

Parables in the Gospel of John



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Contents

- Introduction 2**
- The Parable of the Carpenter’s Apprentice 4**
 - John 5:19-21 4
 - Like Father, Like Son..... 5**
 - Greater Works..... 10**
 - Jesus – The Co-Operating Son..... 17**
- Parable of the Good Shepherd..... 23**
 - John 10:1-5 23
 - He Calls Us by Name 24**
 - The True Shepherd 26**
- The Parable of the Childbearing Woman..... 31**
 - John 16:16-24 31
 - Joy of the Spirit is the Measure of its Power 32**
- Who Are We? About the Author’s 39**

Introduction

John's Gospel, the last to be written (between 90 and 100 AD), is often called a spiritual Gospel,¹ and the author has been called a theologian by John Chrysostom and other Fathers of the Church. In fact, the earliest traditions have named the Apostle John as being the Beloved Disciple and the author of this Gospel. These traditions are very much alive in the Church today, even though scholars wrestle with questions about who wrote the Gospel and who the Beloved Disciple is. As far back as the third century, Origen of Alexandria was convinced of this tradition.

The inspired writer of this Gospel displays evidence of his knowing the other Gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke—the Synoptic Gospels). John, however, did not depend on these other Evangelists for his point of view and for the content he handed down to us. Rather, his has been named a “Maverick Gospel.”²

In John, we find three chapters that may be considered similar to the parables in the Synoptic Gospels:

- John 5:19-21: Parable of the Carpenter's Apprentice
- John 16:21-24: The Parable of the Childbearing Woman.
- John 10:1–5: The Good Shepherd.

John calls these discourses proverbs and uses the Greek term (*paroimia*) for various figures of speech that formulate the words of Jesus and speak of his person throughout the twenty-one chapters of this Gospel.

The corresponding word in the Old Testament (*mashal*) is an all-encompassing classification of figures of speech such as proverbs, pictorial discourses, hidden sayings, aphorisms, ethical teachings, practical wisdom, parables, and allegories.

Reading the Gospel while remembering these different figures of speech will help readers see the difference between John and the Synoptics in

¹“The Spiritual Gospel: The Gospel of John in the Early Church,” Bryan A. Stewart, professor of Religion, McMurry University, 2018

² John, The Maverick Gospel, 3rd Edition, Robert Kysar, Published by Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky.

expressing the teachings and words of Jesus. Moreover, the sayings of Jesus that are common to both Matthew and Luke are not found in John. The Synoptics use a source called “Q” both in a written and an oral form. “Q” means “Quelle” or “Source” in German and is used for the parallel passages found mostly in Matthew and Luke.³

Note: A proverb is simple phrase that's encoded with knowledge. Listeners use their own personal life experiences as the keys to unlock it. A parable is a complete story that delivers new knowledge to general audiences through an entire arc.⁴

With the exception of John 10: 1-5, Liz and I have not preached on these scripture passages. To present a broader spectrum of understanding, we have included sermons presented by other sermonizers from different faith traditions.

³ Adapted from text written in catechist.com

⁴ “Parables, Proverbs, & Points,” by Ron Ploof | March 28, 2016 | Business Storytelling.

The Parable of the Carpenter's Apprentice

John 5:19-21⁵

¹⁹ **The Work of the Son.**^[a] *Jesus replied to them, saying, "Amen, amen, I say to you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son also does. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything that he himself is doing. And he will show him even greater works than these, so that you might be astonished. ²¹ "Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so does the Son give life to anyone he chooses.*

Footnotes

- a. The action of Jesus creates scandal and anger among the religious authorities. He has to explain his activity and especially his claim that he and the Father are one. The evangelist deepens this affirmation of Jesus' divinity. What would be seen as blasphemous in anyone else is here a profound reality. Jesus is one with his Father. All the work of Jesus is God's action among us. Jesus has the power to give or restore life to those who welcome his word as that of God, even if they are victims of sin. To encounter Jesus is to face judgment and to experience eternal life even now. To accept or refuse his work: no decision is more important for us.

When Jesus was accused of making himself equal with God he answered that he could do nothing of himself; he did what he saw his Father doing (John 5:19-21). This has been referred to as the "Parable of the Carpenter's Apprentice," even though we would never recognize it as one of the parables. Jesus watches what his Father (the Master Carpenter) is doing, then duplicates it on earth in close, synchronized obedience. In the same manner, the words he speaks are always what the Father tells him to say (John 12:48-50).

Among other things, this means that every miracle he performed and the words he spoke were the fruit of his daily dependence upon his Father in

⁵ The New Catholic Bible (NCB) Copyright © 2019 by Catholic Book Publishing Corp. All rights reserved.

prayer. To our surprise, his ministry of miracle and word were not the direct result of his shared *deity*, but of his *humanity*. He acted on earth not as a Superman, but as man, the heavenly human (1 Cor. 15:49). That's why he told his disciples that they would do even greater things than he did, availing themselves of the same power he exercised.

This saying implied that the church in general would do more things worldwide than he did locally. At least we don't know of any individual who ever demonstrated more power than Jesus did.

The mysterious connection of the disciples with Jesus released the great, creative energy that came from daily and hourly dependence upon the Father in prayer, applied in the name of his Son, without whom nothing could—or ever will—be brought to fruition.⁶

Astonished? Yes, that is the word for it. Jesus will do many more miracles in his ministry, he will touch many more people, and he will teach many other awe-inspiring truths. The people around Jesus haven't begun to see all that the Father will reveal through his Son. The greatest of the revelations, however, will bring the people to full astonishment: The Father will raise his Son from the dead and bring him back to life in their presence. They will be astonished. Then some of them will begin to do great works in his name, and the work of Jesus will continue to astonish as he works through his disciples. Jesus' work is astonishing! And, if you look closely, some of that astonishing work is being done in you!⁷

Like Father, Like Son⁸

I've heard that saying used many times. Have you? "*Like father, like son.*" Most of the time the person saying it was pointing out a character trait or fault that a son demonstrated, indicating that he must have inherited it from his father. A similar saying is, "You're just like your father!" In my own case, it was my mother who was usually the one saying it to me. I always

⁶ theologymix.com

⁷ heartlight.org

⁸ wisdomfrombove.net – Bible sermons

took it as a compliment because I wanted to be like my dad. He was a character at times, playing pranks on my mother! And, of course, I was always ready to be of service to him if he could use my help!

I've also heard the phrase "Like mother, like daughter," and it was usually said as a compliment. Those sayings, or something equivalent to them, go back many centuries in history. My favorite one is "A chip off the old block." I guess it's all part of the "family resemblance" that sets us apart from other families. Like it or not, know it or not, family members tend to "rub off" on one another, and people who have been around us for a while notice those resemblances, and they are often much more than just "skin-deep,"

In John 5:17, the Lord Jesus made the statement: "*My Father is working until now, and I am working.*" The Jews correctly assumed that Jesus was claiming to be God. Throughout the rest of the chapter (verses 19-47), the Lord Jesus goes into much greater detail to explain and add further proof of His deity. Jesus claims equality with God in seven areas and we are going to look at two of them in this study.

In the midst of their angry words and threats, the Lord Jesus begins His explanation of His relationship to God the Father by swearing an oath to them. "*Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, those things the Son also does in like manner.*" By using the Greek and Hebrew words "*amein, amein*" (or amen, amen), Jesus is saying that what He is about to tell them is first-hand information. He is claiming that He knows these things directly, by personal experience, and therefore they are true.

The Bible is full of examples of God's power and might. Those examples are often called miracles. Dynamis is the Greek word for power, might, or strength. The word is found 118 times in the New Testament, usually in conjunction with the performance of miracles by Jesus. How many times do you think the word "dynamis" is found in the Gospel of John? If you guessed "zero," you would be correct. In the whole Gospel of John, all twenty-one chapters, there is not even one mention of that word. Instead, we find the repeated use of the Greek word "dynatai" which means "powerless." That is a new insight for me personally. I did not know that previously.

