

The Big Story – Genesis through Revelation –

**The Bible {all 66 books} was written over a span of
1500 years
on
3 Continents
by
40 + authors
YET**

each book is woven into the whole by a single storyline:

- **Relationship CREATED** --- Genesis 1 and 2 give us a picture of the perfect creation God intended. There was no sin, suffering or death.
- **Relationship BROKEN** --- Genesis 3 tells us of the choice to distrust God, the entrance of sin and broken relationships - separation from God, sorrow, pain and death.
- **Relationship PURSUED** --- Genesis 3 to Revelation 20 tells the story of God's pursuit of humanity, His war against sin and His plan to rescue us.
- **Relationship RESTORED** --- Revelation 20 and 22 - Sin is forever destroyed. Everything is made right, relationship is restored and once again peace, harmony and joy reign supreme.

Here are some of things we have learned {this is not an exhaustive list}

Old Testament

-Genesis-

The Beginning

- God is Creator. We are created.
- There is a villain in the story and he is out to get us.
- The **TREE** was a protection against the marauding nature of Satan **{see 1 Peter 5:8}** – Only one access point was given to him and then Adam and Eve were told not to go near it.
- God gave us freedom to choose.
- The descent into sin:
 - Mistake 1 – Eve investigated the tree she was told to avoid.
 - Mistake 2 – Eve engaged the serpent in conversation – she dips her toe in Satan's sandbox.
 - Mistake 3 – Eve misquoted God **{Genesis 2:17 and 3:3}**
 - Mistake 4 – Eve believed the serpent's argument that God couldn't be trusted and was withholding something good from her.
- Relationship immediately broken
- God went searching for Adam and Eve **{us}**.

Consequences

- After only 10 generations the world was so corrupt that ***"every intent and thought of his heart was evil continually"*** – God had to step in.
- Justice and mercy operate together as God must deal with sin yet longs to restore those He loves.
- One race created by God – language and people separated after the flood.

The Patriarch's

- When God was preparing to build a nation that would represent Him to the world, He called Abram.
- God's promises are God-sized and He is faithful to fulfill those promises.
- God only tells as much as we need to know.
- Faith is required to move and moving demonstrates faith.
- Humans are clearly not always faithful; but God is **ALWAYS** faithful.
- When you have an encounter with the living God you will never be the same.
- Despite their **MANY** faults, the Patriarchs trusted God and it was counted to them as righteousness.

-Exodus-

In Egypt

The God of the Bible is not distant. He is aware of the sufferings of His people and He will provide a remedy. He **WILL** act – Just because He doesn't act **WHEN** we think He should or **AS** we think He should doesn't mean He isn't working it all out. This becomes an act of faith on our part – to patiently wait.

The Call

- God will take all the time He needs to prepare us for His service **{it took Moses 80 years}**.
- Desert experiences can help us mature.
- God doesn't need us, but He chooses to include us in what He is doing. It's not about us or our abilities or gifts. It's about God and what He will do through us – if we are willing.

Showdown

- **Never underestimate the power of God** = God is unpredictable. He rarely behaves as we think He should. As a result, we underestimate Him. Don't underestimate God's ability to move on your behalf, His plan for your life, His desire to use you, His love for you, His desire for a personal relationship with you or His desire to save you.
- **Allow God to heal and transform you** = If we are honest, there are things in our lives we are hanging on to: hurt from the past, guilt that still haunts us or some persistent sin we can't / don't want to give up... In all of these things, we need God to heal and transform us. **LET HIM!**

Freedom

- **Ellen White {PP 293}**: Many look back to the Israelites, and marvel at their unbelief and murmuring, feeling that they themselves would not have been so ungrateful; but when their faith is tested, even by little trials, they manifest no more faith or patience than did ancient Israel. When brought into strait places, **they murmur at the process by which God has chosen to purify them**. Though their present needs are supplied, many are unwilling to trust God for the future.

What is God's master plan for you? What is God's heart toward you? Do you really believe that all things do work together for good? When life does not go as planned how you answer those questions will determine how you respond to trial.

God is too wise to be mistaken,
God is too good to be unkind.
So when you don't understand,
When you don't see His plan,
When you can't trace His hand..... TRUST HIS HEART! **{words by Babbie Mason}**

How Free People Live

Public Convictions:

- Convictions I **WANT** other people to think I believe, even though I may not really believe them.

Private Convictions:

- Convictions that I sincerely **THINK** I believe. However, when circumstances change, so do my convictions.

Core Convictions:

- Convictions that are **REVEALED** by my daily actions – by what I actually do.

Your actions will always agree with your core beliefs.

God says obey Me:

- Because I have created you and I have redeemed you.
- Because I am worthy to be obeyed.
- Out of gratitude for what I have done for you.

God desires His children to mature. He expects that as they journey together the law will move from an external reality to an internal reality.

Blue Print

Three reasons for the Tabernacle:

- **God wants to be with us!!** More than anything else God wants to be known. He wants to be a part of our lives. The Tabernacle was to be a visible dwelling place for God and it was to be placed in the center of the camp to remind the people that God is not to be relegated to the edges, but is to be at the center of daily life. He wants to be known, but because of sin we can no longer approach Him, so He created a system by which we could get as close to Him as possible.
- **We need to have a proper view of God.** We need to understand that He is God of the Universe and we are created. We should not approach Him casually or with disrespect. We are never to bring God down to our level.
- **The reality of heaven and the plan of salvation.** Remember, the Earthly Tabernacle was called a copy of the real thing in Hebrews 9 – Therefore the Earthly Tabernacle is a miniature representation of the Heavenly Tabernacle, both in form and function. Everything related to the Tabernacle and its services pointed to Christ's role in the plan of Salvation; His substitutionary sacrifice, His priestly duties and His royal duties. It's all heaven all the time!!

Extra Point: Last week we read that God would put to death anyone who broke the Sabbath {32:14}. Why would He, a patient and longsuffering God use such seemingly harsh language? This is what I believe: God had delivered Israel and now they were free. He had given them an outline for how free people live. They, however, still filtered information through the lens of slavery – harsh punishment for disobedience is what they knew and understood. I believe that God desired to communicate with them the beauty and rest that comes from keeping the Sabbath, but I don't think Israel would have understood, so He spoke to them in language they would understand. God used the language of slavery because that is the language they understood.

Meanwhile

- Even though there may be an explanation for why the people began to worship the golden calf, those explanations do not excuse the sin. We may argue that our culture dictates to us, on some level, the accepted way to live. But God makes it clear that the people who follow Him adhere to a different set of rules. If we are violating God's clear commands, we are sinning against Him, even if our culture says differently.
- Transformation goes either **UP** or **DOWN**. God desires to transform us into HIS image (+) while Satan desires to transform us into his image (-). Which way are you going?
- God must deal with sin even if we misunderstand His motives. He loves us too much to allow sin to go unchecked.
- In spite of us God remains faithful.

Construction

- Everything about the Tabernacle points to the plan of salvation and the sacrifice of Jesus.
- God's plan involves people.
- God will equip those He calls.
- The service of God requires our very best. No amount of sacrifice on our part can make up for what was sacrificed for us.
- God loves beauty.

In chapters 35-40, "**all that the Lord had commanded**" is stated 11 times and during the giving of the law, the people declared "**ALL that the Lord has spoken we will do**" – and yet they failed spectacularly. Now, they are doing what God asked them to do. What is the difference? They knew they had committed a grave sin and they were on their best behavior – slightly humbled by

recent events. Sadly, however, this *“new found”* obedience will not last and it won’t be long before they are once again complaining and disobeying. And yet.... God will continue to journey with them for the next forty years and take them into the Promised Land - not because they were worthy but because He promised He would.

-Leviticus-

Nothing but the Blood

Blood is mentioned 90 times in the first 15 chapters of Leviticus. Blood is the foundation of Justification and the assurance of our standing before God. **Our Salvation is based totally on the blood of Christ.**

In the Levitical system, the people brought perfect bulls, sheep, goats and birds – which represented Christ’s future sacrifice. When Jesus shouted, *“it is finished”*, God looked upon His substitutionary sacrifice and declared forever righteous all those who believe in Him. God is not asking you now to offer a bull or a sheep or bird. He is asking you for yourself. He is looking for the best part of you.

- **Romans 12:1-2** - I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

The dietary restrictions of Leviticus 11 are not primarily about what we put into our stomachs, so much as they are about **HOLINESS**. We could argue that these restrictions no longer apply because our ability to keep food fresh is much improved from the wilderness wandering days and it may be viewed as legalistic. However, holiness has no expiration date and it is not legalistic to obey God’s laws – it is legalistic to misuse God’s law.

There are health benefits to the regulations in Leviticus but, what God really wants to reinforce is that there must be separation between the common and the holy. **There are no blurred lines with God.** The Israelites were to imitate God’s holiness. Christians are called to do the same **{1 Peter 1:15-16; 2:9}**.

The Day of Atonement

Christ’s atoning sacrifice was accomplished at the cross **{Heb. 7:27}**, but the full meaning of *“atonement”* includes both sacrifice and priestly ministry **{Lev. 4:32-35; 5:10, 13, 18; 6:7; Heb. 8-9}**.

The earthly sanctuary system – at the center of which is the Day of Atonement - pointed Israel to Jesus and the plan of salvation.

Our salvation is based 100% on what heaven does. The heavenly sanctuary is doing what the earthly sanctuary pointed to:

- Jesus sacrificial death on the cross - using his own blood as a means to pass on to us God’s forgiveness.
- Jesus priestly ministry - The process by which our sins are forever dealt with.

It is all heaven – all the time. All we have to do is believe that it’s true and be transformed by that truth.

Be Holy

Holiness is addressed 90 times in chapters 17-27. Holiness is the result of the Blood of Christ and His intercession for us. In other words – the **FRUIT** of being declared righteous **{Justification}** is a holy and transformed life **{Sanctification}**.

God spent a lot of time and effort outlining for Israel what it looked like to be a set-aside **{holy}** people. He didn’t do it because they were extra special, in fact, they were the least among all the nations. He did it because He made a promise to Abraham. He did it, so that through their witness the whole world would come to a knowledge of the true God. He did it because it was through them Jesus would come – to save you and me. He did it because He is holy and as His people, they were to be holy too.

- **Leviticus 20:26** - Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine.

The law is the standard of God’s government, yet the Israelites feeble attempts to keep it were futile. We **CANNOT** live up to the holy, righteous standards of a Holy, Righteous God. However, the sacrificial system shows us that the thing we **CANNOT DO** was accomplished on our behalf by Christ and through our relationship with Him we **BECOME** holy and willing law keepers.

When we take scripture seriously and believe what it says about God **{holy}** and about us **{not holy}**, then our hearts are raised to understand how truly great is the love and mercy of God - As a result, we respond in gratitude with obedience.

-Numbers-

By the Numbers

The God of Numbers is an organized God:

- People and priests were carefully counted.
- The camp was arranged in an orderly manner.

The God of Numbers is a close and personal God:

- He spoke to Moses directly.
- The cloud covering the Tabernacle moved and led the people on their journey to the promised land.

Once again, we see that cleanliness and holiness are important to God and are vital to the life and survival of the people.

Wilderness Stories

Numbers can be a difficult book to read because it is full of rebellion and bad choices as well as judgment and discipline. I am personally comfortable with how God chose to deal with His people; however, it is important to me that the congregation make up their own minds and not simply accept my position because I told them to, so I asked them to come up with their own

Takeaways for this sermon:

- **Amy:** People would think the Israelites in the book are in misery and suffering, but I would say this group is so lucky to be this close to God and experience God's grace this profoundly. No generation in history has similar experiences.

It is a book of testing and faith. We can learn such lessons as showing gratitude instead of grumbling and complaining, accepting God's appointed leadership and following God's instruction

Thru the lens of book of numbers, I see the resemblance between God and rebellious Israelite, between parents and children and between God and Christian. The history is repeating itself constantly. Our material lives or physical environment might be transformed and changed via technology advancement, but, our generation, is no different than previous generations in terms of spiritual lives. We need to remind ourselves to be grateful, to let our ego go, and be faithful.

- **Ron:** Our lives can be quantified by how we live and which activities we perform: How many hours a day do we spend walking, sleeping, working, praying, learning. But God also quantifies his people in special ways: by faith and loyalty, by character and leadership, and by how they live their lives in Christ.

The book of numbers is in every word the testament of God, in both the past history, the present, and the future. It's a record of the events that took place after Exodus during the wandering years in the wilderness. It describes how God quantifies his people and by his care for them during those long years and the result of their actions and events which took place during that period.

In difficult circumstances, because of unbelief, ungrateful, disobedience and not taking God's words seriously, a whole generation of people had to pay with their lives and die off in the wilderness. While God raised up a new generation of believers and leadership to inherit the promised land. God still kept his words.

