for our flesh will try to cause us to put His words aside with such thoughts as, ‘don’t be silly that won’t work,’ or ‘that’s stupid thing to do,’ or ‘that’s unprofessional.’ But I and many of our brothers and sisters can testify to wonderful and miraculous results when His word abides in us and we apply it.

Then there is the fruit or harvest produced by the word of truth. The seed is sown and that which falls on good ground produces 30, 60 or 100 fold. Beware it is the cares of this world and persecution which seek to stifle the fruit, the harvest. It is a call to really get to know the truth as written for us in the bible and to have it take root in our lives.

Then there is the fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, so He gives us understanding of the truth – He is tasked to lead us into all truth. He also changes us from one degree of glory to another throughout our Christian lives. We find the result of that in Galatians 5 – it is love, joy, peace and so on, increasingly godly character.

So we define fruit as being the visible expression of His power working within us. Fruit will sometimes be the specific result of Jesus speaking to us, sometimes be the working of the truth as we learn, and always be the changing work of the Spirit within.

In Ecclesiastes (4:12) we are told that a threefold cord is not easily broken - so how is it working in your life?

- 1** Are you hearing the Lord speak,
- 2** are you studying the word of truth,
- 3** can you recognise yourself being changed from glory to glory? Be blessed.

The army with banners

In the Song of Solomon which, in allegorical spiritual terms, speaks of the love of the Lord for His bride, He uses the description, *'lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners.'* In Revelation we find the New Jerusalem synonymous with the bride of Christ.

Have you considered yourself as part of His army carrying the banner of the Lord? In every walk of life there are members of the army carrying the Lord's banner! Here is David's description, *'You have given a banner to those who fear you, that it may be displayed because of the truth. That your beloved may be delivered.'* Psalm 60:4

In business, at home, at work, in every place we carry the banner of the Lord. We are marked out as His. That is an awesome thought! We are witnesses to the truth whether we are aware of it or not.

The fact that we are seen by both angels and the opposition is clearly demonstrated in Acts 19 where seven sons of Sceva (a Jewish High Priest) were trying to cast out demons by the name of *'Jesus whom Paul preaches.'* Not being born again believers, having no God given Banner of their own, they had no authority, no power. The demonised man turns on them and overcomes all seven – *saying 'Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you?'* They flee naked and wounded.

Do we know who we are in Christ – far above all principality and power. We are clearly seen by the enemy so should not be surprised when opposition arises. Our enemy uses his wiles against us. But we have our God given banner and we have powerful tools and weapons so that the Lord can always lead us in triumph. *'now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.'* 2 Corinthians 2:14.

Where is this victory – it is *'in Christ.'* The victory is not in our strength, our wisdom, our cleverness. It is in Christ. The victory is assured because *'He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.'* 1 John 4:4 So here we have it – the Spirit in us is all powerful. This is why we are repeatedly advised to walk in the Spirit, to be led by the Spirit – to seek God's wisdom and listen for His reply. The Holy Spirit is given to be alongside us, to lead and to guide.

Think on this – an army with no General at its head, with no clear strategy, with no banner of authority is powerless. Any soldier who does not listen for instruction and does not obey is useless. We are the Lord's army awesome with banners. At work today, tomorrow, every day you are in the Lord's army and whether you realise it or not your *'banner'* is visible to all.

Final question – is the fragrance of the knowledge of God clearly diffused through you in your daily life – at work, at home, in every place?

The smell of life and death

We smell ! The scripture calls it an odour, a fragrance.

'Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For to God we are the fragrance (the sweet smell) of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life – and who is sufficient for these things?' 2 Corinthians 2:14-16

Have you ever thought about it. Sitting in a business meeting, a church meeting, any situation we give off the aroma of Christ. Do you wonder why some people seem to take against you for no apparent reason – they are perishing and they smell death. Have you ever been questioned by someone you have not spoken to about Jesus, them saying 'what have you got that I haven't got?. He or she has smelt the aroma of life. You have an opportunity to see the salvation of a soul.

As we go about our daily business, walking in the works God has prepared for us. His anointing is with us and if we seek and ask He will be answering our prayers. He is leading us in triumph. As He does this, and my experience is that He certainly does, the aroma of Christ is being diffused, released around us. We may not be aware but others pick up the scent for life or for death.