Do you ever feel powerless to please God, powerless to serve God? If not, you should, because you are! As human beings, we are all powerless to do

God's will and God's work by our own enabling. To disagree with that statement would be to consider oneself as being better and greater than the Lord Jesus Christ. He was a perfect, sinless Man, but He was still a man. In His case, He had both a human and a divine nature. In the literal Greek text, Jesus is saying, "*Cannot the Son do for Himself anything except what He sees the Father doing.*" The word "cannot" is the Greek word "*dynatai*" (powerless). In other words, Jesus is watching as the Father does the miracle through Him. By saying those words to his accusers, He is telling them that they are actually blaming the Father for doing those miracles on the Sabbath day. Jesus is just doing the will of the Father by the power of the Father. This information is going beyond the capability of our human understanding to comprehend completely. The following true illustration will give us another person's perspective.

Daniel Webster, the 19th-century statesman, once dined in Boston with some influential people. Soon the conversation turned to Christianity. Webster, a convinced Christian, confessed his belief in Jesus Christ and His atoning work. A Unitarian minister asked, "Mr. Webster, can you comprehend how Jesus Christ could be both God and man?"

"No sir, I cannot understand it," replied Webster, "and I would be ashamed to acknowledge Christ as my Savior if I could understand it. He could be no greater than myself."

In my Bible, verse nineteen ends with the words "*in like manner.*" In verse seventeen, when Jesus said, "*My Father is working until now, and I am working,*" the Jews thought that Jesus was saying that He was working independently of the Father, when actually the reverse was true. Jesus was equal to the Father in nature as God, but dependent upon the Father in His human nature as a man. Jesus' equality with God was also demonstrated by His working together with the Father in perfect harmony. This is one of the great mysteries of the Bible – how Jesus Christ can be fully God and fully man and be able to function in both capacities without compromising either of them. Are you still with me? That was a difficult sentence to formulate! I hope it helps you realize the need for Jesus' total dependence upon the Father in order to do the works of God.

In Psalm 40:7-8, King David says, "*Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book, it is written of me; I delight to do Thy will, O my God; Thy Law is within my*

heart.” David is speaking prophetically in those verses because the author of Hebrews twice quotes those words exactly when referring to Jesus. Hebrews 10:7 says, *“Behold, I have come (In the scroll of the book it is written of me) to do Thy will, O God.”* Then again, in verse nine, *“Behold, I have come to do Thy will.”* And Jesus did just that. In His prayer to the Father in John 17, Jesus said in verse four, *“I glorified Thee on earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do.”* May that be our goal in life: to accomplish the work that God has given each of us to do.

Verse 20 reads: *“For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing, and even greater works than these will He show Him, that you may marvel.”* Jesus points out that His knowledge of the Father is by-far superior to theirs. It is a knowledge that only the Son of God could have. God had concealed many things from Jesus’ accusers. There are mysteries in the Bible that we don’t understand – things beyond our human comprehension. We are also given a limited knowledge of God’s working throughout history and the details of our future. But Jesus is saying that God the Father has withheld nothing from Him. Then Jesus continues by saying *“greater works than these will He show Him, that you may marvel.”* We’ll see what He means in the next verse of Scripture. A person’s knowledge gives him authority and earns him respect if that knowledge is used properly. Jesus is communicating to them that, because He has the knowledge that belongs only to God, He should be acknowledged as God and worshiped as God as a result.

As we look at the Father’s motive for giving this knowledge to Jesus, you might agree with me that the first part of verse twenty might be even stronger evidence that Jesus Christ is God. The verse begins with the words *“For the Father loves the Son.”* The Greek word for “loves” is “phileo.” It speaks of family-love or love for an intimate friend. It is this special, Fatherly love that motivated God the Father to reveal all things to His Son. The more scholarly Jews, versed in the writings of the Law and the Prophets, should have realized the similarity of Jesus’ words to the prophecy written down by Isaiah in Isaiah 42:1. It reads: *“Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put my spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.”* It’s a prophecy concerning the Messiah.

What does the Father say about His Son in the New Testament? At Jesus' baptism, the Father spoke aloud from the heavens introducing the world to His Son by saying, *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."* (Mt. 3:17; Mk. 1:11; Lk. 3:22). The Father speaks one more time from the cloud on the mount of transfiguration, saying to Peter, James, and John, *This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!*" (Mt. 17:5; Mk. 9:7; Lk. 9:35). The Lord Jesus was the Father's delight and source of Fatherly admiration and pleasure. This has been true from all eternity. What a testimony to the deity of Christ, coming from His own Father!

Tying all those verses and their meanings together, I like the beautiful summary-statement that John Piper makes. "He is well-pleased with His Son. His soul delights in the Son. When He looks at His Son, He enjoys and admires and cherishes and prizes and relishes what He sees."

Let's see if we can gain a perspective on the Son's helplessness as a Man to do the works of God, having to rely totally on the Father's enabling for everything that He did; and the Loving heavenly Father working together with His Son to accomplish their work together. Have you ever wondered what that must have been like for Jesus to have been dependent upon His Father during His entire life on this earth? I've been looking for some basis of comparison here in the United States of America, and I think I may have found it. We live in the first generation that has electronic media at their fingertips 24/7. According to the Pew Research Center, 90% of Americans own a phone. Sixty-seven percent of cell-phone owners find themselves checking their phone for messages, alerts, or calls – even when they don't notice their phones ringing or vibrating. Studies have talked about all the things we choose to use our cell phones and smartphones to do for us: such as scheduling meetings, finding places to eat, things to do, checking scores of sporting events, surfing the web, talking, texting, gaming, social media, and the list goes on. Adding up all the ways these phones are being used, based on surveys, one internet trends report said that the average person checks their phone 150 times a day. Add to this the personal use of desktop computers, laptops, notebooks, blue-tooths, etc..

My purpose is not to be judgmental but to cause us to see how dependent many of us are upon our phones and computers. We've made choices in our use of them, and now many of us are so dependent on them that we don't see how we can live without them.

When we look at what Jesus says about His total dependence on the Father, we realize that His words have been verified by the choices He has made throughout His own life. How did the Lord Jesus spent His time on this earth? We find in the Scriptures that Jesus spent much time in prayer and the study of the Scriptures. He also spent a lot of time teaching the apostles, witnessing to the lost, and serving the needs of people. He did all those things because that's what the Father wanted Him to do and empowered him to do; and that's what brought Him joy and personal satisfaction.

I hope that you believe that Jesus Christ is God. If so, I hope that you've responded by committing yourself to Him as your God, your Lord and Ruler, letting Him take charge of your life from moment-to-moment until you see Him face-to-face.

As Christians, we are dependents, and we will never outgrow that dependency during our lifetimes on this earth. We are part of His family, and He has claimed us as his children. By His enabling, let's do the will of Him who adopted us, lovingly depending upon Him to do what He wants to accomplish in our lives because of His great love for us.

May our lives and the use of our time reflect the priorities of Christ, and may our motives reflect the love of Christ.

Greater Works⁹

INTRODUCTION

Recall last week that our sermon text was on Jesus' healing of a disabled person at the pool of Bethesda. And there Jesus got into some trouble with the religious leaders, for when he healed the man and told him to pick up his mat and walk it was the Sabbath day. But Jesus, as we saw last week, is Lord of the Sabbath, and so he can override the Old Testament law about not bearing a burden on the Sabbath. Jesus in fact is God. He answered the Jews saying, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." Thus, the text tells us "This is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."