There are many people today who profess in the name of Christ but at the same time do not believe his word. It's evident because they don't base their choices and decisions upon on what God had said. They rely on their own opinions and perspectives or how it looks to them at this point in time. We need to not leaning toward our own understanding but toward our faith in Christ. We can't be consumed and distracted by the madness that's constantly going by around us.

Taking God's word seriously will give us the meaning to move forward in life. It's important to live purposely for God. No matter where we are and what situation. And for the elders, keep that drive. Mentoring the young with your wisdom. There are some who willfully embrace the pain of their past, in order to help repair the next generation.

Life's journey can be long and bitter, but as we keep our faith in Christ strong, we will enter the promised land one day and see him face to face.

-Deuteronomy-

The core of Deuteronomy is the Covenant that binds Yahweh and Israel together. It is not a book of laws so much as it is a book about the heart. God would be their God and they would be His people. He would be faithful to them and they would be faithful to Him. He would give them the land and they would respond to His love and mercy with love and obedience. It was a call to choose God **BECAUSE** He had already chosen them.

Loyalty to God **{which meant rejecting the worship of other gods}**, concerns about justice and the treatment of the weaker members of society are also prominent concepts throughout the book – concepts worth following in any successful society.

Obedience **{as a loving response to God’s grace}** is the overarching theme. Obedience was the source of blessing, prosperity, joy and health and before leading Israel into the Land of Promise, God gave them all the information they needed to be successful:

- **Deuteronomy 26:16-19** - The LORD your God commands you this day to follow these decrees and laws; carefully observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. ¹⁷ You have declared this day that the LORD is your God and that you will walk in his ways, that you will keep his decrees, commands and laws, and that you will obey him. ¹⁸ And the LORD has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession as he promised, and that you are to keep all his commands. ¹⁹ He has declared that he will set you in praise, fame and honor high above all the nations he has made and that you will be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.

Failure to follow God’s commands would damage the Covenant Relationship, so God set before them the consequences if they chose disobedience:

- **Deuteronomy 30:19-20** - This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ²⁰ and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

All they had to do was love the Lord with all their heart, soul and strength – which would result in obedience. However, their history shows that they **CHOSE** disobedience and apostasy and the resulting consequences. At no point could they claim that they didn’t know – it had been spelled out for them **IN ADVANCE** – they were without excuse!

The influence of Deuteronomy on the rest of Scripture can hardly be exaggerated:

- The history of the nation would be weighed against the backdrop of Deuteronomy and it would provide the criteria by which Israel would judge itself.
- Deuteronomy is one of the most quoted books in the New Testament **{along with Psalms and Isaiah}**. Jesus and the apostles considered it to be of supreme importance in their own teachings regarding God and His dealings with people. It was to Deuteronomy that Jesus turned as He battled Satan in the wilderness **{Deut. 6:13, 16; 8:2-3}**.

-Joshua-

Do Not Be Afraid

The secret to Joshua’s success is found in the first few verses of the book:

- **Joshua 1:1-9** - After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them-- to the Israelites. ³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates-- all the Hittite country-- to the Great Sea on the west. ⁵ No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. ⁶ "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. ⁷ Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸ Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

Throughout the book we see qualities of a Godly leader demonstrated in the life of Joshua – courage, perseverance, promptness, quiet fidelity, steadfast honesty, unselfishness, wisdom and active faith.

“Holy Wars” – Why did God command Israel to destroy the Canaanites? Context is everything.

- **Their cup was full** -- God’s command only applies to the nations of Canaan at the time of the conquest. In **Genesis 15:16**, God told Abraham, **“the iniquities of the Amorites are not yet complete”**, so for at least 400 years a knowledge of the true God was available to the Canaanites. They were given every opportunity to repent.

The Hebrew word **“cherem”** means **“totally given over”** to evil **{accursed things}** and whenever Scripture uses this word in reference to a nation it is **ALWAYS** within the context of the conquest of Canaan **{Deut 7:26; 13:18; Joshua 6:17-18; 7:1, 11-13, 15; 1 Samuel 15:21}**.

- **Protection** -- When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations-- the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you-- ² and when the

LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. ³ Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, ⁴ for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. {Deuteronomy 7:1-4}

Rest at Last

The Promise Fulfilled

- **Joshua 21:43-45** - So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. ⁴⁴ The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them. ⁴⁵ Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.

God IS faithful. He was faithful then and He is faithful now. What He promises to do - He will do.

The apple didn't fall far from the tree

- **Exodus 19:8** - The people all responded together, "We will do everything the LORD has said." -- They didn't.
- **Exodus 24:3** - When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do." -- They didn't.
- **Exodus 24:7** - Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." -- They didn't.
- **Joshua 24:24** – "We will serve the LORD our God and obey him." -- They didn't.

I have no doubt that their intentions were good, but they failed because they tried to be faithful through their own power. **TRYING** to be faithful will never work. It is only when we **ALLOW** God to come into our hearts and transform us into faithful people that we will become faithful.

"Israel did not drive out"

½ way through possessing the Land, the Children of Israel just stopped. Comfort, cowardice and a lack of faith led to compromise. As Israel grew in strength, they forced the people of the land to become laborers, but they never completely dispossessed the land as God had commanded them. The influence of these idolatrous people would be a significant contributing factor to Israel's slide into idolatry and eventual apostasy.

When God gives us a direct command, it is always for our good and for our protection. Obedience is always the best choice.

-Judges-

A Cautionary Tale

When you take the title "Christian" you are in fact saying:

- You will be my God and I will be your person.
- I will do all that you have commanded me – I will obey.

Like the Israelites, we forget and often stray intentionally from God. Sometimes as a result, bad things happen:

- We blame God yet conveniently forget the part we have played – our disobedience.
- We turn to God and cry to Him, pleading for protection, redemption, and power from on high. We study a little more, pray a little more, make promises..... However, the minute things begin to turn around, we study a little less, pray a little less, forget our promises and return to life as usual. We are distracted by shiny baubles and slowly but surely, things once again replace God.

And yet, there He is.... waiting for us to come back. He is ready to once again redeem and sustain.

I am reminded that I am not much better than the Children of Israel. There are consequences to my choices. Yes, God is willing and able to step into my life and redeem and restore me even when I intentionally run away, but how much better it would be not to run away at all....

Samson

- **Hebrews 11:32-34** - And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, **Samson**, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

Why is Samson in the faith chapter? The truth is, Samson was not particularly faithful, but God was faithful. Samson is in the faith chapter because he put his faith in God's faithfulness.

This story is a living lesson in the grace of God. How a man who was beaten and blinded, humiliated by his own repeated stupidity, reached the bottom, turned around and discovered that God was waiting for him all the time. There's nothing heroic about Samson. All he did was turn around and find God. God is the hero.

Restoration of your relationship with God does not depend upon how good you are. If that were the criteria, Samson would definitely NOT be in the faith chapter.

- He turned around – while he was still weak.
- He turned around - while he was still shackled.
- He turned around - while he was still blind.
- He turned around - and God took him.

God will take you too – all you have to do is turn around!

-Ruth-

God welcomes Gentiles into the Covenant Relationship.

- **Isaiah 42:6** - I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,
- **Isaiah 49:6** - he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."
- **Hosea 2:23** - I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one. 'I will say to those called 'Not my people, 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'"

Hesed {compassion/faithfulness/loving-kindness/grace/mercy – action on behalf of someone in need} is central to Jewish ethics and theology and is clearly reflected in the Book of Ruth as an example of God's "**Hesed**" toward us:

- Ruth first displayed "**hesed**" by her commitment to Naomi. She stayed with Naomi when she didn't have to.
- Boaz was a man of integrity and was known for his kindness. He followed the law and displayed "**hesed**" by making sure the poor were cared for.

God is actively involved in the lives of believers through divine providence. He moves in the everyday moments of life and utilizes situations and circumstances to help us achieve and complete our purposes in life.

- **Ellen White {CC 250.3}**: In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will. . . .
- **Romans 8:28** - And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Jesus is the supreme example of the kinsman-redeemer. Just as Boaz had the right of redemption and yet was under no obligation, so it was with Jesus - it was an act of "**HESED**".

- **Ellen White {PP 64}**: The angels prostrated themselves at the feet of their Commander and offered to become a sacrifice for man. But an angel's life could not pay the debt; only He who created man had power to redeem him.
- **Ellen White {DA 22.4}**: This was a voluntary sacrifice. Jesus might have remained at the Father's side. He might have retained the glory of heaven, and the homage of the angels. But He chose to give back the scepter into the Father's hands, and to step down from the throne of the universe, that He might bring light to the benighted, and life to the perishing.

- **Hebrews 4:14-16** - Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

-1st Samuel-

The Last Judge of Israel

Sin of Presumption:

By taking the Ark into battle the Israelites were trying to manipulate God - *"Surely with His name on the line, God won't let us fail."* - but God will not be manipulated as demonstrated by the fact that He allowed the Ark to be captured. What God wanted from his people was faithfulness not disobedience and then using Him as a get-out-of-jail-free card.

- We, too, are guilty for not being faithful and then pulling out the *"God"* card when something goes wrong, expecting Him to get us out of the jam we find ourselves in. We should not be surprised when God declines the request.

God and the Philistines:

Because the Philistine won the battle and took the Ark, they assumed their god to be stronger than the God of Israel. They learned quickly that their god was no match for the God of Israel.

God's faithfulness:

The chosen people of God were fickle and forgetful and presumptuous and had a wandering eye. God, on the other hand, remained consistent and faithful.

- We are fickle and forgetful and presumptuous and have a wandering eye and we leave God and then wonder where He's gone..... and yet, God remains faithful.

The Rise and Fall of Saul

Obedience:

Obedience is the most beautiful confession that we can make. Obedience says, *"You are my God, I submit to Your authority and Lordship. I trust You; I love You and I am grateful to You"* and is the evidence of the grace of God powerfully working and moving in us = Transformation.

Disobedience is rebellion against God and a denial of His right to rule in our lives.

- Saul **Rationalized** his failure to obey.
- Saul **Blamed** others for his failure to obey.
- Saul **Minimized** his failure to obey.
- Saul **Excused** his failure to obey.

Repentance:

We think that being sorry automatically means being repentant. But sorrow for sin is not enough. Saul was sorry he got caught. He was sorry that he looked foolish. He was sorry for the consequences, but pride and self-reliance prevented Saul from confessing and repenting of his sins.

- **2 Corinthians 7:9-10** - I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of God*, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. ¹⁰ For the sorrow that is according to *the will of God* produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Saul would reign for another 30 years. We will witness his decline into madness and in the end, he will die in battle his sons at his side. The saddest part of Saul's story is that it didn't have to turn out the way it did. Saul could have made different choices, but he didn't. He could have remained faithful to God, but he didn't. He could have chosen humility and repentance, instead he chose pride, self-reliance and self-centeredness.

The Lion of the Tribe of Judah

- **David** was bold for God's honor. He did not fight for his own glory, but for the Glory of God = Be bold for the honor and glory of God.
- **David** acknowledged his sin and tried to do right by those impacted by his choices = Never think that your choices only affect you and when your sin impacts another be quick to repent and make it right.
- **David** sought God's guidance and was obedient = Seek God's guidance and be quick to obey.
- **David** did not take what was rightfully his – the kingdom of Israel. He waited for God's timing = Trust God's timing in your life:
 - **Psalm 20:7** - Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.
 - **Psalm 40:1-4** - I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. ² He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. ³ He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD. ⁴ Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods.

The Tragic End of King Saul

David was far from perfect. *"Long trials had wearied his faith and exhausted his patience"*. His choices put others at risk and dishonored the name of God. *"David did not renounce his worship of God nor cease his devotion to His cause; but he sacrificed his trust in God to his personal safety, and tarnished the upright and faithful character that God requires His servants to possess"* {PP 672}. Despite his choices and lack of faith, God did not desert him and when David returned, God was waiting and welcomed him back.

By contrast –

- **Ellen White {PP 676.3}**: On the morrow Saul must engage the Philistines in battle. The shadows of impending doom gathered dark about him; he longed for help and guidance. But it was in vain that he sought counsel from God. The Lord never turned away a soul that came to Him in sincerity and humility. Why did he turn Saul away unanswered? The king had by his own act forfeited the benefits of all the methods of inquiring of God. He had rejected the counsel of Samuel the prophet; he had exiled David; he had slain the priests of the Lord. Could he expect to be answered by God when he had cut off the channels of communication that Heaven had ordained? He had sinned away the Spirit of grace.... Saul did not turn to God with humility and repentance. It was not pardon for sin and reconciliation with God, that he sought, but deliverance from his foes. By his own stubbornness and rebellion, he had cut himself off from God.... God had borne long with Saul; and although his rebellion and obstinacy had well-nigh silenced the divine voice in the soul, there was still opportunity for repentance. But when in his peril he turned from God to obtain light from a confederate of Satan, he cut the last tie that bound him to his Maker.