As Paul said, 'who is sufficient for these things?' Of course we are not in ourselves. But the Holy Spirit is continually changing us from one degree of glory to another – continually improving the aroma! So we could expect to see more and more reaction among those we meet – for good and for bad.

Jesus told His followers, *'You are the salt of the earth but if the salt has lost its flavour, how shall it be seasoned. It is neither fit for land nor for the dunghill.'* Luke 14:34-5 Here the Greek 'osme' is translated 'flavour,' above in 2 Corinthians it is translated 'aroma.' The important point relates to its effectiveness. The aroma is effective leading to life or death. Salt with no flavour has no use it is ineffective.

The question for us is twofold – do we smell good? And are we being effective salt, bringing good flavour to the world we inhabit? Or are we living purely in the realm of our own desires and understanding, the same way as unbelievers?

Paul thanks the Philippians for their gift calling it a sweet smelling aroma, as acceptable sacrifice. (4:18) Jesus Himself is God's gift to us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma. (Ephesians 5:2)

We can follow these examples of generosity and *'God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.'* Philippians 4:19

Do you smell good? Are you effective? Is the aroma of Christ being diffused around you?

He may exalt you in due time

This is a quote from 1 Peter. Here Peter is saying '*humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God,*' with the consequence that in due time He will exalt you. A difficult concept for many especially those who are very successful. It is so easy to congratulate oneself on one's success!

What happens in our physical world is so immediate, so real, so compelling it is easy to ignore the eternal consequences – that seems too far away, almost unreal. However the scripture is very clear – we are likened to grass and to the flower of the field which withers and passes away. A beautiful flower is a truly gorgeous sight – our creator Lord has furnished our world with great beauty. But the beautiful flower has a limited life span – often just a few days or less.

Young men and women frequently have no or little thought of eternal matters. As one gets older and older the 'due time' draws ever closer. During one's years of life the Holy Spirit has been doing His work – changing us from one degree of glory to another until we find our outlook has changed. Eternal things which seemed light years away now become ever closer. Our attitude is gradually changed.

Paul could say he longed to put off his earthly tent and be clothed with his new spiritual body. Now I understand and can agree with Paul's viewpoint.

Along with that line of thought, consideration of what one has done and 'achieved' in life takes on a reality check. Look back and see that it was the Lord and His anointing working in and through you. All credit to Him. As Jesus said, *'without Me you can do nothing.'* John 15:5 - that is nothing that counts as fruit, nothing that has any eternal significance.

Hence the need to humble ourselves under His mighty hand that He will, by and through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, bring forth fruit from our lives to the glory of God.

Then in due time we may be exalted.

Peter makes it clear that on our pathway through life we can expect all sorts of difficulties - he calls them *'fiery trials.'* - This is not strange, this is normal. Indeed rejoice for to some extent you are sharing the sufferings that Jesus experienced. *'Be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour'* - this is normal Christian life! *'Resist him steadfast in the faith.'* Here is practical humility - *'cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.'*

Humility before the Lord is one of the characteristics of the true sons of God - each one wonderfully born again into God's family, filled with His Holy Spirit and adopted into the status of sons of God. Here the true son is a most willing servant of the Lord seeking to do the works He has prepared beforehand, until the completion of the adoption, the redemption of our bodies at the due time. *Are you a true son?*

If you are willing

Jesus comes down from the mountain to be met by a leper amongst the great multitudes. The leper came worshipping and said to Jesus, *'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me whole?'* An amazing statement of trust and hope! The leper called Jesus. *'Lord,'* so he knew who he was addressing. All that was required was Jesus willingness. *'Jesus put out His hand and touched him saying. 'I am willing; be cleansed.' Immediately his leprosy left him.'* Matthew 8:1-3

Key points for us:

First we must believe that He is. This is trust. We trust that Jesus is who He says He is – the Son of God.

Then believe that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. The literal Greek says, *'He is a payer in full of wages of those who search for Him.'* Hebrews 11:6 For us this message is one of hope. Seek out Jesus, He has both the answers and the power.

The leper worshipped. The leper asked. The leper received.

For the leper, he was still under law, and was told by Jesus to fulfil the requirement of the law by offering the gift Moses commanded – that would a testimony to the priest as he would have to minister the commands in Leviticus 14 for the first time in his life - there is no account that any Jew had previously been healed of leprosy!

We are not under law but grace – so we freely receive all that the Lord gives. Yet being a testimony was important for the leper and is important for us also.