⁹ By Douglas Douma - douglasdouma.com

Now, we continue on to the next passage which the ESV Bible has conveniently labeled “The Authority of the Son.” That is indeed the theme of this section – Jesus’s authority over all things. But I’ve titled this sermon “Greater Works” because it is Jesus’s promise that there will be seen greater works—works even greater than healing a disabled person. And these greater works will display his authority.

And so now we have the beginning of a monologue that Jesus gives to the Jews explaining his own relationship with the Father and telling of his own authority as the Son of God to execute judgment.

The best way that I’ve found to break down this passage to make it more easily digestible is to consider it in three parts, each of which begins with that phrase “Truly, truly, I say to you.”

This is quite a beautiful phrase in my mind. Quite a powerful phrase. The King James Version says “Verily, verily I say unto you.” Our ESV Pew Bible reads “Truly, truly I say to you.”

Each time this phrase is spoken it is a strong claim to truth and notifies the listener to pay attention. Truly, truly, I say to you. There should be no doubt regarding these things. These are things which Jesus himself is telling you and He, the very Word of God, is the source of all truth.

So, we have three of these “truly, trulies.” Truly, we do.

I. – “Like Father, Like Son”

II. – The Resurrection of the Soul

III. – The Resurrection of the Body

[REPEAT]

I. Truly, Truly #1 – Like father, like son (vs. 19 – 23)

19 So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

Continuing from the previous section Jesus here explains that he has power over all things, including that he is Lord of the Sabbath.

And why does he have that authority?

It was given to him from the Father. God has given Jesus' authority.

The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.

Like father, like son.

For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

Like father, like son.

So, this is the first point of Jesus's "truly, trulies."

But we must keep in mind the purpose of Jesus's whole monologue: it is to proclaim his authority. So that all will marvel at Jesus and his authority, and so honor Him as they honor the Father, Jesus promises that GREATER WORKS will be seen.

Now, what is greater than the healing of the disabled person at the pool?

The rest of this passage explains two greater works. [REPEAT: two greater works] There is the spiritual resurrection and the physical resurrection. Or the being made a believer by the work of the Holy Spirit and the raising of all physical flesh from the grave on the last day.

It is great thing to one time heal a man; the spiritual resurrection is a great thing; it makes one a child of God for all time. And then physical resurrection is another greater thing, for it reunites the soul and with body for all eternity. The eternal is greater than the temporal.

We can see this easily with some examples:

What is greater than a slice of pizza? Answer: An endless pizza bar.

What is greater than a taco? Answer: An endless taco bar.

What is greater than a salad? Answer: Just about anything? Well, ok, an endless salad bar.

The unlimited is greater than the limited.

While a one-time healing is a great miracle, those things which result in eternal life are called "greater works."

The resurrection to life (spiritual life) and the resurrection of life (physical life) are the greater works that will be seen.

Remember all the way back in chapter 1 of John's Gospel, Jesus said to Nathanael, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." (John 1:50)

And following this promise to Nathanael, Jesus—just like in our current passage—said "Truly, truly, I say to you." "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Whenever the Bible has the English words "truly, truly" or "verily, verily," it is a translation of the Greek words "Amen, Amen." All, of course, are familiar with this Greek word, Amen. We say it often at the end of prayers. What does it mean? The end? No. It means "firm" or "truth." So, when Jesus says "Amen, Amen" he means "here is a firm truth I am going to tell you." Truly, truly, I say to you.

So that was our first of the three truly, trulies: Like father, like Son. Jesus has the authority of God.

Now, with the second and third "truly, trulies" we have Jesus giving details on those "greater things" he has promised will be seen. First there is the resurrection of the soul, and then the resurrection of the body.

II. Truly, Truly #2 – The Resurrection of the Soul (or eternal life through faith) (vs. 24)

From verse 24:

24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.

Here we have the resurrection of the soul. This comes with faith. All who believe in Jesus Christ are born again—their soul's resurrected to new life. This is the promise of Jesus. And soon after this promise was given, the Christian church would begin a rapid expansion. Thousands would come to believe in Christ.

We see this resurrection of the soul described as "passing from death to life." It is not a situation where you are sick or ill and need a little help from Jesus to add to your own efforts. Rather, the Biblical picture is that we are dead.

And Jesus then comes, and he doesn't just make us feel better, he raises us to new life.

Now, this idea of your rebirth, or coming to faith, being called a "resurrection of the soul" is not the most commonly used phrase, but it is a biblical one. "A resurrection of the soul."

In the book of Revelation, another of John's writings, he refers to the soul's rebirth as "the first resurrection." So, it is proper that we call this "A resurrection of the soul."

So then, that was our second "Truly, truly." The resurrection of the Soul. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.

Now we come to the third and final "truly truly" of this passage. It is another of the "greater things" that will be seen. It is the resurrection of the body.

III. Truly, Truly #3 – The Resurrection of the Body (vs. 25-29)

I've been saying for some years, and will continue to say for some more years ahead, that I am not yet prepared to preach through the book of Revelation. I had a professor in seminary—85 years young in fact—who taught on the subject of eschatology, the study of the end times. And HE would not tell us what position he took on those debated questions. There is debate in the Christian world even among solidly orthodox Christian commentators when it comes to the Biblical teachings about the end of the world. Having read a number of these writers from the various positions I've realized that there are many difficulties in the subject. That has forced me to hold off from teaching the book of Revelation until such time that I can study the book more deeply. But, alas, here I am in another of John's books—not his Apocalypse, but his Gospel—and there is recorded from Jesus' very words some important teachings about the physical resurrection at the end of the world. So, we have found a good opportunity to delve into these teachings.

This third "truly, truly" initially continues on the theme of the previous words. Jesus says, "an hour is coming, AND IS NOW HERE, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live." Because Jesus says "AND IS NOW HERE" we know he is referring to the resurrection

of the soul, which was already occurring in his midst, and not the resurrection of the body which does not occur until the end of the world. It is referring to salvation by faith in the words of Jesus Christ; by believing what He has said, by believing the Gospel of the Lord IN THIS VERY TIME, FOR THE TIME IS NOW HERE. Those who hear, those who believe, will live.

As we continue on this third “truly, truly” the subject shifts from the resurrection of the soul to the resurrection of the body. [REPEAT: he subject shifts from the resurrection of the soul to the resurrection of the body] While the resurrection of soul is said to be “NOW HERE,” the resurrection of the body is still future. Jesus says, “an hour is coming.” And this time He doesn’t add the phrase “and is now here.” That phrase was applied to the resurrection of the soul, of which the Holy Spirit can work in man at any time especially from the time of Christ onwards. But the resurrection of the body is still yet to come.

Now, about this resurrection of the body, there are two points I want to emphasize today from our text. [REPEAT: two points about the resurrection of the body]

1. There will be a single resurrection.

2. The good are resurrected to life, the evil resurrection to judgment.

First,

1. There will be a single resurrection.

This is called the general resurrection. All will be resurrected, both the elect to salvation and the reprobate who through their sins will find judgment. The resurrection of both the just and the unjust occurs at the same time, sometime in the future.

Jesus says in our text, “for AN HOUR is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice 29 and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”

In the same hour, at the same time, both the good and the evil will be resurrected. All people.

Paul teaches the same as John. In Acts 24:15 Paul speaks of “A resurrection of BOTH the just and the unjust.” Note that important article – “A.” There will be “A resurrection” both of the just and the unjust. Not two resurrections, but one.

But while there will be a single resurrection, there will then be two directions people go.

2. The good are resurrected to life, the evil resurrection to judgment.

The book of Revelation speaks of “the first resurrection,” which we’ve identified with the resurrection of the soul. Only Christian believers experience this resurrection. Then there is the resurrection of the body; the general resurrection. ALL people experience this resurrection.