Our choices matter. Israel had an Eternal King, but they chose an earthly king instead. Saul could have chosen repentance, but chose pride and arrogance instead, which resulted in the ruin of his career and the loss of his soul. David could have chosen faith, but chose self-preservation instead, which endangered the lives of untold numbers of people. We have been granted free will and the ability to choose. We decide who will be the guiding force in our lives and those choices have eternal consequences.

-2nd Samuel-

David's Kingdom Established

Uzzah:

- God does not hold us accountable for things of which we have no knowledge – Philistines & the Ark
- God does hold us accountable for what we know, yet disregard, or what we could know, but choose not to know - Israel & the Ark.

David:

- **Ellen White {PP 723}**: It was when David was walking in the counsel of God that he was called a man after God's own heart. When he sinned, this ceased to be true of him until by repentance he had returned to the Lord. The word of God plainly declares, "The thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of the Lord.".... Though David repented of his sin and was forgiven and accepted by the Lord, he reaped the baleful harvest of the seed **he himself had sown**. The judgments upon him and upon his house testify to God's abhorrence of the sin.

Some struggle with the reality that David's infant son paid the price for his father's sin. I hope you come to understand through the following verses that God uses Substitutionary Sacrifice to show us how awful sin is and the ultimate price that will be paid on the cross:

- **Genesis 3:21** - The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.
- **Genesis 22:13** - Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.
- **Leviticus 1:3-4** - If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD. ⁴ He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.
- **Isaiah 53:4-6** - Surely, he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
- **John 19:28-30** - Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." ²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

David and Saul:

- **Ellen White {PP 726}**: Many have murmured at what they called God's injustice in sparing David, whose guilt was so great, after having rejected Saul for what appear to them to be far less flagrant sins. But David humbled himself and confessed his sin, while Saul despised reproof and hardened his heart in impenitence.

Whoever under the reproof of God will humble the soul with confession and repentance, as did David, may be sure that there is hope for him. Whoever will in faith accept God's promises, will find pardon. The Lord will never cast away one truly repentant soul.

Absalom!

We do not live in a theocracy **{a nation led directly by God}** and God does not deal with us the way he dealt with David. The life of David is an insight into:

- The danger of playing in Satan's sandbox – sin will wreak havoc in your life and the consequences are devastating.
- Sometimes God brings direct judgment and sometimes He allows us to experience the consequences of our choices, all in hopes that the experience will lead us to see the truth about sin and return to Him in repentance.
- God willingly accepts us back when we come to him in repentance.

-1st Kings-

Solomon

- Don't play games with sin.
- Be careful who and what you fall in love with - relationships, career, stuff - anything that can come between you and God.
- Make time for God in your daily life and hide His Word in your heart.
- Learn to love the things that God loves: Justice, Mercy, Obedience, Faithfulness, Humility, Generosity.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 - This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD

Jeroboam and the Kings of Israel

The author does not leave the reader in the dark as to the reasons Israel and Judah were eventually destroyed:

- Rejection of God
- The worship of Idols.
- Social oppression / injustice.

When God tells us not to do something it is not because He wants us to have a dreary and boring life. He wants to protect us!

- God loved Jeroboam and went out of His way to show him what would happen if he continued in idol worship – God wanted to **PROTECT** him and Jeroboam **CHOSE** differently!
- God loved the Young Prophet from Judah and said *“I’m sending you into hostile territory, so say what I tell you to say and then **GET OUT**”* – God wanted to **PROTECT** him and the young prophet **CHOSE** differently!

Do not blindly accept as valid every religious theory or opinion; hold each statement to the standard of the Word of God!

- If You don’t know what your Bibles say and I come along and tell you something completely false and you **BUY** what I’m selling – **YOU** are accountable for that.
- If You do know what your Bibles say and I come along and tell you something completely different and you **BUY** what I’m selling – **YOU** are accountable for that.

Ahab and Elijah

Some people suggest that God is remote and doesn’t get involved with the affairs of men.

Deism: The belief in the existence of a supreme being - a creator who does not intervene in the universe. The term comes from an intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries that accepted the existence of a creator on the basis of reason but rejected belief in a supernatural deity who interacts with humankind – George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin were all deists – Thomas Jefferson made his own version of the New Testament – cutting out anything that, in his view, went against reason, including the miracles of Jesus and His resurrection.

However, the God of 1st Kings:

- Sends prophets to warn
- Judges when the prophets are ignored
- Provides food
- Sends fire from heaven
- Sends rain
- Is gentle with His weary servants
- Is passionate for the salvation of people, including Ahab - who did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any king before him.

The one thing the God of the Bible is **NOT** – remote or distant.

-2nd Kings-

Ministry of Elisha

God specializes in using ordinary people. Elisha was a farmer.

The nation of Israel was almost beyond help, but God still tried to save them. Through the ministry of Elisha, God demonstrated His love and care for His people and His hatred of the sin that was destroying them. If they would just return to Him, He would restore them – **BUT. THEY. WOULD. NOT.**

God extended to foreign army commanders and armies. He extends mercy, not because He has to, but because He wants to.

- **Romans 9:14-16** - What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

Decline and Destruction of Israel

Israel is dead. Did God fail? **NO!** He did everything in His power save Israel, **BUT. THEY. WOULD. NOT. LISTEN.**

The consequences were spelled out for them before they entered Canaan **{Deuteronomy 28-30}**.

- **Deuteronomy 30:19-20** - This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ²⁰ and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold

fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Israel **CHOSE** destruction and God – despite His best efforts – gave them what they wanted..... freedom **FROM** Him.

God gives each one of us the power of choice. We choose to love, trust and obey **{freedom IN Him}** or we choose to ignore and disobey **{freedom FROM Him}**. Both choices come with consequences – Choose wisely.....

Last Years of Judah

Judah outlasted Israel by just 136 years. They had every opportunity to learn the lessons Israel refused to learn.

God sent Isaiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Joel, Jeremiah, Obadiah and Ezekiel to warn them of the coming judgments. They had **PLENTY** of time to repent and return to their covenant relationship with God – **BUT. THEY. WOULD. NOT!!**

They wanted all the good stuff that came with being *“God’s People”*, but none of the responsibility. They wanted the blessings not the Blesser.

Help me want the Healer more than the healing.

Help me want the Savior more than the saving.

Help me want the Giver more than the giving.

Oh, help me want You Jesus more than anything.... {Natalie Grant – More Than Anything}

-1st Chronicles-

A Retrospective

- **George Santayana:** Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.
- **Ellen White {CET 204.1}:** We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.

By reviewing the history of Israel, the author of Chronicles does 2 things:

- Traces God’s faithfulness.
- Encourages the people not to repeat past mistakes. **Don’t. Be. Like. Them.**

Everything about the Ark, from its construction - to its contents - to how it was to be transported, communicated something about the holy character of God and His rightful place as Israel’s King.

However, the Ark had resided in the house of Abinadab for upwards of 60 years, in part, because Israel had tried to manipulate God into a battle victory and had lost.

God had been replaced as ruler and the Ark had been neglected, unsought and forgotten, becoming just another piece of furniture in someone’s family room. Uzzah had gotten used to the Ark being in the family room. He no longer saw it as a holy object and he no longer saw God’s commands as binding – so why not move a common object in a common way?

- **Ellen White {PP 705}:** The fate of Uzzah was a divine judgment upon the violation of a most explicit command.... Thus, in the bringing of the ark from Kirjath-jearim there had been a direct and inexcusable disregard of the Lord's directions.

If Uzzah’s sin had gone unpunished, others would have been emboldened in their own sin. Uzzah’s death served as a warning that God is righteous and requires obedience.

It is dangerous to view God as ordinary/common. We want Him at our level because He is easier to control that way. As a result, He becomes our peer and ceases to be our King.

However – God is God and we are not. We are not equal to Him. He is Creator and we are created **{Even the angels veil their faces as they approach His throne}**. He might not deal with us in the same way He dealt with Uzzah, but that doesn’t mean He is less serious about disobedience/obedience.

David

The history of David affords one of the most impressive testimonies ever given of the dangers that threaten the soul from power and riches and worldly honor – those things that are the most eagerly desired among men.

God bestowed on David and Israel the highest possible honor - you will be my people. But their desire to be like the nations around them opened them up to temptation. What God offered was not good enough.....

- **Ellen White {PP – Ch. 73}**: The prosperity of Israel under David had been due to the blessing of God rather than to the ability of her king or the strength of her armies. But the increasing of the military resources of the kingdom would give the impression to surrounding nations that Israel's trust was in her armies, and not in the power of Jehovah.

The sin in numbering Israel was not **THAT** David counted the fighting men but **WHY** he counted them: pride, personal glory = **“look at the size of MY army”**. It was the sin of presumption and trusting in his own power.

Your strength is not in how much you can bench press or your bank account or your intelligence or the number of friends you have on Facebook. Your strength is in Christ. As Paul said, **“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength”**. Look to the God of the Bible who is faithful to keep you, deliver you, provide for you and enable you to conquer no matter the circumstances.

-2nd Chronicles-

God **CHOSE** the Children of Israel:

- Because He made a promise to Abraham.
- To demonstrate what holiness and fidelity to Him looks like – witness.
- To be a blessing to the surrounding nations.
- Through them Jesus would come..... **HOWEVER**:
 - **2 Chronicles 7:12-22** - ... To Solomon: I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices. ¹³ "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, ¹⁴ **if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.** ¹⁵ Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. ¹⁶ I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there. ¹⁷ "As for you, **if you walk before me as David your father did**, and do all I command, and observe my decrees and laws, ¹⁸ **I will establish your royal throne**, as I covenanted with David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a man to rule over Israel.' ¹⁹ "But **if you turn away and forsake** the decrees and commands I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, ²⁰ **then I will uproot Israel from my land**, which I have given them, and **will reject this temple** I have consecrated for my Name. **I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule** among all peoples. ²¹ **And though this temple is now so imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?'** ²² People will answer, **'Because they have forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers, who brought them out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them-- that is why he brought all this disaster on them.'**
 - **2 Chronicles 12:8** - They will, however, become subject to him, **so that they may learn** the difference between serving me and serving the kings of other lands." (Rehoboam's incident with Pharaoh Shishak)
 - **2 Chronicles 21:7** - Nevertheless, because of the covenant the LORD had made with David, the LORD was not willing to destroy the house of David. **He had promised** to maintain a lamp for him and his descendants forever.
 - **2 Chronicles 24:19** - Although the LORD sent prophets to the people to bring them back to him, and though they testified against them, **they would not listen.**
 - **2 Chronicles 36:15-16** - The LORD, the God of their fathers, **sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place.** ¹⁶ **But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.**
 - **Ellen White {PK 20.1}**: The Lord had through Moses set before His people the result of unfaithfulness. By refusing to keep His covenant, they would cut themselves off from the life of God, and His blessing could not come upon them. At times these warnings were heeded, and rich blessings were bestowed upon the Jewish nation and through them upon surrounding peoples. But more often in their history they forgot God and lost sight of their high privilege as His representatives. They robbed Him of the service He required of them, and they robbed their fellow men of religious guidance and a holy example. They desired to appropriate to themselves the fruits of the vineyard over which they had been made stewards. Their covetousness and greed caused them to be despised even by the heathen. Thus, the Gentile world was given occasion to misinterpret the character of God and the laws of His kingdom.

-Ezra-

God had promised to preserve a Remnant and bring them back to their land:

- **Jeremiah 29:10-14** - This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity.... **{see also Is. 44:24-28}**

Ezra tells us how God fulfilled that promise:

- **Ezra 1:1** - ... the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation
- **Ezra 5:5** - The eye of their God was watching over the elders of the Jews, and they were not stopped until a report could go to Darius and his written reply be received.
- **Ezra 7:6** - ... The king had granted him {Ezra} everything he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.
- **Ezra 7:9** - He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the gracious hand of his God was on him.

Ezra is also a book about choices and consequences. The whole idea of the foreign women and children being divorced and sent away seems cruel and heartless to our modern minds – **HOWEVER** – God had made it clear from the beginning of the Desert Wandering that His people were to be **set apart** – A Holy Nation.

- **Exodus 34:15-16** - Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices. ¹⁶ And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same.

God knew that His people would struggle with idolatry and compromise so He purposely told them not to intermarry with the pagan nations. **The issue was not racial, cultural, or social; it was SPIRITUAL - He wanted to protect His people.**

They didn't listen – with disastrous consequences:

- **Numbers 25:1-3** - While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, ² who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. ³ So Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor. And the LORD's anger burned against them.

God repeated Himself:

- **Deuteronomy 7:2-4** - ... and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. ³ Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, ⁴ for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.

They didn't listen – with disastrous consequences:

- **1 Kings 11:1-4** - King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter-- Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. ² They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods...." ⁴ As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been
- **2 Chronicles 36:16-17** - But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.... God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar.