So we give God the glory by testifying to what He does and has done for us. But consider this also- *'whatever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not to men.'* Our actions can speak as loudly and often more loudly than words. The way we act and the way we react to others is to speak to them of Jesus. Our testimony is our life as well as our words.

Is Jesus still willing? Yes, of course - He is the same yesterday, today and forever. Is Jesus able to meet your needs? Yes, of course - He is all powerful and has all authority, He has the name above all names.

The leper sought out Jesus, he found Him amongst the multitudes. Knowing who Jesus is the leper first worships Him there and then makes his request. The leper, who had great need put Jesus first through worship.

It is easy to get into expressing our needs before remembering that we come before the Son of God, the Holy and Righteous One, the only One worthy of our worship.

The leper asked. We are invited to ask. *'Come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may find grace and mercy to help in time of need.'* Hebrews 4:16

Come with thankfulness, come with worship, come with hope, come with confidence - He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. Come listening for His word to you - for we receive by faith which comes by hearing what He says - and faith moves mountains!

The mystery of faith

There is something about faith that seems to be a mystery. We hear some mature brothers and sisters say things like, 'I have faith for my eternal salvation with no doubts but I don't have faith for healing or other needs.' We know that our eternal salvation is bought and paid for by the blood of the Lamb and His sacrifice. When we read Isaiah 53, in particular, we read that at the same time He bore our sicknesses and diseases and that by His stripes we are healed. In the New Testament we read that Jesus healed all who came to Him.

But somehow the experience of many seems to fall short. So we ask ourselves the simple question, 'Why?' Is there some misunderstanding?

So let's take a quick look at Hebrews 11 - the chapter sometimes referred to as the 'Hall of fame.' First remember verse 6, *'without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.'* For each born again believer at our first encounter with the Lord we heard Him call us to Himself - for some an audible call, for others the still small voice of God, for others some word quickened to us by His Spirit. We responded and were born again. Our eternal salvation was and is by faith and is guaranteed.

The key is that 'faith comes by hearing and hearing by the (spoken) word of God.' Romans 10:17

Look at the heroes of Hebrews 11 and you will see they heard God speak and they responded positively, then miracles occurred. Noah built an ark, Abraham left his father's country, Moses split the Red Sea, Joshua saw the walls of Jericho fall down and so on.

Somehow many seem to think that if they try hard enough, pray long enough, and generally proclaim that they believe, then they will be healed or whatever. It does not work like that! Seek the Lord at the throne of grace and listen for His word. Be patient. Wait on the Lord – those who do so renew their strength. We seek the Lord and make our needs known to Him with the expectation of His reply. We have experienced times when the reply has been the fulfilment of our request. Other times the reply has involved some action on our behalf – anoint with oil, cast out a spirit, go and do something specific. Sometimes repentance is required, sometimes we need to put right something between us and another believer. In business we may receive directions – to see someone, to do some specific action, so that our prayer request can be done for us.

It is no good quoting scripture at God and insisting He fulfil it. No good 'standing on the written word,' expecting that to be 'faith.' The only way faith comes, according to scripture, is by hearing what the Lord is speaking to us. All else is folly.

So listen, be patient and do what the Lord says or go the way of folly and confusion.

Unless

'Can two walk together unless they are agreed?' Amos3:3

Most certainly a question of great importance! In context it is the Lord asking Israel – He has chosen them as His special nation and yet they disregard Him and follow other gods. The result is correction - but Israel does not respond to correction.

'Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.' Amos 3:7

We will do well to take note of the two principles here given through Amos. The Lord has chosen each one of us as His born again family on earth. As with Israel He desires that we walk with Him - the New Testament calls that walking in the Spirit. In our free will, like Israel, we can choose God's way or the way of our own desires.

The Lord God spoke to Israel through the prophets, He speaks to us today if we will but listen and take note. He gave Israel many scriptures to help them understand righteousness. We have the whole bible which not only guides us in all things relating to holiness but also shows us the folly of disobeying, of going our own way.

Joshua challenged Israel to choose whom they would serve – be it the Lord God or other foreign Gods. We face the same choice, who will we serve? Will it be Lord God or some other God(s). Many today follow the God of football or the God of money or the God of their own desires.

Our God is a jealous God - He wants us to walk with Him. Not so that He can in any way harm us or be against us - but so that He can bless us abundantly, so that He can pour His love upon us, so that He can by mercy respond to our prayers and requests and by faith meet our needs.