But then, in regard to this second resurrection, “those who have done good (come out) to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”

We who have experienced the first resurrection, that of our soul, are promised that we “do not come into judgment.” God sees in us only the good things that His Holy Spirit works in us. All of our sins are covered; they are atoned for by Jesus Christ.

But for the rest, who have done evil, they shall be judged.

Now, why is it that God judges some?

Paul explains in Romans 9:

“What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.”

In the judgment of those who have done evil God shows his power, and He makes us to know how truly blessed we are in His forgiving our sins and giving us eternal life.

All who believe in Jesus shall indeed see these greater things. First there is the resurrection of the soul when you come to faith in Christ. Then there is the resurrection of the body and life everlasting in God’s glory.

The healing of a disabled person is a great thing. The turning of water into wine is a great thing. The healing of an official's son is a great thing. But you will see greater things!

What a great joy it is in your life when a family member or friend comes to faith in Jesus Christ. We see this happen in our own day.

And what a great joy it will be when in the end our bodies are resurrected and reunited with our souls to everlasting life.

These are the greater things.

Conclusion

Let us then have hope in Jesus Christ who has the authority, who has the power, to raise us to life eternal and in whom is the promise for all who believe. Amen, Amen.

Jesus – The Co-Operating Son¹⁰

Story - Moses and Jesus were in a threesome playing golf one day. Moses pulled up to the tee and drove a long one. The ball landed in the fairway but rolled directly toward a water hazard. Quickly Moses raised his club, the water parted, and it rolled

Story - Moses and Jesus were in a threesome playing golf one day. Moses pulled up to the tee and drove a long one. The ball landed in the fairway but rolled directly toward a water hazard. Quickly Moses raised his club, the water parted, and it rolled to the other side, safe and sound.

Next, Jesus strolled up to the tee and hit a nice long one directly toward the same water hazard. It landed right in the center of the pond and hovered over the water. Jesus casually walked out on the pond and chipped the ball onto the green.

The third guy got up and randomly whacked the ball. It headed out over the fence and into oncoming traffic on a nearby street. It bounced off a truck and hit a nearby tree. From there, it bounced onto the roof of a shack close by and rolled down into the gutter, down the downspout, out onto the fairway

¹⁰ Contributed by Brad Bailey - John 5:19-21 (sermoncentral.com)

and straight toward the aforementioned pond. On the way to the pond, the ball hit a little stone and bounced out over the water onto a lily pad, where it rested quietly. Suddenly a large bullfrog jumped up on a lily pad and snatched the ball into his mouth. Just then, an eagle swooped down and grabbed the frog and flew away. As they passed over the green, the frog squealed with fright and dropped the ball, which bounced right into the cup for a hole in one.

Moses turned to Jesus and said, "I hate playing with your Dad."

In the same way some of us can feel intimidated by the proposal of playing with God.

THE POSSIBILITIES FOR GOOD ALWAYS SEEM GREATER THAN THE ENERGY WITHIN US

As we continue in our series "Meeting Jesus" I want to ask you, how does meeting and knowing Christ speak to our often-overwhelmed pursuit of doing good?

Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. (John 5:19-21)

By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me. (John 5:30)

- Here Christ speaks of great works of the kingdom being done but also he speaks of how they come forth. His Modus operandi, Mode of operation.

- Been confronted about healing on the Sabbath and to explain he draws upon common analogy especially vivid in the Jewish culture of the time Sons imitating their fathers.

o Travis yr. Old keep him from picking up and

o That's the picture our lord gives of how we are to work with the Father

o Amazing description in my late 20s Family business

1. Jesus imparts to us a spirit that longs to please the Father.

- Jesus makes known his starting point his motivating process to please the Father”

“My food” said Jesus, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” (John 4:34)

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. (John 6:38)

- Jesus is describing the fundamental distinction between a spirit of religion which tries to earn our relationship with God (our acceptance) on our merit, and a spirit of relationship that simply enjoys the mutual love that God desires.

- Travis the beauty of looking at Travis no concept of owing or earning even existing in his spirit no guilt going on He is just longing to please his daddy; to partner with me.

- That’s what Jesus describes as our motivation to minister our “Modis operandi.”

- Imparting what God always declared to obey is better than sacrifice.

- It’s not that we don’t owe God not that there’s no basis for being dutiful not that there’s no basis for a sense of “should do.” But the spirit of God’s desires is one of obedience born of mutual love. He longs to please us with his good pleasure and we long to please him.

- Many psychologists and therapists today emphasize the need to get rid of our “should” but apart from knowing God, leaves only a place of self-centered existence. Jesus is God centered existence.

- To meet Jesus is to meet the one who imparts a new motive in our spirits removing both our guilt-centered and our self-centered replacing it with the love of child for parent.

- Gordon McDonald “Driven vs Called”

o Driven = Anxious

o Called = peace and peace to all we do

o We see in Jesus certainly an extensive and effective ministry but equally telling is all that he didn’t do.

- Obedience Christ portrays is that which bears only that which the Father gave him to do nothing more, nothing less. Jesus describes an obedience to what is before him, especially in the moment.

- Jesus' obedience wasn't to some vague "possibility" of good, but obedience in each and every actual opportunity.

2. Jesus imparts to us a spirit that is sensitive to the Father's leading.

- Jesus says (John 5:19) He can only do what he sees his Father doing.

- Again, Jesus is describing how he shares in the Father's ministry It begins in obedience, it continues in being observant.

- The picture he gives is again much like my son who first stood and watched what I was doing then jumped in.

- Word sees means to look at, to consider, become aware of, perceive Jesus looked at the rich young ruler and loved him.

- Such observant spirit is described by Jesus throughout John's Gospel

Jesus answered, My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me." (John 7:16)

He who sent me is dependable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world." (John 8:26)

Then Jesus cried out, When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So, whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say." (John 12:44-46; 49-50)

Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father. (John 14:10-12)

All this I have spoken while still with you. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. (John 14:25; 16:12-15)

The same phrase used by Jesus in John 15

How are such workings of the Father and Son made known to us by the Holy Spirit?

- Remind us as many have sought to constantly ask today with W.W.J.D. (What Would Jesus Do)

- o Spirit will remind us of help us apply

- o We end up imitating those we're close to; (a friend's mannerisms, laugh soon their ways)

- Speak to us of what the Lord is doing

- o Observe and listen

- o Prayer for Jesus wasn't just asking God to do something but finding out what the Father was doing and then taking his part.

- o Sometimes general as when we recently did prayer walk, and many began to feel the Lord's heart for this city and the people. Other times as specific as a particular issue at hand for the person next to us.

- Illustration of Dolphin used in Navy research cement tanks Sonar sound wave to find direction catch fish Tank desensitized their sonar even as we can allow our own trappings to desensitize our spirits.

- God is working in fact. God works in all things including trials and tragedies.

3. Jesus imparts to us a spirit that relies on the Father's power. John 5. "I can do nothing by myself" He could only participate in what the Father was doing.

- Jesus knew that his role on earth was as a mediator of the things of heaven.

- Jesus no more looked at the world and said What a mess I've got to fix all this? than a baby looks at the ozone layer and thinks I can take care of this."

Jesus simply co-operated with what the Father was doing by heaven's power.

Final story - Stacey King who once played on the Chicago Bulls basketball team with Michael Jordan is to have reported one night how he and Michael Jordan scored seventy combined points. I didn't mention that Jordan scored sixty-nine.

The question isn't how many points we score but whether we get in the game.

Parable of the Good Shepherd

John 10:1-5¹¹

The Good Shepherd - ¹ “Amen, amen, I say to you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the gate but climbs in some other way is a thief and a bandit. ² The one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock. ³ The gatekeeper opens for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ “When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ However, they will never follow a stranger. Rather, they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers.”