The people disregarded the Word of God -- mingled with the pagan nations and adopted their practices. Because of disobedience, Israel no longer existed and Judah was exiled for 70 years! Now the returned exiles were repeating the same sin. There will always be those who misunderstand God's motives, but the truth is that the problem is ours not God's. **His commands always come from a heart of love and a desire to protect.** Yet, when we think we know better **AND** disobey **AND** there are consequences **AND** we find ourselves in a mess because we have ignored God, we blame Him.

If God has given you clear direction, please don't ignore Him.

-Nehemiah-

There are few men in the Bible who exemplify the strength of character, faith and trust in God that Nehemiah exhibited:

- He was a layman - not a priest like Ezra or a prophet like Haggai and Zechariah, however, he was exactly what God needed to accomplish the goal of rebuilding Jerusalem.
- He was a resourceful man of action who had an unwavering trust in God. He planned and did what was in his power to do and left the rest to God.
- He was sensitive to God's will and obedient to the call.
- He aligned himself with God's plans and purposes.
- He had a heart for God's people and cared about the things God cared about.
- He was direct and did not shy away from asking for what he needed.
- He was bold and fearless.
- He had an active prayer life and often turned to prayer before making decisions:
 - **Nehemiah 4:8-9** - They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. ⁹ But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.
- He was decisive.
- He led by example.
- He was an encourager and routinely reminded the people where their strength came from:
 - **Nehemiah 4:14-20** - After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes." ⁹ Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. ²⁰ Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!"
- He was humble – he did not claim glory for himself, but always gave God the credit for his success.
- He had tremendous administrative skills.
- He was wise and discerning.
- He was unwavering and did not bend under the mocking attacks of outside enemies.
- He was forceful when he needed to be and he stood for truth.

Nehemiah was the right man for the job!! He teamed up with God to accomplish a seemingly impossible task and it took just 52 days to complete a job that had been sidelined for 93 years.

John Huss: One man + God is a majority.

-Esther-

God is working behind the scenes in every circumstance of our lives. We may not see it now, but someday we'll see our lives from His vantage point and we'll see that in every circumstance He **WAS** there working.... Faithfulness in daily life will help us to be faithful in moments of crisis.

-Job-

Trials

God staked His entire reputation and the foundation of His universal government on a flawed and frail human:

- God: Job is faithful to Me because he loves Me – we have a relationship.
- Satan: You've bought him off and he is only faithful to You for profit.

Job's refusal to curse God is testimony that God was speaking the truth.

The book of Job is not primarily a book about suffering. It is about how a Christ follower **RESPONDS** to suffering while maintaining faith in God.

What we believe to be true about God will play a significant role in how we respond when trials come:

- **Isaiah 26:3** - You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose mind is stayed on You*, because he trusts in You.
- **Jeremiah 29:11** - For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.
- **John 14:27** - Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.
- **Romans 8:28** - And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

When trials and trouble come, how will you respond? Will you blame God or will you hold fast to your faith and trust in Him even when – especially when – you don't understand why.

“Friends”

Human suffering occurs for many reasons – **ALL** the result of our choice to know the difference between good and evil (**Gen 2:16-17**).

The world view fueling the conversations between Job and his friends is that misfortune **ONLY** occurs as a result of evil deeds - God **ALWAYS** blesses and prospers the righteous and **ALWAYS** inflicts punishment on the wicked – In This Life. Job shared this world view, which is why he was so confused and angry.

Both God and Satan viewed Job as **“blameless and upright”** - though for different reasons – so we know this world view is wrong.

What Job's friends got right: They came when Job was suffering and for 7 days they mourned with him and said nothing.

What Job's friends got wrong: Everything else!! Their speeches include many inaccuracies, primarily involving **WHY** God allows people to suffer. **They misrepresented God!!!!**

- **Matthew 5:44-45** - But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

What Job got right: Even though his starting point was wrong and he didn't understand the situation and railed against God, he held on to his faith like a drowning man to a life vest.

- **Job 13:15** - Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him...

What Job got wrong: He overstated his own righteousness. He accused God of being out to get him while refusing to tell him why – failing to give Job a chance to repent. He acknowledged the power of God was beyond human understanding, yet still demanded understanding – he demanded his day in court, which assumed some level of equality.

The fault of Job and his friends lies in the fact that their starting point was wrong and they tried to explain the nature of God and the relationship between God and humans with only the limited information available through human knowledge and wisdom.

- **Isaiah 55:8-9** - "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. ⁹ "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

What you believe to be true about God will have a profound impact on how you respond when trials come.

To the friend of those who suffer: Support, love, empathize and keep your opinions to yourself.

To the one who suffers: No matter how smart you are you will never fully understand **WHY** God does what He does or allows what He allows. The quicker you accept that truth the better off you will be. God doesn't ask us to understand – He asks us to **TRUST HIM**. Hold on to your faith like a drowning man holds on to a life vest. One day God **WILL** make it right.

- **Oswald Chambers:** There will come one day a personal and direct touch from God when every tear and perplexity, every oppression and distress, every suffering and pain, and wrong and injustice will have a complete and ample and overwhelming explanation...

God Speaks

The finite mind cannot fathom the mysteries of the infinite!

What Elihu got right: He pointed out the mistaken nature of Job's position which implied that God owed him something for his righteousness.

What Elihu got wrong: Everything else.

God does not address Job's suffering nor does He answer any of Job's questions. But the fact that Job had a personal encounter with the God of the Universe made everything else fade into nothing - He no longer **NEEDED** his questions to be answered. His repentance was true and complete. He was able to separate his love and service to God from the blessings of this life.

- **Tim Keller:** Job never saw why he suffered, but he saw God and that was enough.
- **Ellen White {3BC 1141.1}:** Men of the greatest intellect cannot understand the mysteries of Jehovah as revealed in nature. Divine inspiration asks many questions which the most profound scholar cannot answer. These questions were not asked, supposing that we could answer them, but to call our attention to the deep mysteries of God, and to make men know that their wisdom is limited; that in the common things of daily life there are mysteries past the comprehension of finite minds; that the judgment and purposes of God are past finding out, His wisdom unsearchable. If He reveals Himself to man, it is by shrouding Himself in the thick cloud of mystery.
- **Romans 11:33-36** - Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

-Psalms-

Beauty: God is infinitely creative and delights in beauty. The psalms are full of appreciation for the beauty of God's creation.

- **Psalm 19:1** - The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

Praise: The psalms are filled with praises to God. In order to properly praise God, we must come to know Him as revealed in His Word and we must involve Him in our lives.

- **Psalm 145:1-3** - I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. ² Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. ³ Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.

Honesty/Authenticity in Prayer: No experience in life is too high or low to exclude God. We are to call on Him when we are in the valleys and when we're on the peaks.

- **Psalm 142:1-7** – (A maskil of David. When he was in the cave. A prayer). I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. ² I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble.... ⁵ I cry to you, O LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." ⁶ Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. ⁷ Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.

Corporate worship: It's not enough to praise God when you are alone. We need to worship together. Examples from the songs we sing at South Bay:

- Rock of My Salvation - Psalm 18:2
- A Mighty Fortress - Psalm 31:2
- You Are So Faithful - Psalm 33:4
- As the Deer - Psalm 42:1
- Come Let Us Worship - Psalm 95:6-7
- Sing a Joyful Song - Psalm 100:1-2
- You Are My Song - Psalm 118:14
- Doxology - Psalm 148:1-14

God is not an abstract theological idea to the psalmists. The authors knew what it meant to connect with the living God. We learn from them that no matter what we go through, there is a God who listens to those who call on Him. Psalms provides hope and confidence in God as the Maker of all things and the Ultimate Ruler of the Universe. He sees everything, knows everything, He has no limits, His presence is everywhere. He walks beside us, goes before us, encamps around us, reigns above us, and dwells among us – He is worthy to be praised.

-Proverbs-

There is nothing mysterious about Proverbs. It is the Moral Law applied to the practical matters of life. However, practical guidance is not the main focus of Proverbs. Undergirding the book is the assumption that the foundation of all right living is **WISDOM** and in Proverbs there are just 2 ways of doing something – God's way or our way. Proverbs shows us the difference between Godly wisdom and human wisdom. Most importantly, we find that wisdom is not what we do or how we do it – wisdom is a Person and true wisdom comes to us through a relationship with that Person.

- **Proverbs 2:6** – The Lord gives wisdom. Knowledge and understanding come from His mouth.
- **Proverbs 4:20-23** - My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. ²¹ Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; ²² for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body. ²³ Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

-Ecclesiastes-

Solomon gives us an honest account of the state of our world:

- We desire the wrong things. We love pleasure and wealth. We try to please ourselves and pursue life based on emotions and desires. We trust these things, but they never last and they never really satisfy us.
- Getting to the top is meaningless. Position, popularity, and prestige are poor life goals. People are fickle, changing quickly and easily. People throng to those who are popular – but popularity passes.
- Poor people suffer. Good people suffer. Important and powerful people are often wicked and corrupt. There will be trials throughout our lives – no one is exempt.

Solomon is honest enough to admit that sometimes life circumstances make faith difficult, but he insists that the struggle of faith is an important aspect of life and that giving up on faith will make life completely meaningless.

In the end, life without God makes no sense and has no purpose. The only thing that makes life worth living is our relationship with God and the promises he has made to walk beside us and save us.

-Song of Solomon-

The fire of love between a **man** and a **woman**, as described in Song of Solomon, originates in God. It is not just animal passion or *“natural attraction”*, but a holy love ignited by God Himself. It’s not just beautiful, wholesome and good, it’s holy.

Human love, at its best, points beyond itself to the Lord of love.

Even though the Godhead is above sex as we know it, the love relationship of **male** and **female** made in the image of God {**Gen 1:26-27**} and the various characteristics of human love described in the Song – mutuality, wholeness, joy of presence, pain of absence, exclusive inclusiveness, permanence, intimacy, oneness, beauty, wholesomeness, goodness, etc. – all reflect the love relationship between Father/Son/Holy Spirit.

That kind of love between husband and wife is the closest we can get to understanding the love the Godhead has for each other and the love they have for us and is the sole reason Satan has worked so hard to distort and destroy it.

-Isaiah “Yahweh is Salvation”-

I See the Lord

Times were good in Judah. A good king sat on the throne and the nation prospered under his rule. Sure, there were some outside threats – but why worry? Looks can be deceiving, however. Judah was complacent and lazy. Their king might have worshipped God, but her leadership did not. The people practiced witchcraft, worshipped idols and exploited the poor. They still considered themselves to be God’s **“chosen people”**, but were that in name only, because they had, in fact, rejected both God and the Covenant.

If God did not care He would have walked away and started over. But He desperately loved them and would do anything and everything in His attempt to save them. He was looking for someone to share His burden:

- *“Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”*

He found Isaiah:

- *“Here am I. Send me!”*

Immanuel and Judgment Against the Nations

Isaiah has sometimes been called the *“5th Gospel”* because of the 17 passages that bring the good news of God’s deliverance and a future Redeemer. Perhaps more than any other part of Isaiah, the passages that point to a future suffering servant king {**9:1-7; 11:1-9; 42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-6; 52:13-53:12**}, have brought the most hope to Christians:

- **Isaiah 9:2, 6-7** - The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned..... ⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.
 - **Matthew 4:12-17** - When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali-- ¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁵ "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles-- ¹⁶ the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." ¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."
 - **Luke 1:30-33** - But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."
- **Isaiah 11:1-10** - A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. ² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD-- ³ and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; ⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. ⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. ¹⁰ In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.
 - **Matthew 1:1-6** - The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David.... and Jesse begot David the king.
 - **Matthew 3:16-17** - As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."
 - **Romans 15:7-13** - Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. ⁸ Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* to the fathers, ⁹ and that the Gentiles might glorify God for *His* mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name." ¹⁰ And again he says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!" ¹¹ And again: "Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!" ¹² And again, Isaiah says: "There shall be a root of Jesse; And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, In Him the Gentiles shall hope." ¹³ Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - **Revelation 19:11** - Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.
- **Isaiah 25:4-9** - You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall ⁵ and like the heat of the desert. You silence the uproar of foreigners; as heat is reduced by the shadow of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is stilled. ⁶ On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine-- the best of meats and the finest of wines. ⁷ On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; ⁸ **he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken. ⁹ In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."**
 - **1 Corinthians 15:51-54** - Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed -- ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. ⁵⁴ So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."
 - **Revelation 7:16-17** - They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; ¹⁷ "for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.
 - **Revelation 21:3-4** - And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. ⁴ "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

Judgment and Redemption

Hezekiah invited God into the situation. I believe that God is a gentleman and if we choose to fight our own battles, He'll let us do just that. But He'd really rather we invite Him in to fight for us. Invite God in!!

Fear is a powerful emotion = fight or flight.