Life has its ups and downs and business life in particular. What a privilege to be walking with God, knowing and being confident that when we pray He hears - and that when He speaks then all the power of heaven is there to bring things to pass on our behalf. Many times in both life and business we have heard God speak, our children have been healed, business matters have had divine intervention, God has been and is good to us. We proclaim this is still the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:19) The Lord God is still wanting to walk with us - He wants us to bring our requests to Him, He wants us to listen to His Spirit and to learn patience so that we can inherit the promises and the blessings of being His sons (*'huios'* sons here is gender neutral.)

So, as Moses challenged Israel, 'choose life.' He had set before them the way of blessing and the way of cursing. We have the same choice - will we, will you, choose to walk together with the Lord by the Spirit, choose to listen and follow or will we, you go our own way?

I am the way

Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life.' John 14:6

Consider - the way (*hodos* in Greek). It means the pathway, the road to the destination. For all mankind Jesus is the way and the only way to the heavenly eternal destination. Jesus is more than the door, He is the door and the way, the road. Our life as Christians is to walk on that road - to be and to become more and more like Him.

Consider - the truth (*aletheia* in Greek) It means the truth - not **a** truth, but **the** real truth. For us it means the truth as taught by Jesus, and by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles - all recorded for us in the Bible. The truth is the bricks and mortar of the road, the safe pathway through life.

Consider - the life (*zoe* in Greek) It means the life that God gives as a gift. It is the life God imparts to all His creation, us, animals, plants etc. Each living thing is given exactly the life it needs. (*Bios* also translated life - is the physical life we live.)

Consider - Jesus said, '*I have come that they may have life (zoe) and have it more abundantly.*' John 10:10

How will we experience Jesus' promise of more abundant life? The answer is in unity with Jesus, but ...

'Can two walk together unless they are agreed?' Amos3:3

Jesus is the pathway and He calls us to follow Him. (*akoloutho* in Greek) It means to be a follower or a companion – going the same way, on the same path. Jesus won't deviate from the way – but what about us? To any degree in which we deviate from His path of truth we will lose out on the abundance He promises.

Danger – today the truth, kept for us in the scriptures, is derided on every side. Even amongst believers we don't take it to heart, deny some of it, prefer our own ideas. The world completely ignores the truth and is on the wrong path altogether. But even we deviate from the path, go our own way, and then we wonder why we don't experience life more abundantly.

Now is the moment to consider the 'new normal for life.' Consider, am I following my calling in Christ.

Consider – the teaching of John in his first letter. This is the way to walk – walk in light (the truth), walk in love (just as Jesus demonstrated), this will be a manifestation of God's gift of life. Paul to the Ephesians added, walk in unity – that must first be with the Lord and then with each other, putting on the new man, being led by the Spirit of God.

Review - am I walking in unity with Jesus in the truth? What do I think of the scripture? Have I deviated from the way? Have I deviated from the truth? Am I receiving life more abundantly? What is my 'new normal?'

Conspiracy

There is a secret plan to suddenly remove a significant part of the human population of the earth. Suddenly, almost instantaneously, large numbers of people will disappear – seemingly dissolve into the sky.

The secret plan involves removing these people before the world enters into a period of unparalleled disasters increasing in intensity until grown men cry out for the mountains and rocks to fall on them and cover them.

This conspiracy is very largely hidden from mankind today even though it has been written about hundreds and hundreds of years ago. Now many things point to the fulfilment of the conspiracy soon, maybe very soon. The world is not ready or prepared as it continues to ignore the clear warning given all those years ago.

This special group of people, who are going to be removed from the earth, are known as followers of the way. It was Jesus who said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life.' The way is a pathway, a road, a thoroughfare – it leads to its ultimate destination. We cannot describe the destination because, 'Eye has not seen, not ear heard, nor have entered the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.'

However we can describe the start of the final journey.

At the last trumpet *'We shall all be changed In a moment, in the twinkling of We shall be changed.*

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.' From 1 Corinthians 15:51-4

‘Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.’ 1 Corinthians 15:58

Are you on the way? Have you entered through Jesus who called Himself, and is, the door – believe, put your trust In Him and step through onto the way. Walk with Him along the way. Learn all about Him, His kingdom and become more and more like Him on the way. Look forward to that incredible moment when the last trumpet of the present age sounds. Then it will be time for the Lord to take the believers to their kingdom home.