Footnotes

- a. *The parable of the good shepherd, the feast of the Dedication, and the raising of Lazarus are three passages that describe who Christ is and what he wants to be for us. The ideas of life and unity dominate these pages. The desire of Jesus is that we have access to the full reality of life. He gives life to the point of giving up his own; he is the life.*

Another preoccupation impels him: to gather into one all who believe in him. So, the work of God is to overcome the forces of death, destruction, and dispersion, forces that disfigure the world and our existence.

- b. *The image of the flock and the shepherd occurs frequently in the Bible to describe the relationship of Israel with God, or simply the relations of the people with their leader (this language came spontaneously to any civilization of antiquity). More than once the Prophets denounced as wicked shepherds those in authority who exploited the people or led them astray: kings, princes, priests, prophets of comfort (see Jeremiah 23; Ezekiel 34; Zechariah 11:4-17). In the final analysis (they said), God alone is the shepherd to whom the flock belongs and who can properly lead and feed it. They were longing for a devoted shepherd who would act solely in God’s name.*

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Jesus now dares to describe himself as this Messiah-shepherd, who comes to deliver human beings from those who enslave them for their own profit or to impose upon them their own convictions. There are no other ways of reaching life and the knowledge of God: Jesus is the “gate;” he is the Shepherd who knows and gathers believers into a single flock. The word “know” signifies a mutual exchange, a reciprocal and radical belonging. This is the main assertion of the passage.

He Calls Us by Name¹²

He calls his sheep by name. His own! This reflects a personal nature of our relationship with Christ.

G.A. Smith tells of watching shepherds in Judea. “Sometimes we enjoyed our noonday rest beside one of those Judean wells to which three or four shepherds come down with their flocks. The flocks mixed with each other, and we wondered how each shepherd would get his own again. But after the watering and the playing were over the shepherds one by one went up different sides of the valley, and each called out his special call; and the sheep of each drew out of the crowd to their own shepherd.” The shepherd leads rather than drives them. The sheep recognize the voice of the shepherd and follows him. This is amazing.

In Jesus' day, sheep and shepherds were common. Much of Judea was rocky. During the day, the sheep would graze unfenced land under the watchful eye of the shepherd. At night, the shepherd would gather them into the sheepfold for protection.

There were two kinds of sheepfolds. In a village, there would be a communal sheepfold with a strong gate. Sheep from several herds could be kept there. In the morning, each shepherd would call his sheep, and those who belonged to him would come running.

However, shepherds couldn't afford to spend many nights in the village. There just wasn't enough grass close to the village to support the flock. Shepherds spent most nights away from home--in the lonely places where sheep could find grass to eat. In those lonely places, sheepfolds were much simpler--just a solid fence with an opening for the sheep to enter and to

¹² A Sermon By Rev. Liz Miller

depart. At night, once the sheep were safely inside the fold, the shepherd would lie down across the opening and fall into a light sleep--ready to awaken at any sign of danger--ready to do battle with any wild animal that might attack the sheep--ready to confront any thief that might try to steal the sheep. At daybreak, the shepherd would rise and stretch--and then he would lead the sheep to a place where they could find green grass and fresh water. He was a shepherd 24/7, but at the sheepfold he also became the gate. This is so much like Jesus.

Jesus said, *"I am the gate. If anyone enters in by me, he will be saved, and will go in and go out, and will find pasture"* (v. 9). Stop and think about that for a moment. *"If anyone enters in by me, he will be saved."* That's the purpose of a sheepfold, isn't it! The shepherd brings the sheep into the sheepfold to protect them from wild animals--from thieves--and from their own foolishness. Inside the sheepfold, with the shepherd lying across the opening, the sheep had little to fear. Outside the sheepfold, there was danger. Outside, there was death.

I personally find great comfort in that idea. The Good Shepherd goes before us to prepare the way, which means there is no place that we go that the Shepherd hasn't already been. He's already made sure the path is clear and safe. There may be hardships, there may be mishaps, there may be struggles but The Good Shepherd has already seen those and knows how to help us negotiate through the treacherous territory. He has already prepared a way for us to get through. All we must do is continue to listen to His Voice.

And when we prepare our hearts through prayer and worship we can more fully and more clearly listen to the voice of the Shepherd. And when we listen, The voice of the Shepherd guides us.

The voice of the shepherd is consistent, filled with compassion and love. The voice of the shepherd calls us by name, inviting us into a deeper relationship with him and to follow him more completely. Are we listening?

We might ask ourselves these questions. How am I growing closer to God and experiencing the presence of God? How do I encounter the "holy?" Do I experience the love and compassion of God and how do I show that? Do I follow his voice, and do I know what God wants to do in my life or where God might be leading me?

What can we do to hear the voice of God? We need to take time to be quiet and still to hear his voice. I challenge you to turn off the television, radios, telephone, and internet so you can listen for the voice of God speaking to you.

In today's world that is not the easiest thing to do. I am not one who necessarily likes the quiet. Even Jesus, would always take time away to spend quiet time with God. We need quiet time to pray. We need to listen to the God, the shepherd who speaks to our soul. Our God goes right to the heart and awakens something within us if we only allow it.

Our shepherd is trying to lead us into a deeper relationship. There will be peace when we listen and follow his voice. He calls each of us by name. Listen closely, can you hear him?

The True Shepherd¹³

INTRODUCTION:

To properly understand the message of Christ in John 10, one must first understand the circumstances that led up to it. In John 9, Jesus healed the man born blind, but the Pharisees would not accept it. Instead, they insulted the man, threatened him, and finally excommunicated him from the religious life of Israel. They cast away one of the sheep of the nation of Israel. But Jesus, the true Shepherd, found him and lovingly brought him into the fold of God.

I. THE PRETENSE OF FALSE SHEPHERDS (verse 1)

The Lord sets the stage by describing the false shepherds who showed that they did not care about the welfare of the sheep when they cast out the blind man. The sheepfold that Jesus referred to in verse one was a sheepfold in a town or village, not one in the countryside. Each village in Palestine had a common sheepfold where each shepherd, returning from the field with his sheep, would lead his flock at night. The sheepfold was made of rough stones and the walls were ten to twelve feet high. It had no roof. This was a place to protect the sheep from wild animals, thieves and robbers that might try to harm them. After the shepherd led his sheep through the door of the

¹³ Wisdomfromabove.net – Bible Sermons

sheepfold, he would entrust his flock to the doorkeeper. Each sheepfold had a doorkeeper whose job was to protect and care for the sheep while the shepherd went home to sleep. Once the sheep were led through the door into the sheepfold, the door was locked and guarded by the doorkeeper. No one but the doorkeeper had the key to unlock the door.

The first thing the Lord Jesus wanted these Pharisees to understand was that they were the false shepherds. He said in verse one, *“He who does not enter by the door but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber.”* The Greek word translated as *“thief”* refers to a petty thief who steals from people around him, whereas the word *“robber”* refers to a band of robbers. Both individually and collectively, His listeners fit His description of them. Jesus is reminding them of the words of the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel who prophesied against the shepherds of His people Israel. God had not appointed the Pharisees as shepherds over Israel. They appointed themselves and they only pretended to care about the people. In Ezekiel 24:2, God said to the shepherds of Israel, *“Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?”* Time hasn’t changed a thing. Today, there are still false prophets trying to lead people astray. False shepherds have only one goal: to glorify themselves by having others follow them.