The USA and much of the world was in the midst of a crippling depression when FDR became president. In his 1st Inaugural Address {March 1933}, he said: ***“So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance”***. He was challenging the people and leadership of the USA not to be crippled into inaction by fear, but to fight and move forward.

Many years earlier, Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, had chosen not to trust God when he was afraid and saw no way out of an impending war with Israel and Syria. He chose an alliance with Assyria instead and that single act opened his country up to years of oppression and invasion. Now Hezekiah found himself in a similar situation. He was facing an army he could not defeat. He could not fight and he could not run..... He was out of options. He would lose and his people would suffer and die.

Often, we see only 2 options when faced with a crisis = fight or flight, but for the Christian there is **ALWAYS** a 3rd option = Trust God and let Him work it out.

- **Deuteronomy 1:29-30** - Then I said to you, 'do not be terrified, or afraid of them. ³⁰ 'The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes,
- **Psalms 20:7** - Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the LORD our God.
- **Psalms 118:6** - The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?
- **1 John 4:18** - There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear....
- **Philippians 4:6-8** - Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things.

Isaiah 25:9 - In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

Comfort and Restoration

Isaiah is one of the most important books in all Scripture.

Like most of the Old Testament Prophets, Isaiah was called to announce the ***“Bad News”*** regarding the judgments to come because of Israel/Judah's many and varied sins. Yet, he was also called to announce the ***“Good News”*** of a coming Redeemer Who would be ***“pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities... through Whose wounds we would be healed.”***

Like most Old Testament Prophets, Isaiah also devoted time to the ***“Bad News”*** of the judgments of God upon the Nations for their many and varied sins. Yet, he also announced the ***“Good News”*** of future blessing and inclusion with God's People:

- **Isaiah 56:6-7** - And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant-- ⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."

Those promised blessings to Gentile believers include you and me – That is indeed ***“GOOD NEWS”!!***

Finally, God inspired Isaiah to declare these words - ***“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, ³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.”*** {61:1-3}

Some 700 years later, at the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus walked into His local synagogue on Sabbath morning and stood up to read:

- **Luke 4:17-21** - The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, ²¹ and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Isaiah used language and imagery that the readers of his day would understand but the message remains the same:

Yahweh wins, Babylon loses and Yahweh's people are free.

-Jeremiah "Yahweh Establishes"-

The Call

Jeremiah did not apply for the job as God's prophet. When God called him, he actually protested by pointing to his youth and inexperience. Never the less, Jeremiah did what God asked him to do – at great personal cost.

Jeremiah is known as the *"weeping prophet"* because he mourned the sins of his people and grieved his lack of success in turning the people back to God - yet he remained faithful to his unwanted call because God had promised to be faithful to him.

- **Jeremiah 1:17-19** - "Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. ¹⁸ Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land-- against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. ¹⁹ They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.

Any servant of God who feels himself/herself too weak to serve should consider this:

- If God called you then He will equip and enable you.
- If you are walking with Him in obedience and faith then He will be with you and will accomplish His purposes through you.

The Prophet Speaks – but no one is listening

We have not dealt with everything in Jeremiah's long and challenging book; however, we can come to some clear conclusions and important lessons that speak to us even today:

- Jeremiah was a prophet of the heart. He wanted to see hearts changed by the messages he preached. **The heart of the problem was a problem with the heart.** He would preach to the same people for over 40 years and by human standards was a complete failure. Few listened and fewer still obeyed. The nation he tried so desperately to save **CHOSE** ruin and exile instead.
- God went to extraordinary lengths to try to save His people from disaster. Year after year, He sent prophet after prophet in the hope of stopping the sin that was moving Israel/Judah to suffering and ruin. **But. They. Would. Not. Listen.** They preferred the pleasant messages of the false prophets to the strong words of Jeremiah because the human heart wants blessing without obedience **{cost}** = We still prefer messages that are warm and friendly over messages that force us to look at the state of our own hearts.

Is there anything in your life that God is trying to get your attention about? Please listen to Him! If you need to repent – then repent. If you need to seek forgiveness – then seek forgiveness. If you need to obey – then obey. Whatever needs to be done – just do it! Please! Learn from the catastrophic pride and stubbornness of God's people and **Don't. Be. Like. Them!**

God desires to show mercy. He is long suffering and patient and loves you beyond all understanding **AND** if you persist in sin, He will have no choice but to allow the consequences of those choices. Please turn around before it's too late!

Finally, In the midst of all the warnings and judgments found in Jeremiah were the promises of a Redeemer and restoration:

- **Jeremiah 23:3-6** - I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. ⁴ I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD. ⁵ "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.

Jesus came and lived and died the death we deserve. He took on Himself the guilt of everything you and I have done and will ever do. Now that's love!!!

-Lamentations-

God is righteous. He cannot shut His eyes to evil and must act, even though it breaks His heart. When Jeremiah weeps, God is weeping; when Jeremiah mourns, God is mourning; when Jeremiah is filled with sorrow, God is too.

Jeremiah weeping over a destroyed Jerusalem reminds us of Jesus weeping over the future destruction of Jerusalem.

- **Matthew 23:37-38** - O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. ³⁸ Look, your house is left to you desolate.
- **Luke 19:41-44** - As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴² and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace-- but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

The universe is **ONLY** eternally safe because God cannot and will not tolerate sin. Sin will be destroyed – we decide whether or not we will be destroyed with it.

- **Charles Swindoll:** At one time or another, all of us have enjoyed the fleeting pleasures of sin... Because, we are sinners by nature, we are prone to shove aside, the anguishing reality of the effects of compromise, so that, we can more thoroughly embrace the thrills of evil. Realizing this, the Lord has graciously inspired and preserved the Lamentations of Jeremiah, which records, the devastating consequences that flowed from Judah in rebellion against God. As we read the pages of this book, we will find ourselves asking if the bitter fruit of disobedience is worth the tremendous price it exacts.

-Ezekiel "Whom God Strengthens"-

No Place to Hide

Judah is in serious trouble. God knows His people will not listen to Ezekiel, but He will warn them and try lead them back to repentance - anyway.

Ezekiel's call began with a spectacular view of Heaven. The vision he saw was incredible but it is not as complicated as it first appears to be:

- **4 Mighty Angels {4 Living Creatures}** attend the Throne of God and have been tasked with carrying out the plans and purposes of God. They are directed by the Spirit of God and move in every direction.
- The Throne can move in any **Direction {Wheels}**. It goes where it wants to go. Nothing can stop it = God is intimately involved in all the events of human history – including your history.
- God also **Sees Everything {Full of Eyes}** – Nothing escapes His notice:
 - **Psalm 139:7-10** – Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.
- Sitting on the Throne is **Jesus {Looked Like a Man – same language used to describe Jesus in Revelation}** – He is Sovereign God.

Ezekiel sees that God is in absolute control and has at His disposal Mighty Angels who go where He tells them to go. Ezekiel can trust this God because even though things look grim and they are only going to get worse, God is still.... **GOD**.

- The God of Ezekiel is the God of Revelation – what He **WAS** then He **IS** today. We can trust Him with our lives and the final events of history.
- Ezekiel's vision reminds us that we are but puny humans compared with the might and glory and majesty and power of God. Despite what is going on here on earth, God remains God and He will accomplish what He has promised.

Oracles of Judgment Against Israel and the Nations

The God of Ezekiel is:

- Omniscient – all knowing
- Omnipresent – universal presence at the same time
- Omnipotent – all powerful
- Holy, Faithful, Sovereign and Eternal

The phrase, “...they shall know that I am the Lord” occurs 70 times and the word “Sovereign” 217 times in the book of Ezekiel.

That seems to be the core of the problem for both Israel and the surrounding nations – they don’t acknowledge God for Who He is.

Israel:

Even after centuries of warnings and prophetic messages, the people of God did not believe Him to be of any consequence in their daily lives, but they also believed that His presence in the Temple guaranteed that it would never be destroyed = **we can do what we want AND we have nothing to worry about.**

They had lived in sin and rebellion for so long that they were blind to the reality that their choices had serious consequences. They needed to be reminded of God’s holy nature and that as **HIS** people, they were accountable to Him:

- Ezekiel 6:9-10 - Then in the nations where they have been carried captive, those who escape **will remember** me-- how I have been grieved by their adulterous hearts, which have turned away from me, and by their eyes, which have lusted after their idols. They will loathe themselves for the evil they have done and for all their detestable practices. ¹⁰ **And they will know that I am the LORD;** I did not threaten in vain to bring this calamity on them.
- Ezekiel 5:11-12 - Therefore as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your vile images and detestable practices, I myself will withdraw my favor; I will not look on you with pity or spare you. ¹² A third of your people will die of the plague or perish by famine inside you; a third will fall by the sword outside your walls; and a third I will scatter to the winds and pursue with drawn sword. **Then they shall know that I am the Lord.**

The Nations:

To the surrounding nations, God was just another local deity – not One to be feared or respected or worshipped. However, Ezekiel makes clear that they too were accountable to God even though they did not recognize Him as Sovereign:

- This what “**Adonai Elohim**” {The Majestic Ruler over all} says.....
- “**Because**” – the indictment or legal charges
- “**Therefore**” – the verdict or sentence
- And you will know that I am “**Adonai**” {Master}

We may think that we are far removed from the events found in Ezekiel. But are we really?

- God’s people are accountable to Him and the choices we make while claiming to be Christians have serious consequences.
- For those who ignore God or say He doesn’t exist or that they are only accountable to themselves..... They may not acknowledge God, but that does not place them outside His righteous judgments.

If you wonder if I am telling the truth, consider:

- **1 Peter 4:17** - For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

Oracles of Hope and Restoration

This Temple has never been built – If the returning Jews had been faithful and accepted the conditions offered by Ezekiel – I believe there would have been a literal fulfillment of this prophecy. God gave Israel another 400 + years; however, the people were not faithful. It is true that never again, as a nation, did they fall into idolatry, however, formal worship replaced sincere religion and human traditions replaced the revealed will of God. By their insistence on keeping the letter of the Law they lost sight of the Spirit of the Law {**Religious Fog**}. Jesus came, in part, to clear away the religious fog – His people killed Him.

- **Ellen White {COL 305}**: The law of God unmixed with human tradition was presented by Christ as the great standard of obedience. This aroused the enmity of the rabbis. They had set human teaching above God’s word, and had turned the people away from His precepts. They would not give up their man-made commandments in order to obey the requirements of the word of God. They would not, for the truth’s sake, sacrifice the pride of reason and the praise of men. When Christ came, presenting to the nation the claims of God, the priests and elders denied His right to interpose between them and the people. They would not accept His rebukes and warnings, and they set themselves to turn the people against Him and to compass His destruction. For the rejection of Christ, with the results that followed, they were responsible. A nation’s sin and a nation’s ruin were due to the religious leaders.

Therefore, this prophecy could not be fulfilled as God originally intended. The ultimate fulfillment is found in the eternal home of God and His people as described in Revelation 21-22.

-Daniel "Yahweh is My Judge"-

Loyalty:

Humans are concerned with whether or not God is loyal to them. However, truly devoted followers of God are most concerned with their loyalty to Him.

- Standing for God does not rest on the hope of reward, or getting out of a jam. It rests on never wanting to do anything that will damage the relationship **NO MATTER THE COST**.

Judgment:

God is relentless in His pursuit of lost people. He is willing to do whatever it takes to save them. He is also holy and righteous and cannot lower His standards.

- Some of His judgments are conditional - we get to decide the end result!!
- Some of His judgments are designed to stop us in our tracks and bring us back to him – but we get to decide!!
- If we continue to resist, we will be weighed in balance and found wanting. There is no remedy. There is no cure. There is only destruction.

Judgment is not popular. Daniel shows us that for the friends of God, the judgment is a good and necessary thing:

- It's **good** because God rules in favor of His people.
- It's **necessary** because of the accusations made by Satan. To the watching universe, the judgment demonstrates that God was right all along and that it's safe for you and me to live with them for eternity.

The judgment must happen before Jesus comes again.

The precise events of earth's history are known only to God. The prophecies were given to build our faith, not to scare or manipulate us.

The Sanctuary:

Everything God does has purpose. The earthly sanctuary system pointed Israel to Jesus and the plan of salvation. The earthly sanctuary is a copy of the heavenly sanctuary. Therefore, the heavenly sanctuary system is doing what the earthly sanctuary pointed to – dealing with the sin problem. Salvation is based 100% on what heaven does. The sanctuary system points to:

- What Jesus did on the cross - using his own blood as a means to pass on to us God's forgiveness.
- The lengths heaven will go to get as many into heaven as possible.
- It's all heaven – all the time. All we have to do is believe and be transformed.