What do we learn? Now is the time to be steadfast and immovable as we abound in the works that God has prepared for us and called us to. *‘Whatever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance, for you serve the Lord Christ.’*

As the world rushes along headlong, not understanding what is ahead and relying on its own ingenuity, rejoice, we know the moment of our deliverance from the coming wrath draws near.

Our Lord God has and does guarantee our inheritance - Jesus said, *‘I have gone to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am you may be also.’* – That is when we rise to meet Him in the clouds. ***Come Lord Jesus.***

Ready steady come

What a time to be alive! In every direction there are extreme events – pandemic, fires, floods, storms, it seems the world is under an onslaught.

For us, born again believers, who look forward to the return of Jesus Christ to reign and rule, we sense more and more that the time is becoming short. Important then to be in a state of readiness. To be like Abraham who waited for the city whose builder and maker is God. On the temporal level we do all as if unto Jesus, whilst on the eternal level we wait for that which He has prepared for us. Being ready is knowing that we are strangers, staying on earth for a time – one description is resident aliens! We conduct ourselves with awe of our Lord and what is to come.

'And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear.' 1 Peter 1:17

As the stresses and strains, the fires, the floods and all the extreme events buffet the earth and as mankind enters into perilous times (as Paul warned Timothy, 2nd letter 3:1-9) we hold steady. We know our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. We know He is far above every other name that can be named and we know that He promises to bring good out of every situation for us who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:29)

Hold steady by keeping close to Jesus, by following the leading of the Spirit and by keeping short accounts with the Lord. Confess sin quickly and be restored from all unrighteousness. Pray and seek guidance so that we can walk on the Highway of Holiness prepared for the ransomed, doing the things He has prepared beforehand for us to walk in, – to His glory.

Jesus said the way is narrow but we do not walk it alone. He will never leave us nor forsake us, even when we stray off the path. Let us become ever more sensitive to the Spirit as we work out the salvation (deliverance from danger) of our souls – whilst looking forward to our spiritual inheritance.

'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed.' 1 Corinthians 15:50-52.

When the last trumpet of the present age sounds it will be the call to come – to come into our inheritance – to come into the presence of Jesus having received immortality like Him.

Are you ready to meet Jesus should He come more quickly than you expect? Are you steady as a rock in your most precious faith? Are you looking forward to the call to come into your inheritance?

Onward Christian soldiers

Stand up straight, get your armour on - you are on parade! Our enemy has filled the world with anxiety through the pandemic - it is affecting some of our brethren as well as many unbelievers. Now we must be strong in the Lord.

If we don't fight - anxiety in the heart of man it will cause depression. Proverbs 12:25. Things will get worse - so fight we must.

Paul wrote to the Philippians, *'Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.'* 4:6-7 This then is our goal - through prayer we will come to receive peace. However more weapons are available to strengthen us on the way.

Sometimes when you see an army marching they march to a song, or to a chant, or to music - it helps strengthen them on their way. When we need picking up, strengthening, Christian songs and choruses will strengthen us on our way. Sometimes it may require a real act of will power to sing and praise the Lord, but pushing through reaps its reward.

In some town centres in the UK you may come across the town crier. He is dressed in his particular way and carries and rings a loud bell. He is summoning the people to listen as he shouts out his message to all and sundry.

He is making a proclamation. We too can make proclamations of truth, speaking out our biblical beliefs in the face of any circumstance. The enemy is listening and trembling! *'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.'* Philippians 4:13

Paul said he spoke in tongues more than anyone else. We ask ourselves why? Paul knew extensive spiritual pressure from Satan's thorn – but he knew that God's grace was always sufficient. Paul was able to testify that *'God always leads us in triumph.'* 2 Corinthians 2:14 One of Paul's weapons was much speaking in tongues because the mind is inactivated so that it cannot focus on anxiety at the same time.

Call for reinforcements if necessary, your brothers and sisters can come alongside, just as Aaron and Hur held up the arms of Moses in Exodus 17:12.

Know this, the victory is certain. Grace is abundant. God invites us to pray and answers our prayers. He has equipped us with armour – read the list in Ephesians 6. Put on the armour, proclaim the truth, sing and praise the Lord and have the praises of God sounding out in your house. Know this also, wars are fought over time. Sometimes it is over very quickly but more often the battle goes on over a period of time – so persevere and don't give up. The victory is assured.

Our target - *'be anxious for nothing'* and give God the glory.

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