II. THE PROOF OF THE TRUE SHEPHERD (verses 2-5)

In contrast to these Pharisees, Jesus told them in verse two, *“But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.”* What does the door refer to? It refers to God’s appointed way of entrance to the nation of Israel, the way in which the Old Testament prophets said that the true Messiah would come. Jesus came in the exact fulfillment of those Old Testament prophecies. They foretold where He would be born, who He would be born to, the unusual events surrounding His birth, how He would be introduced to the nation of Israel, where He would live, why He came, and how He would die and then rise from the dead. Also, Jesus’ life, His miracles, the words spoken by God the Father at His baptism, and many witnesses verified His claim to be the Messiah, Israel’s true Shepherd.

Verse 3 tells us, *“To Him, the doorkeeper opens.”* In Israel, after the sheep spent the night in the sheepfold under the care of the doorkeeper, the shepherd would return in the morning to lead his sheep out. When the

doorkeeper heard the shepherd's voice, he would open the door of the sheepfold for him. Who is this doorkeeper that Jesus is talking about? He is John the Baptist, the one who prepared the way for the Messiah and introduced Him to Israel. He publicly proclaimed that Jesus was "*the Lamb of God*" and "*the Son of God*" (John 1:23-36). After John introduced Jesus to Israel, some Jewish people began to follow the true Shepherd.

When a shepherd came to get his sheep in the morning, he would come to the sheepfold filled with the sheep of many shepherds. In order to lead out the sheep that belonged to him, he would call his own sheep by name, and they would come to him and follow him. This is what Jesus is saying in verses 3 and 4. Sheep know the voice of their shepherd and will follow him only. There was a small minority of the Jewish people who followed the Lord Jesus. You can't fool these sheep when it comes to recognizing their Shepherd's voice. They will not respond to the voice of strangers. That's why Jesus said in verse five, "*And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him.*"

One day a man in Australia was arrested for stealing a sheep. However, he claimed that it was his own which had been missing from his flock for many days. At first, the judge was puzzled, not knowing how to decide the matter. At last, he asked that the sheep be brought before him. Then he took one of the men, the man who made the accusation, into the courtyard and told him to call the animal. The sheep made no response except to raise its head and look frightened as if it dreaded being in that unfamiliar place with strangers. The officer took the man back to the courtroom. Then he instructed the officer to bring down the defendant. The accused man did not wait until he entered the yard, but as he drew near the gate, before the sheep could see him, he began to make his peculiar call. Overjoyed, the sheep bounded toward the gate and by his actions showed that he recognized the familiar voice of his master. "His sheep knows him," said the judge, and so the case was quickly decided.

The point of our Lord's message to the Pharisees was to explain why a man born blind would follow Him. It was because He was Israel's True Shepherd, and a true shepherd has sheep. Why does anyone leave a religious system or a philosophy today? It's because we have heard the voice of the True Shepherd calling us through the Bible, and we have chosen to trust Christ and follow Him.

A missionary was once asked to pass through some very unfamiliar territory in the middle of the night. As we went through the darkness with his guide going on ahead, he looked down at his feet and could see no road. The guide turned so frequently that the missionary feared the way had been missed. In his anxiety, he finally cried out, "Where is the way?" The native turned around and said, "I am the way. There is no beaten path here; just follow me step by step and you will reach the end of the journey safely. The missionary did as he was told and soon arrived at his destination.

III. OBSERVATIONS:

What can we learn from Jesus' words in this passage of Scripture? First of all, we learn that Jesus is the true Shepherd of God because He came through the door – the proper entryway to the sheep of Israel in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. The doorkeeper, John the Baptist, recognized that Jesus was the Messiah and opened the door for Him, proclaiming Him to be the "*Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29).

Secondly, we learn that Jesus knows His own sheep. "*He calls them each by name*" and they come to Him because they recognize His voice. Every encounter with Jesus in the Gospel of John is on a personal basis. We've already studied His encounter with Nicodemus, the woman at the well in Samaria, the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, the man born blind, as well as several others. Every person comes to Jesus individually and personally.

Thirdly, "*He leads them out.*" Jesus is telling these Pharisees that, even though they cast the man who had been born blind out of the synagogue, it wasn't just their own doing. Jesus was leading the man out of that place of spiritual blindness. He was the one behind it. The once blind man was now His sheep, and he came to his true Shepherd.

Fourthly, in verse four, Jesus said: "*He goes before them.*" Unlike the Pharisees who were self-centered, the true shepherd of the sheep stays with his sheep and goes in front of them. He is the first to experience what lies ahead, facing the dangers and obstacles that may be in store for them. He chooses the best pastures and the safest areas for them to graze.

Lastly, at the end of verse four and continuing through verse five, Jesus said, "*the sheep follow him because they know his voice. And a stranger they simply will not follow but will flee from him because they do not know the*

voice of strangers.” As he leads his sheep, the shepherd talks to them, showing his constant care for them. Sometimes the shepherd would talk louder and more sharply to get the sheep’s attention and remind them of his presence. The sheep trust in him only and flee from strangers. I have watched videos on YouTube demonstrating the validity of this passage of Scripture and it was amazing to observe the sheep’s reaction to the stranger’s voice and afterward to the shepherd’s voice.

IV. APPLICATIONS:

Do you hear Him calling you? If you will study the Scriptures as they describe the Person and work of Jesus Christ in His own words and through the testimony of eyewitnesses, you will conclude that He is the True Shepherd of the sheep. Spiritually, we are all like sheep – defenseless against the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, directionless in our journey through life, easily led astray, and ignorant of the dangers that lie ahead in this life and the next. We need a shepherd, and there is only one True Shepherd that you can trust because He loves you and proved it by giving His life for you. If you’re ready to make that commitment to Christ or want to review what it means to become a child of God and follower of Jesus Christ, please read my sermon entitled “WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO RECEIVE CHRIST – John 1:12. Choose to follow Him and experience the peace and joy that comes from being close to the One who leads the way for you and calls you by name because you have become a member of His flock forever.

If you are already a follower of Jesus Christ, are you walking close to the Shepherd even when it’s hard to understand where He is leading you? Remember that He sees your tomorrow more clearly than you see your yesterday. Keep trusting in His guidance and praying for His leading in your life. He is with you, leading you every step of the way and providing for your needs along the way.

The Parable of the Childbearing Woman

John 16:16-24

Triumph of Jesus and the Joy of the Witnesses^[a] 16 “In a little while you will no longer see me, and then a short time later you will see me again.” 17 Then some of his disciples said to one another, “What does he mean by saying to us, ‘In a little while you will no longer see me, and then a short time later you will see me again,’ and ‘Because I am going to the Father’? 18 What is this ‘little while’? We do not know what he means.” 19 Jesus knew that they wanted to question him, so he said to them, “You are asking one another what I meant by saying, ‘In a little while you will no longer see me, and then a short time later you will see me again.’ 20 Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will be sorrowful, but your grief will turn into joy. 21 “A woman in labor suffers anguish because her hour has come. But when her baby is born, she no longer recalls the suffering because of her joy that she has brought a child into the world. 22 In the same way, you are now in anguish, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one shall deprive you of your joy. 23 “On that day, you will not ask me anything further. Amen, amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in my name, he will give it to you. 24 Until now, in my name, you have not asked for anything. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.

Footnotes

- a. John 16:16 The departure of Jesus will be a moment of disarray for the disciples; his absence will more than once be a moment of disarray for believers. But that is not the last word. The sufferings, like the pains of giving birth, make a testimony fruitful. Let us look at the Death and Resurrection of Christ; they are the definitive events in history. From the cross and Easter, a new light is given to believers; a new confidence with God is offered to them. Christ will be the mediator; with him believers will be one with God. This intimacy will be a time of endless joy and peace for people who have believed they are children of God.