-Hosea "Yahweh has Saved"-

The most extraordinary feature of Hosea is the honest way in which God reveals His heart in a desperate attempt to get His people to choose life:

- MY people are being destroyed through lack of knowledge. **{4:6}**
- What am I going to do with you, Israel and Judah... **{6:4}**
- When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. **{11:1}**
- It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. **{11:3}**
- I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them. **{11:4}**
- How can I give you up, Ephraim... how can I hand you over, Israel... my heart is changed within me and all my compassion aroused... I will not come in wrath. **{11:8}**

Hosea's own experience with heartbreak because of his wife's unfaithfulness gave him a glimpse of the depths of God's love for Israel and the unspeakable anguish He felt because of their unfaithfulness:

- Hosea loved Gomer – knowing what she was and what she'd do. She abused his love for her and took advantage of his forgiveness. When she ended up a slave, he redeemed her.

- God loved Israel – knowing what she was and what she’d do. She abused His love and took advantage of His mercy, grace and forgiveness. When she ended up a slave, He promised to redeem her.

Hosea in no way excuses the people for their conduct, however, through all his writing he depicts the yearning love of God for His wayward people.

Hosea bore God’s last message to the Northern Kingdom, but his appeals were ignored. **UNREPENTANT** and **UNCHANGED** they held to their rebellious course of action and were carried into Assyrian bondage in 722 BC – Israel was no more.

-Joel “Yahweh is God”-

Knowing the future gives a person a huge advantage.

What would you call a person who heard the sirens telling them a Tsunami was coming, but chose to go to the beach: Stupid? Short sighted? Foolish? Ignorant? Mostly you’d call them Dead!!!!

In Scripture the sirens are blaring – The Day of the Lord is coming!! God’s judgment is real!! Repent now!!

- **Joel 2:1** - Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand—
- **Ezekiel 33:11** - Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'

As Joel says – each of us has a decision to make. A day will come when Jesus will come in might and power and judgment. The sun and moon will be darkened and the stars will no longer shine. This will not be a good day for those who **CHOOSE** rebellion. However, for His people, God has promised to be a refuge and a stronghold:

- **Psalms 46:1-11** - God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, ³ though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. ⁵ God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. ⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. ⁷ The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. ⁸ Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth. ⁹ He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. ¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." ¹¹ The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

God has also promised His people eternal restoration:

- **Revelation 21:1-3** - Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.
- **Revelation 22:1-5** - Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

-Amos “Burden-bearer”-

Amos is not the kind of person you think of when you think of a prophet of God. But God doesn’t care about your occupation or education. He cares about your willingness to obey His call.

Christians spend a lot of time condemning the world for its obvious sins. We think all the non-Christians need to change their ways and we might even hope for a little swift judgment from time to time. There is no question that those who reject God will experience judgment, **HOWEVER**, in the book of Amos, God is most concerned about His own people and spends significantly more time warning them of the judgments to come for **THEIR** sins:

- **Amos 5:7-12** - You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground... ¹⁰ you hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth. ¹¹ You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone

mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. ¹² For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.

- **Amos 5:21-23** - I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. ²² Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. ²³ Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.

We need to be very careful of thinking that because we are *“Christians”* and because we come to church and *“worship God”* that our sins are okay - that what we do doesn't matter:

- **1 Peter 4:17** - For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

Claiming to be a *“Christian”* won't save you. Going to the *“right”* church won't save you. Confidence in your own brand of worship won't save you. Only one thing saves you – the cross of Christ – and you have been given the freedom to choose your response:

- With a faithful and obedient heart
- With a stubborn and prideful heart

Your choice will make all the difference.

-Obadiah “Servant of Yahweh”-

Pride leads to self-trust and independence from God.

Everyone is accountable to God for their action/in action.

When judgment comes, God will provide a place of refuge for those who trust in Him.

-Jonah “Dove”-

The Hero of the story is God --- The conversion of Nineveh did not last. The city was destroyed in 612 BC and the nation no longer exists. God knew that would happen, but He went out of his way **ANYWAY** to save as many as possible.

- God Loves **PEOPLE** and desires to save them.
- God's Plan for Saving People Involves **HIS PEOPLE**.

Is God calling you to do something? Are you reluctant to accept the call or are you running away hoping He won't notice?

- God wants to use us to save the world.
- Let us learn to love the people God loves.
- Let us come to embrace His call.

-Micah “Who is Like Yahweh”-

Micah recognizes the justice in God's judgments on Israel.

God hates and condemns sin in all forms - religious, social and economic.

God wants relationship – which produces holiness – not sacrifices to make up for what we have done throughout the week.

Because of their sins, God must judge his people – just like He said He would in Leviticus and Deuteronomy:

- **Leviticus 26:44-45** - Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God. ⁴⁵ But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the LORD.
- **Deuteronomy 30:1-10** - So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you, ² and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, ³ then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you.

But Micah also emphasizes forgiveness, restoration and the promise of the Messiah:

- **Micah 7:18-20** - Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love. ¹⁹ He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. ²⁰ Thou wilt give truth to Jacob *and* unchanging love to Abraham, which Thou didst swear to our forefathers from the days of old.

-Nahum “The One Comforted”-

There is an old saying, *“What goes around, comes around”*..... The Bible puts it this way:

- **Galatians 6:7** - Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

The Assyrians, over their long history, were brutal and barbaric. God sent them multiple warnings – *“Stop! Turn to Me before it’s too late!”* {see Jonah} Ultimately, they refused to listen and a point came when God said, *“enough is enough”*.

Everything Nahum prophesied came true exactly as he said it would! Despite the military might of the Assyrians... they were no match for the God of Heaven.

What does that mean for you and me? We need to take God seriously. He is slow to anger and He delights in mercy. His heart’s desire is to save as many people as possible **AND** He will deal with sin. If we continue to rebel and pursue sin, despite the warnings He gives us and His pleadings for us to return..... We can expect the same results experienced by Nineveh – destruction:

- **Ellen White {CT 415.3}**: O that men might understand the patience and long-suffering of God! He is putting under restraint His own attributes. His omnipotent power is under the control of Omnipotence. O that men would understand that God refuses to be wearied out with the world's perversity and still holds out the hope of forgiveness even to the most undeserving! But His forbearance will not always continue. Who is prepared for the sudden change that will take place in God's dealing with sinful men? Who will be prepared to escape the punishment that will certainly fall upon transgressors? . . .

Ellen White {DD 43.4}: To our merciful God the act of punishment is a strange act. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Ezekiel 33:11. The Lord is "merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, . . . forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." Yet He will "by no means clear the guilty." "The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked." Exodus 34:6, 7; Nahum 1:3. By terrible things in righteousness He will vindicate the authority of His downtrodden law. The severity of the retribution awaiting the transgressor may be judged by the Lord's reluctance to execute justice. The nation with which He bears long, and which He will not smite until it has filled up the measure of its iniquity in God's account, will finally drink the cup of wrath unmixed with mercy....

-Habakkuk “Embrace”-

Sometimes it appears to us that God isn’t acting quickly enough to address the evil in our world. We can relate to Habakkuk’s question, *“How long, O Lord?”*

- **Revelation 6:9-10** - When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. ¹⁰ They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"

It is not wrong to have a candid conversation with God. He is not put off by our questions as we try to understand the way He deals with us. It is important to remember that God is God and we are not -

- **Isaiah 55:8-9** - "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways", declares the LORD. ⁹ "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

- yet, honest questioning can actually increase and deepen our faith and give us a stronger connection to our God.

Just because He doesn’t appear to be working doesn’t mean He isn’t working:

- **2 Peter 3:9-11** - The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives.

Habakkuk beautifully expresses the essence of faith – regardless of how hard life is, it is possible to find joy and strength in God, who promises salvation for all who wait on Him.

- **Habakkuk 3:17-19** - Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. ¹⁹ The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to go on the heights.

-Zephaniah "Yahweh has Sheltered"-

Judgment is coming - repent before it is too late.

History tells us there was no corporate repentance in Israel.

When God tells us the end is coming and there will be judgment on those who have rebelled against Him, we know He is telling the truth – we can trust Him.

- **Acts 3:19** - Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;
- **2 Peter 3:7-10** - But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. ⁸ But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

God has promised to shelter those who are true to him, preserving them for eternity. Not only that, He will rejoice over them and shout for joy at their salvation.

-Haggai "Festival"-

The book of Haggai is somewhat unique among Old Testament books for one key reason: the people actually listen and obey.

Message 1 – Many Christians don't contribute to the work of God (money, time, spiritual gifts) because it's inconvenient, but spend freely on themselves. We come up with great excuses, maybe even "*spiritual*" excuses – "*it's not time to rebuild the Lord's house*". It's amazing how quickly we come up with reasons for not doing what God has asked us to do. We don't put God first, despite our claims, but we still expect Him to bless us.

- **Matthew 6:33** - But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Message 2 – One of the first indications of a dying church is nostalgia for past glory. Discouragement and resentment lead to discord/grumbling, a down turn in service and mission and finally death.

- **Hebrews 12:1-2** - Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Message 3 – Sin spreads more easily than holiness. Being a member of a church doesn't make anything we do holy. A few worthy acts will not make us acceptable to God as long as we are unclean through compromise, neglect and sin. God wants holy hearts more than He wants sacrificial service. Becoming holy requires intention and effort but being unholy requires no effort at all.

- **Psalms 51:10** - Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Message 4 – It can be difficult to stand as a Christ follower when surrounded and bullied by the majority. Today, God is speaking encouragement into your life. **Don't give up! You. Are. Not. Alone.**

- **John Huss** – One man and God is a majority
- **Joshua 1:9** - Have I not commanded you? **Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.**
- **2 Chronicles 20:15** - ...This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. **For the battle is not yours, but God's.**

- **2 Kings 6:15-17** - When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. ¹⁶ "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "**Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.**" ¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

-Zechariah "Yahweh Remembers"-

The Lord Remembers

Zechariah's prophecies came at a time of great uncertainty and anxiety. Judah had been in captivity for 70 years. They were weak and feeble. They scared easily and were overwhelmed with depression as they looked into the future. Zechariah's messages were intended to cheer and sustain the returned exiles.

God still intended to bless Israel and use them in the salvation of the nations. However, Zechariah saw that submission, repentance, and cleansing from sin must proceed the outpouring of Divine Blessing.

Conditional prophecy/promises – I believe that God intended for the promises found in Zechariah to be **literally fulfilled to literal Israel**. However, God's intent does not do away with our power to choose. Israel did not fulfill the requirements of the Covenant. When they rejected the **Messiah** - Whom Zechariah had prophesied about - it marked the close of their last opportunity as the special agents of God for the salvation of the world. They failed to realize their exalted destiny and therefore, many of the Old Testament prophecies will not find their fulfillment in the literal nation of Israel.

- **Ellen White {PK 712-713}**: Christ would have averted the doom of the Jewish nation if the people had received Him. But envy and jealousy made them implacable. They determined that they would not receive Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. They rejected the Light of the world, and henceforth their lives were surrounded with darkness as the darkness of midnight. The doom foretold came upon the Jewish nation. Their own fierce passions, uncontrolled, wrought their ruin. In their blind rage they destroyed one another. Their rebellious, stubborn pride brought upon them the wrath of their Roman conquerors. Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple laid in ruins, and its site plowed like a field. The children of Judah perished by the most horrible forms of death. Millions were sold to serve as bondmen in heathen lands.

That which God purposed to do for the world through Israel, the chosen nation, He will finally accomplish through His church on earth today. He has "let out His vineyard unto other husbandmen," even to His covenant-keeping people, who faithfully "render Him the fruits in their seasons." Never has the Lord been without true representatives on this earth who have made His interests their own. These witnesses for God are numbered among the spiritual Israel, and to them will be fulfilled all the covenant promises made by Jehovah to His ancient people.

However! That does not mean Israel has been thrown aside – notice:

- **Ellen White {4BC 1180.3}**: Spiritual Restoration Coming. --The work of which the prophet Zechariah writes is a type of the **spiritual restoration** to be wrought for Israel before the end of time [Zechariah 8:9, 11-13, 7, 8 quoted] (Letter 42, 1912).

A Glimpse of the Future

The book of Zechariah proves an important point: The New Testament doesn't make sense if you ignore the Old Testament and the Old Testament is not complete without the New Testament. They are both vitally important to our understanding of the Plan of Salvation.

Why spend all this time looking into the future? Well, Zechariah seems to think that the future makes all the difference. He wanted to inspire his people to return to their covenant relationship with God and live by the power of His Spirit. To know that their **"smallness"** didn't have to define their future. Their future was secure as long as they remained faithful.

And what about us? Knowing that in the end **GOD WINS** should make all the difference for the Christian who is navigating behind enemy lines. We turn our eyes toward Heaven because we know our hope doesn't rest in this fallen world, but in the world to come. We have hope because we know how the story ends – God **WILL** be King over all the earth; sin **WILL** be destroyed and His people **WILL** live securely in His presence forever. The future shapes our present action and gives us joy as we serve God and are transformed into His image now.

- **Revelation 21:1-7** - Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am

making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

-Malachi "Messenger of Yahweh"-

Infidelity leads to a fracture in our relationship with God. If God were to accept our sacrifices, offerings and prayers in the midst of our conscience infidelity, He would be supporting our unfaithfulness. God must be shown to be consistent. If it was wrong once it is always wrong.

God loves His people.

Amid our unfaithfulness, God remains faithful.

New Testament

-Matthew-

The Gospel According to Matthew

God loves you. Your picture is in His wallet and He wants to graft you into His Family Tree.

What is most remarkable about the first 2 chapters of Matthew is the trust and obedience of Joseph.

- He was told to marry a pregnant girl – he does.
- He was told – in the middle of the night – to get up and move his family to Egypt, **NOW** – he does.
- He was told to go back home – he does.

Trust that God knows what He's doing and be prepared to move when He says move.

- **Oswald Chambers:** Faith is deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time.
- **Ellen White {DA 67.1}:** Such was the Saviour's reception when He came to the earth. There seemed to be no place of rest or safety for the infant Redeemer. God could not trust His beloved Son with men, even while carrying forward His work for their salvation. He commissioned angels to attend Jesus and protect Him till He should accomplish His mission on earth, and die by the hands of those whom He came to save.

We are all sinners in need of a Savior.

There is only one path to a restored relationship with Heaven and it is through Jesus – The Way, the Truth and the Life.

Blessed Are They

What's the point of telling men and women who have defective lives and divided hearts that they need to be "*pure in heart*"? What's the use of giving us an ideal we cannot possibly attain? If Jesus is nothing more than a teacher or "*Good Man*", then we'd be happier and better off knowing nothing of the Sermon on the Mount. But if we know Jesus as our Savior and the One who has promised to transform us then we know that He did not just come to teach us, He came to **MAKE** us what He teaches we should be.

The Sermon on the Mount is a statement of the life we will live when the Holy Spirit is having His way in our lives.

These teachings come with an astonishing amount of discomfort because they are so different than what our culture tells us is true. But as we walk with Him and our minds and motivations are changed, we come into line with what He has taught.

Healing Stories

The people wanted to be a part of a great nation and Jesus knew that following Him would be very different. He wanted people to know the truth and count the cost --- The cost of following Jesus is temporary, but the cost of **NOT** following Him is eternal.

What do we do as we wrestle with the division and strife that following Jesus brings?

- **Hebrews 12:1-2** - Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
- **Romans 8:31-39** - What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³ Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ Just as it is written, "For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Kingdom of Heaven

Christ's mission was misunderstood and the manner of his coming did not fit the people's expectations, so when he did appear – as a baby – they did not recognize him. During his public ministry he performed miracle after miracle --- He raised the dead, healed the leper, restored sight to the blind and pointed the people to a God who loved them and desired restoration. Yet they wanted something else, something different. They wanted Him to perform mighty deeds of conquest and establish His earthly kingdom upon the ruins of Rome. The gospel of Jesus was a stumbling block because the people wanted **SIGNS** not a **SAVIOR**. When He did not fulfill their expectations, especially those of the scribes and Pharisees, they looked for a way to stop Him.

- Our expectations regarding God's activity in our lives will determine our response to Him. Do we want him to work **FOR** us or **IN** us? Do we want a change of **STATUS** or a change of **HEART**? Do we want **SIGNS** or a **SAVIOR**?

Probably more than any other commandment, we wish Jesus would have been more specific regarding Sabbath-keeping. We are told not to labor, but He doesn't give us lists of things we should or shouldn't do on Sabbath. He leaves us with only general principles:

- Sabbath is Holy – dedicated to God **{Genesis 2:3; Exodus 20:8-11}**
- Sabbath is Holy time – worship of God **{Psalm 95:1-7; Isaiah 58:13}**
- Sabbath should bring Holy joy **{Isaiah 58:14, 14; Mark 2:27}**
- Sabbath should be a time to meet the needs of others **{Matthew 12:11-12}**

If you are wondering if a Sabbath activity brings honor or dishonor to God ask yourself some questions:

- Is what I am about to do something I **NORMALLY** do during the week, business or leisure – is it common?
- Is what I am about to do leading me to think of God – to worship Him? Am I using this time to meet with fellow believers or strengthen the bonds with my family?
- Is what I am about to bringing me physical or spiritual benefit? Does it bring joy?
- Is what I am about to do benefit someone else? Will it lighten a burden or bring comfort?

Jesus sought an avenue to every heart. He used a variety of illustrations to present truth and to appeal to the different hearers:

- **Ellen White {COL 35.3}**: He will make plain His word to all who seek Him in sincerity of heart. Those who study the word of God with hearts open to the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, will not remain in darkness as to the meaning of the word.... All who come to Christ for a clearer knowledge of the truth will receive it. He will unfold to them the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, and these mysteries will be understood by the heart that longs to know the truth.

Ministry in Galilee

When Jesus fed the 5,000, it came as a surprise to the disciples, although it was not the first time they had witnessed miracles. The second time however, should not have been a surprise at all, and yet their response was exactly the same, ***"How are you going to do that?"***

Peter failed when he attempted to walk on water, but he was the only disciple to get out of the boat --- Millions of church goers are content to sit in the pew. They want the comfort associated with spirituality but they don't want the risks and challenges that go along with actually following Jesus. Yet Jesus is still looking for people who will get out of the boat – who will risk failure and discomfort – because walking with Jesus is worth whatever the price.

What we believe matters:

- Church leadership believed that church tradition and outward demonstrations of righteousness were most important **{Religious Fog}**. Jesus stated that sin starts in the heart and the clear commands of God must never be replaced by tradition.
We find it easier sometimes to maintain the external façade of being a Christian. However, while others may congratulate us on our externals, God cares more about what is going on **ON THE INSIDE**.
- Peter believed that Jesus was ***"the Christ"***, but he also believed that death was not a part of the mission of ***"the Christ"***. That belief opened the door for Satan and he exploited it. Jesus said and demonstrated what his mission was all about and yet his disciples could not let go of their deeply held beliefs. Even when Peter, James and John witnessed Jesus' transformation on the Mount it did little to change their understanding, because not long after that they were arguing about who would be the greatest in Jesus' kingdom.

Jesus used the question of greatness to lead his disciples to a new understanding of Christian Community:

- In the parable of the Lost Sheep Jesus stressed the profound concern that God has for those who go astray. At great cost to himself he goes in search of them. This is the same attitude his followers should have for people who have left the church.
- Jesus gave instructions for dealing with conflict and open sin. Sometimes a church congregation must deal with a member who is intentionally and rebelliously committing sin **{this is different from making a mistake}**.
When a member cuts himself off from fellowship, what then? Jesus says treat him like a heathen. We might be tempted to misinterpret Jesus instruction and use his words as an excuse to treat a former member badly. That's why he **STARTED** the conversation with the parable of the Lost Sheep. **His ultimate goal is restoration and reconciliation.**
- Forgiveness is essential within the community of believers. We cannot possibly make up for our offenses against heaven, yet they have been forgiven because of Jesus. In comparison, human offenses are quite insignificant. We have been forgiven – we should forgive.

Ministry Coming to An End

Again, and again Jesus taught that true greatness is measured by moral worth. In the estimation of heaven, greatness of character consists of living for the welfare of our fellowmen and in doing works of love and mercy.

The Scribes and Pharisees claimed to be invested with divine authority. Because the people had been taught reverence and blind faith in the priesthood, they had become enslaved to the teachings and traditions of these men **{Religious Fog}** and no longer had a saving knowledge of God. Jesus sought to break the chains.

- **Ellen White {DA 620}**: The gems of truth that fell from Christ's lips on that eventful day were treasured in many hearts... Mighty were the results flowing from the words of the Saviour to that wondering, awestruck crowd in the temple at Jerusalem.
But Israel as a nation had divorced herself from God... He had called the temple His Father's house; but now, as the Son of God should pass out from those walls, God's presence would be withdrawn forever from the temple built to His glory. Henceforth its ceremonies would be meaningless, its services a mockery.

It is possible to go through all the religious requirements and be a good **“religious”** person **AND** reject Jesus at the same time. It is also possible that we can **“do church”** as we have always done and Jesus is nowhere to be found.... What a sobering thought!

Final Events

We believe that Jesus is coming back **but not anytime soon....** We don't live in expectation of His return. This is exactly what Jesus warned against. The world is on a collision course that will end with His 2nd Coming. It is as inevitable as the birth of a child once labor has begun. We must be ready.

A time is coming when everyone will have to make a choice – either for God or against Him. There will be a time of great trouble, but in the end God **WILL** triumph. Christians must live in the light of this reality. How we live is informed by the knowledge that someday all will be called into account. While we wait, we must be faithful stewards of all that God has entrusted to us – talents and people alike.

Many people died on crosses. It was Rome's favorite form of execution and wasn't banned until some 300 years after the death of Jesus. So, what makes Jesus crucifixion so different from all the rest?

- **Isaiah 53:5** - But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.
- **Romans 5:6-8** - For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus, the perfect Son of God, took the punishment you and I deserve – He **CHOSE** it. That's what makes it different – He died that we might live!

-Mark-

Reluctant “Star”

Why would Jesus urge those He had healed to keep quiet about it? It seems that He wanted to be anonymous for as long as possible because He knew what would happen when word got out:

- Jesus told the man not to tell anyone, but the man told everyone he saw and the news spread quickly. Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

The Jewish nation had been looking for the Messiah for a very long time. The religious leadership had spent years reading and watching and hoping, but they had allowed their personal circumstances and hatreds to color their interpretation of scripture. They were tired of being an oppressed people and they hated the Roman occupation. On the other hand, they had a very healthy opinion of themselves and their role in the world. They were, after all, God's "**Chosen People**". So, instead of looking for a Savior of Souls they were looking for a conqueror of nations.

Jesus knew what His role was and He knew that their expectations and His True Mission were on a collision course. He didn't want anything to prevent His journey to Calvary.

Son of Man

Jesus favorite name for Himself was "**Son of Man**". In the first 10 chapters, Mark focused primarily on the humanity and servant-hood of Jesus. Jesus came to suffer {Ch. 8, 9, 10} and serve. He was a man of action {the word "**Immediately**" is used 34 times throughout the book}. He was always moving from place to place healing the sick, casting out demons, feeding the multitudes and raising the dead. Jesus did teach, but from Mark's perspective, teaching was secondary to His primary mission of service.

Son of God

Even though Marks primary focus was on the humanity of Jesus, he did not ignore His divinity - Examples:

- We see the divinity of Jesus at His baptism {Ch. 1}.
- Jesus claimed authority over the Sabbath and to forgive sins {Ch. 2}.
- Demons recognize Jesus as the Son of God and His authority over them {Ch. 3 & 5}.
- Jesus' divinity is clearly seen at the Transfiguration {Ch. 9}.
- At His death a Roman soldier acknowledges Jesus as the Son of God {Ch. 15}.

Crucified and Risen Savior

On three separate occasions Jesus spoke of His suffering, death and resurrection. He was trying to prepare His disciples slowly for the events to come and His disciples needed all the advanced warning they could get, because, even though Jesus had walked them through it, they were not prepared for it when it came.

The entire book of Mark is under girded by the idea that Jesus' ministry cannot be separated from His cross. The events of Jesus adult life all point to the cross and the reason why He came. Mark argues that Jesus life cannot be rightly understood without the cross.

The cross, thank God, was not the end of the story. On Sunday morning Jesus rose from the grave! He's Alive! We serve a Risen Savior!

-Luke-

Dear Theophilus...

The purpose of Luke's letter is spelled out in the first few verses: "**So that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.**"

Luke gives a reliable and precise historical record of the life of Jesus. He was detailed and included dates and events that the other Gospels do not include. He paid special attention to the parables and miracles of Jesus, listing more than the other Gospels.

It is also interesting to note that women are given a prominent place in Luke's writings – specifically naming 8 {Elizabeth, Mary mother of Jesus, Anna, Martha and her sister Mary, Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary mother of James} + at least 14 other references to women throughout the book.

Luke portrays Jesus' profound interest in people and relationships --- revealing that Christ is for everyone - not just the Jews. Jesus is seen as a friend of sinners and a savior to anyone who will believe in Him.

Journey to Jerusalem

Jesus seemed to get in trouble most often in 2 specific areas of his ministry – Sabbath and Sinners:

Sabbath – The Sabbath is mentioned nearly 50 times in the Gospels and Luke lists 6 specific confrontations between Jesus and the religious leaders as well as the fact that Jesus rested from all his work on the Sabbath {23:50-56 see also Genesis 2:1-3}:

- 4:31-36 – Demon cast out
- 4:38-39 – Peter's Mother-in-law healed
- 6:1-5 – Grain field encounter – {5} Jesus said to them, The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.
- 6:6-11 – Withered hand healed
- 13:10-17 – Woman infirmed for 18 years healed
- 14:1-6 – Man with dropsy healed

The Sabbath commandment has an important spiritual purpose - It points God's people to Him as Supreme Maker of all things and Redeemer from bondage. However, Sabbath observance underwent a dramatic transformation in the centuries leading up to the time of Christ and had become so distorted that it was a burden of epic proportions.