What is the return of Christ? Is it the glorious coming at the end of time or the Resurrection manifested in the appearances? The two things go

*together. The Resurrection will inaugurate a new era, the last times; and the end of time will manifest the glory of the Risen One.*¹⁴

Joy of the Spirit is the Measure of its Power¹⁵

Summary: The problem is that we've confused joy with happiness. Happiness is dependent on happenings. Circumstances in your life dictate whether or not you are happy. Joy, on the other hand, is a gift from God - a fruit of the Spirit.

Opening illustration: During an earthquake, some years ago, the inhabitants of a small village were very much alarmed, but they were at the same time surprised at the calmness and apparent joy of an old woman whom they all knew. At length one of them, addressing the old woman, said, "Mother, are you not afraid?" "No," said the woman, "I rejoice to know that I have a God who can shake the world."

Let us look into 'God's Word' and see the purpose of this Joy that we should have through the Holy Spirit.

Introduction: In the OT, joy was an expression of excitement that was experienced with personal triumph or celebrating a good harvest or military victory. Often feasting, the offering of sacrifices or blessings and dancing were tied with joy (Deut. 12:12; 1 Sam 18:6; Ps 31:7; 96: 11; Isa. 56:7; 60:15; 61:3 ff; Joel 1:16;). In the NT, Joy comes from the Holy Spirit. It is associated with receiving or the telling of God's redemptive love. It also is associated with the enjoyment of life such as eating, drinking, feasting and even suffering (Matt 5:11-12; Luke 12:19; Acts 7:41; Gal 5:22; 1 Peter 1:6).

Today the problem is that we've confused joy with happiness. Happiness is dependent on happenings. Circumstances in your life dictate whether or not you are happy. Joy, on the other hand, is a gift from God - a fruit of the Spirit that transcends whatever is happening in your life. Joy allows you to rise - even to soar - above difficult circumstances, challenges, and heartaches. Joy comes from knowing Who is in control and that He has a plan to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11) We do not draw our strength from the great feeling we get when things go right; if we did, we would be powerless when hard times and adversity hit, and we would all be easy pickings for the devil. No, it is the joy of the Lord that is our strength!

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¹⁵ Contributed by Ajai Prakash (sermoncentral.com)

Background: This passage is figurative of all that a believer will go through before the coming of Christ. We see that Jesus knows the scriptures; He knew these pictures; they were in His mind and in His memory. And now He was saying to His disciples: "I am leaving you; but I am coming back; the day will come when my reign begins and My Kingdom will come; but before that you will have to go through terrible things, with pain like birth-pangs upon you. But, if you faithfully endure, and go through that terrible time, the blessings will be very precious." Then Jesus went on to outline the life of the Christian who endures.

Purpose of the 'Joy of the Spirit'

1. Sorrow will turn to JOY (v. 20):-

One of the most popular passages in the Bible is Nehemiah 8:10: "Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Why is joy important? Because the "joy of the Lord is your strength!" Joy produces strength. And strength is needed to fight. You are called to "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12). I sense in my spirit that many people in the body of Christ are tired of fighting the good fight of faith. They are struggling to fight because they have lost their joy.

You are tired of fighting for your marriage. You are fed up with your spouse. Do you think that he doesn't love you anymore, so why fight for his love? You are ready to throw in the towel. You're sick and tired of being sick and tired. You have been sick for so long that you don't remember what it's like to be healthy. At one time, you battled this sickness, but the sickness is winning. So, you think, What's the use, I might as well accept this sickness and learn to live with it. I'm never going to get well.

You once waged war against your financial debts. But things haven't changed much, and you're beginning to get discouraged. You think that you are never going to get out from under all your bills. You might be having trouble with your children. You wonder if they are ever going to straighten up. You are exhausted from their rebellion. Is God ever going to change them? you wonder.

There may be a time when it looks as if to be a Christian brings nothing but sorrow, and to be of the world brings nothing but joy. But the day comes when the roles are reversed. The world's careless joy will turn to sorrow; and the Christian's apparent sorrow will turn to joy. The Christian must always remember, when his faith costs him dear, that this is not the end of things that after the sorrow there comes the joy. [Light at the other end of the tunnel]

Entering into the joy of our Lord often is best realized when circumstances are the worst. Where you see prosperity in this world, it is often accompanied by spiritual famine. You seldom see a man prospering in the world and spiritually as well. ISA 54:10 says, "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, says the LORD that hath mercy on thee." The things of this life will all be removed. When circumstances are the most trying, the peace of God is the most precious. During the worst circumstances we are able to give it all into His hands.

Illustration: Author Leo Buscaglia tells this story about his mother and their "misery dinner." It was the night after his father came home and said it looked as if he would have to go into bankruptcy because his partner had absconded with their firm's funds. His mother went out and sold some jewelry to buy food for a sumptuous feast. Other members of the family scolded her for it. But she told them that "the time for joy is now, when we need it most, not next week." Her courageous act rallied the family.

2. Two precious things about this Christian JOY (vs. 22 & 24):-

(a) It will never be taken away ~ It will be independent of the chances and the changes of the world. It will be untouchable by any of the activities and assaults of men. It is the simple fact that in every generation people who were suffering terribly have spoken of sweet times with Christ. The joy the world gives is at the mercy of the world. The joy which Christ gives is independent of anything the world can do. It does not depend on what the world gives and takes away, because it is dependent only on the presence of Christ, and it is grounded only in God.

(b) It will be full (complete) ~ It is characteristic of life that in life's greatest joy there is always some element of incompleteness. There is always something lacking. It may be that somehow there lingers in it some regret; that there is the feeling that there may be a cloud no bigger than a man's hand to mar it; that the memory that it cannot last is always at the back of our minds. In the Christian joy, the joy of the presence of Christ and of the life lived with Him, there is no alloy, no tinge of imperfection. It is perfect and complete.

3. Christian JOY ~ the pain that went before is forgotten (v. 22):-

The mother forgets the pain in the wonder of the child. The martyr forgets the agony in the glory of heaven. If a man's fidelity costs him much, he will forget the cost in the joy of being forever with Christ, and in the simple joy of having proved himself. The joy of the world at their not seeing Him seems to show that His removal from them by death was what He meant; and in that

case, their joy at again seeing Him points to their transport at His reappearance amongst them on His Resurrection, when they could no longer doubt His identity. At the same time, the sorrow of the widowed Church in the absence of her Lord in the heavens, and her transport at His personal return, are certainly expressed here.

Philippians 4:4 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" How often do you to rejoice? You know the answer, Always! You are always to rejoice, because "joy" is the easiest fruit to lose. You can't live off of the joy you had yesterday. Joy can give you strength only when you possess it.

If you had joy last week, that joy will not give you strength today. Joy can only give you strength today if you have it today. This is why you must rejoice always. You might say, "I don't feel like rejoicing." God didn't say, "Rejoice, only if you feel like it." No! He said, "Rejoice always." Obviously, God knows that you don't feel like rejoicing always. Yet you need to rejoice always because if you don't then you lose the strength to fight.

James 1:2 says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds." Pure joy is not happiness. "Happiness" comes from the word "happen." Happiness, therefore, is based on what is happening. If something good is happening, then you are happy. However, God says that pure joy occurs even in the midst of trials - even when the car breaks down, or when the kids get sick, or when the boss cuts your hours, or when your spouse is in a bad mood, etc..

Why is James telling us to count it pure joy whenever we face trials? Because joy gives you strength to fight your trials, and if you'll fight the trials, you will overcome. James continues, "Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (v. 4). You see, James has in mind "victory over trials", not "acceptance of his trials." So, by rejoicing, you overcome your trials.

Illustration: Tony Campolo tells a story about being in a church in Oregon where he was asked to pray for a man who had cancer. Campolo prayed boldly for the man's healing. That next week he got a telephone call from the man's wife. She said, "You prayed for my husband. He had cancer." Campolo thought when he heard her use the past tense verb that his cancer had been eradicated! But before he could think much about it she said, "He died." Campolo felt terrible. But she continued, "Don't feel bad. When he came into that church that Sunday he was filled with anger. He knew he was going to be dead in a short period of time, and he hated God. He was 58 years old, and he wanted to see his children and grandchildren grow up. He

was angry that this all-powerful God didn't take away his sickness and heal him. He would lie in bed and curse God. The more his anger grew towards God, the more miserable he was to everybody around him. It was an awful thing to be in his presence. But the lady told Campolo, "After you prayed for him, a peace had come over him and a joy had come into him. Tony, the last three days have been the best days of our lives. We've sung. We've laughed. We've read Scripture. We prayed. Oh, they've been wonderful days. And I called to thank you for laying your hands on him and praying for healing." And then she said something incredibly profound. She said, "He wasn't cured, but he was healed."

4. New relationship with God (v. 23):-

When we really and truly know God we are able to go to Him and ask Him for anything. We know that the door is open; we know that His name is Father; we know that His heart is love. We are like children who never doubt that their Father delights to see them, and that they can talk to Him as they wish. In that relationship Jesus says we will ask for anything. But let us think of it in human terms – the only terms we have and can comprehend. When a child loves and trusts his Father, he knows quite well that sometimes his Father will say NO because his Father's knowledge and his Father's love know best. We can become so intimate with God that we can take everything with us to Him, but always we end by saying: "Thy will be done."

Joy helps us see that life and purpose is all about who God is, and not who I am (Psalm 15; 101; 2 Thess. 1:12; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1). Joy is indispensable for sharing love, it is being confident in our faith. It is not just what you know; it is Who you know. He is Christ. Your love of Jesus is the picture other people need to see so they can better see Him (Joshua 1:8-9; 2 Cor. 1:24)! When we know we have the Good News, we will know Jesus, not just as a Savior, but as LORD (Luke 6:46)! He is to be all things to us. Is He Lord of your life, too? Joy helps us understand God's perspective and gives us the confidence and patience to endure anything! This realization impacts and fuels us to endure the toughness of life and to proclaim Jesus to others. Because we are confident in His power and impact, we will live in Him and show Christ to others. I know that in my life, my effectiveness is directly correlated to my walk and my prayer life. How much I trust and obey becomes the power that helps me get through life when it seems dark and foreboding and Joy will help you too.

5. New relationship is only possible through Christ (v. 24):-

It exists in His name. It is because of who Jesus is and what Jesus did that our joy is indestructible and perfect, that our knowledge is complete, that the new way to the heart of God is open to us. All that we have ~ joy of eternal life, came to us through Jesus Christ. It is in His name that we ask and receive, that we approach and are welcomed.

The key is for us to look to Christ, not to our situation, and declare our circumstances as joy. We are to be content and satisfied, to face them, and then learn and grow from them. This does not mean to give up and do nothing; it means to refocus our energies into productivity and faith - not questions and bitterness. It is to have our convictions and fulfillment in Christ, not circumstances. So, when something difficult comes upon us, we will have the great comfort that God is in control and will not allow us to carry more than we can tolerate. Our joy and purpose in life is Christ, and our relationship in Him! Will you allow yourself to become less, and Him to become more (John 3:30)? If not, what is in the way?

Illustration: Joseph Stowell tells of having dinner with Billy Graham at a dinner for the staff and board of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Billy was eighty at the time and Dr. Stowell asked him a question: "Of all your experiences in ministry, what have you enjoyed most?" "Was it you time spent with presidents and heads of state? Or was it...." Before he could finish his next sentence Billy Graham responded: "None of that, by far the greatest joy of my life has been my fellowship with Jesus. Hearing Him speak to me, having Him guide me, sensing His presence with me and His power through me. This has been the highest pleasure of my life!"

Conclusion: You may be tormented with fear, worry and depression. However, you can draw the water called "sound mind" - through joy! Don't get down. Don't get discouraged. The devil may be able to attack you (, he is the god of this age) but he has no power to steal your joy. Joy is a spiritual force inside your human spirit. Satan can touch your body, finances, and family as the book of Job teaches, but he can't touch your spirit. Your spirit is off limits to the devil. And since he can't touch your spirit, he can't rob you of your joy. Because Joy is from the 'Fruit of the Spirit.' Satan cannot steal your joy since it is spiritual. If you lost your joy it is because you gave it away. However, if you will keep your joy, Satan has to release your blessings.

When my flesh rears its ugly head and the temptation to somehow or other put creation above the Creator leads me to feel weak, wondering how I can muster up the strength to be a "good Christian," what I need to remember is that strength doesn't come from inside me, it comes from the joy I have in

the Lord. How cool is that? When I need strength, I can rely on the joy the Spirit produces in me. When my affections are all focused on God, temptation loses its power.

Who Are We? About the Author's

Rev. Jack and Rev. Liz were married in 2011 and serve as *"Equals in Ministry - Equals in Life."* Although retired from active ministry, both remain in good standing with the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC), Pacific Northwest Diocese, and the First Christian Church - Disciples of Christ (DOC), Northern Lights Region.

Rev. Jack served in the United States Marine Corps including a 13-month deployment in Vietnam (1965-66). After leaving the Marines, he earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and a Certificate in Leadership Management. He retired in 2008 after a 36-year career in the Real Estate Valuation Industry; the last 10 years in corporate management. Prior to retiring, Rev. Jack earned a Master of Art's Degree (MA) in Pastoral Ministry and a Doctorate (D.Min.) in Applied Ministries. After his ordination in November of 2010, Rev. Jack earned a Master of Divinity Degree (M.Div.).

Rev. Liz is a graduate of Central Washington University earning a Bachelor of Arts in Education. She went on to become a Certified Teacher with a Special Education endorsement and taught in the Bellingham School District for over 20 years. Rev. Liz earned a Master of Divinity Degree (M.Div.) from the St. John XXIII Theological Institute, have experience signing for the deaf at church, and was a licensed Foster Care provider for over 25 years. Rev. Liz was ordained in August of 2012.

Our Story: After years of service in the Independent Catholic Church, we found ourselves in a unique position in the final years of our ministry. While being Pastors of Saint Clare Pastoral Center, an independent Catholic community, we also served for three years in a pastoral role for the Mount Vernon First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). During that period and prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, our two communities shared an ecumenical worship service each Sunday on Zoom. It was a remarkable relationship that benefited both faith traditions and created a distinct ecumenical identity that aligned with the Mission Statement and Constitutional Preamble of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC), and the vision of unity found in both the Disciples of Christ, Council on Christian Unity, and the Second Vatican Council. Pope Francis wrote of such relationships stating, "It is important to know each other better but also to recognize what the Spirit has shown in the other as a gift for us ... We must

walk united with our differences. There is no other way to become one. This is the way of Jesus.”

The relationship between Saint Clare Pastoral Center and the First Christian Church of Mount Vernon developed into a welcoming and inclusive experience that led to a better understanding of what unites us as the People of God and served as a living, breathing example of the work begun by the Catholics and Disciples of Christ Commission for Dialogue. In this lies our calling of working toward the “visible unity of the one church of God,” which was the original goal of the commission when it began work in 1977.

Although First Christian Church sold its building and ended its visible ministry at the end of 2021, Saint Clare Pastoral Center continued to provide a transitional and ecumenical worship service each Sunday on Zoom through August 2022. This provided a safe haven for FCC members while they transitioned into other faith communities. Since everyone was welcome at our gatherings, the work towards Christian unity and walking together in our differences continued. In November 2022, Rev. Liz and I retired from active ministry, the Pastoral Center closed, and our Safe Haven website (www.stclarepastoralcenter.com) was born. Our ministry continues.

Rev. Liz, and Rev. Jack