Example: plowing was a prohibited-work category, however, according to first-century rabbinic opinion, the prohibition against plowing could be violated by simply spitting on the ground. The spit could disturb the soil, which in the rabbis' view was a type of plowing! Women were forbidden to look into a mirror on the Sabbath, because they might see a gray hair and pull it out, and that would constitute work.

It was this kind of distorted and critical religious atmosphere {Religious Fog} that Jesus fought against and that would lead directly to his death.

<https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/booklets/sunset-to-sunset-gods-sabbath-rest>

Sinners – Jesus was accused of associating freely and often with sinners:

- 5:30 - But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, *"Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"*
- 7:39 – {The woman who anointed Jesus} - When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, *"If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is-- that she is a sinner."*
- 15:1-2 - Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, *"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*
- 19:7 – {Zacchaeus} - All the people saw this and began to mutter, *"He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"*

Jesus' Response:

- 5:31-32 - Well people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. Righteous people don't need to repent, but sinners do and those are the people I've come to call.
- 15:4-7 – {Lost Sheep} - There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.
- 15:8-9 – {Lost Coin} - There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.
- 15:10-32 – {Lost Son} - We had to celebrate! Your brother was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.
- 19:10 – {Zacchaeus} - For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.

As followers of Jesus, we should do good on Sabbath and work to eliminate the fog surrounding it and we should be about the business of seeking and saving the lost.

Final Events

The closing chapters of Luke reflect the other Gospels, however, in some cases, he gives more detail:

- Jesus wept over Jerusalem {19:41-44}
- Jesus' encounter with Herod {23:6-12}
- The Extended Emmaus story {24:13-35}

- The Promise of the Holy Spirit {24:49 – which ties in nicely with the beginning of Acts}

Before we can see the beauty and power of the cross, we must first see its necessity. The ultimate evidence that Jesus came to *“Seek and Save the Lost”* was his death. Yes, He came to show the Father. Yes, He came to identify with us – after all his favorite name for himself was *“The Son of Man”*. Yes, He came to show the true colors of Satan. He came to do all those things and so much more, but the overarching reason He left the glory of heaven was to save us.

We had to celebrate! Your brother was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. {Luke 15:32}

-John-

The Word Became Flesh

The central theme of the Gospel of John is that Jesus is the Son of God. John builds his case from the very first verse, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God”*. By doing so, John proclaims to the reader that what Jesus is – God is. Jesus came to do the work of His Father. To see Jesus was to see the Father in action:

- **John 5:19** - ... 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.
- **Ellen White {LHU 26.6}** - In word and in deed the Messiah, during His earthly ministry, was to reveal to mankind the glory of God the Father. Every act of His life, every word spoken, every miracle wrought, was to make known to fallen humanity the infinite love of God. . .

Every *“sign”* added evidence to John’s assertion regarding Jesus’ Divinity. He selected them specifically for their ability to help his readers believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be.

2000 years later, John’s Gospel reaches out to you and me and invites us to experience and believe in that same Jesus who walked on water, healed the sick and raised the dead - and that by believing we might have eternal life {20:31}.

“I Am”

The Jesus of John is not a comfortable Jesus. He doesn’t pretend - what you see is what you get. Jesus is simply Himself: wild, generous, compassionate, honest, bold, untamed, beautiful, breathtaking. He is the Great *“I AM”*. This Jesus demands a response – you cannot remain neutral in His presence – you have to **CHOOSE**. You will either pick up stones or fall at His feet.

- **C.S. Lewis {Mere Christianity}** - I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a good moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic-on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg-or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great moral teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

Jesus Messiah

Each of the Gospels has a unique perspective on the events surrounding Jesus death. Perhaps the most striking feature in the book of John is that Jesus is clearly in control of those events – His death was voluntary:

- In the Gethsemane, when He answered the mob with, *“I Am”* – they fell to the ground and they were only able to arrest Jesus because He allowed Himself to be arrested.
- When Pilate became irritated that Jesus was not cooperating and said, *“Don’t You know I have the power to release you or have You crucified?”* Jesus responded, *“You have no power over me except for the power that has been given you.”*
- When all had been accomplished, He laid down His life:
 - **Ellen White {DA 758.1}** - Christ did not yield up His life till He had accomplished the work which He came to do, and with His parting breath He exclaimed, "It is finished." John 19:30. The battle had been won. His right hand and His holy arm had gotten Him the victory. As a Conqueror He planted His banner on the eternal heights. Was there not joy among the angels? All heaven triumphed in the Saviour's victory. Satan was defeated, and knew that his kingdom was lost.

In John, the crucifixion was not a tragic mistake. It was something Jesus foreknew and deliberately chose. At every stage, Jesus was in control of His own destiny. He died because He deliberately chose to die. By His death on the cross Jesus accomplished the mission His Father had given to Him – to save humanity – and through His suffering Jesus was glorified.

- **Oswald Chambers** – The death of Jesus was not the death of a martyr; it was the revelation of the eternal heart of God.
- **John 3:16** - For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
- **John 15:13** - Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.
- **Romans 5:8** - But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- **Hebrews 12:2** - Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

-Acts-

A New Church Is Born

Gamaliel was right. There was nothing the Sanhedrin could do to stop this new *“Jesus Movement”*. It might have started out with 120 scared people hiding in an upper room, but through the **Power of the Holy Spirit**, it became a mighty movement that turned the world upside down. In 313 AD, Christianity became a legal religion and in 380 AD it became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Today there are over 800 million Protestants and over 1 billion Catholics worldwide.

- **Acts 1:8** - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."
- **Zechariah 4:6b** - Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.

Today, in many Christian circles the Holy Spirit is neglected, forgotten, or misunderstood. We spend more time worrying about what we think church should look like and we no longer depend on or expect the Holy Spirit to work. We may even hope He doesn't work because He might interfere with our plans.

- **A.W. Tozer:** If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference

However, Holy Spirit power is vital in the life of a Christian – it is not an optional extra:

- He – transforms our hearts – Titus 3:4-5
- He – convicts of sin – John 16:7-8
- He – is our Comforter – John 14:16
- He – is our Teacher and helps us remember– John 14:26 and John 16:13
- He – gives us power to overcome Satan – 1 John 4:4
- He – communicates for us – Romans 8:26-27
- He – gives us spiritual gifts and the power to use them – Acts

A.W. Tozer: The Spirit-filled life is not a special, deluxe edition of Christianity. It is part and parcel of the total plan of God for His people.

Growing Pains

The believers in Jesus faced hardships at every turn, but in spite of persecution, the message of Salvation was spreading rapidly. First. Judea, then Samaria and now Turkey:

- **Ellen White {AA 174}:** Centuries before, the pen of inspiration had traced this ingathering of the Gentiles; but those prophetic utterances had been but dimly understood. Hosea had said: "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not My people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God." And again: "I will sow her unto Me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not My people, Thou art My people; and they shall say, Thou art my God." Hosea 1:10; 2:23.

The Savior Himself, during His earthly ministry, foretold the spread of the gospel among the Gentiles. In the parable of the vineyard He declared to the impenitent Jews, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Matthew 21:43. And after His resurrection He commissioned His disciples to go "into all the world" and "teach all nations." They were to leave none unwarned, but were to "preach the gospel to every creature."

Missionary Journeys of Paul

- **Acts 9:15-16** - The Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

We can all agree that while Paul's efforts were met with much success, he paid a high price for those efforts. He suffered much for the cause of Christ.

Sitting in our comfy pews, we might wonder if all that pain and suffering was worth it. Who would volunteer to be vilified and ridiculed, misunderstood, beaten, stoned, arrested, shipwrecked, bitten by a poisonous snake, imprisoned and beheaded?

Paul had every reason, from a human perspective, to be depressed but he seemed to think it was all worth it:

- **2 Corinthians 7:4** - I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my **joy** knows no bounds.
- **Philippians 1:4** - In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with **joy**.
- **1 Thessalonians 2:19-20** - For what is our hope, our **joy**, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? ²⁰ Indeed, you are our glory and **joy**.

Why joy? What motivated Paul? He knew what he had been before meeting Jesus and he never forgot his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road - He was transformed and that experience informed his views of suffering for the rest of his life:

- **1 Timothy 1:12-17** - I thank Christ Jesus our LORD, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. ¹³Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴The grace of our LORD was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. ¹⁷Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Paul focused on **CHRIST** and the promotion of the Gospel. He lived to please God. That relationship was the source of his peace and joy in all circumstances. He was so absorbed with reaching people for Jesus that he simply didn't have time to worry about the personal cost:

- **Philippians 4:12-13** - I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Paul has no idea that what he willingly endured for the cross of Christ still has impact today. He didn't do it for glory or recognition. He did it because he could do nothing else:

- **2 Timothy 4:7-8** - I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

You and I are also sinners saved by Grace What would you be willing to endure for the Cause of Christ?

-Romans-

Not Ashamed

Salvation comes from establishing a relationship with the Living Lord of the universe. When we trust Him as Lord, He saves us from the penalty and power of sin, and makes us righteous before Him through the perfect life, atoning death, and heavenly ministry of Jesus.

Through faith in Him He will transform your life!

The good news is that no matter how mired you are in your own sin, there's a way to gain a right standing before God. How could we be ashamed of such a Gospel?

- **Romans 1:16-17** - I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

These two verses set the tone for the rest of the letter. They are the theme and the foundation on which everything else stands.

Declared Not Guilty

The promise of Righteousness / Justification was not given to Abraham alone, but to **ALL** of his descendants who **CHOOSE** to believe - those who know the law and those who don't. The only qualification for receiving the Righteousness of God is to believe that, through Jesus, He has provided it for you.

You can't get it by being better or sinning less, or gauge it by what you have done vs. what someone else has done. You get it purely because:

- It has been paid for by Someone Else.
- Offered to you as a Free Gift.
- You receive it with Gratitude.
- And you are Transformed.

That's it. SIMPLE

Live Free

We should be filled with awe and wonder and gratitude:

- While we were running head long in the other the direction, God sent Jesus to save us.
- Because of Jesus' obedience we have access to His righteousness.
- We no longer have to be controlled by sin.
- The law we have failed to keep becomes an internal reality and as we walk with Jesus, we become more and more like Him.
- Our peace is found in the midst of the storm.
- Nothing can separate from Jesus and through Him we are more than conquerors.

It just doesn't get any better than that!!!!

All Adopted

Paul has been guiding his readers step by step through the plan of salvation.

- All have sinned.
- Salvation is received through faith.
- Salvation changes the way a Christian lives his life.
- Both Jews and Gentiles are on equal ground when it comes to mercy. God's mercy is wide and extends to all.

Paul concludes this section with Praise to God. He is awestruck by the majesty of God:

Romans 11:33-36 - Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

There is no room for human pride in the plan of salvation. All glory belongs to God.

Therefore

Paul has taken us a long way in his letter to the church in Rome. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. We are all sinners saved by grace. We all receive the righteousness of Christ the same way – through faith. We all become like Jesus the same way too – through the transformational power of the Holy Spirit.

He concludes this amazing and life changing letter with these words:

Romans 16:25-27 - Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, ²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him-- ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

-1st Corinthians-

Paul vigorously asserts that the power of God is made manifest in the cross of Jesus and demonstrates the inability of human wisdom to provide salvation.

- It is impossible to know God without the Holy Spirit. God's redemptive work can appear foolish and offensive to those who have not accepted the Spirit. However, to those who have accepted the Holy Spirit into their hearts, it is the power of God to save.
- We are too easily distracted by insignificant arguments. Disagreements have become about garnering support and winning at all cost at the expense of the community as a whole. Our spiritual maturity is revealed by our humility and ability to love and respect people who may disagree with us.
- Speaking out and standing up against evil, especially within the church body, is not easy. It takes courage. But the mature follower of Christ would rather speak up for what is good and right than to allow evil to go unchallenged.
- Because of Jesus, we are free from the penalty the power of sin. Christian freedom is not about personal rights – it is about Christian love – love for God and love for our neighbor.
- Freedom in Christ is found in our willingness to submit to his authority and in putting the welfare of others ahead of our own. Mature Christians know that knowledge doesn't mean we are free to do as we please. We are to consider the needs and beliefs of others. Mature Christians need to be aware of the immature and baby Christians around them. What may be morally neutral for one may not be for another. We are never to be deliberately offensive or insist on our personal freedom at the expense of a fellow believer. More than that, if we insist on our personal rights and in doing so cause a weaker brother to stumble, we are sinning against that brother and we are sinning against God.
- Spiritual freedom comes with spiritual responsibility. We know our areas of weakness - the places where we struggle. We must be on guard. We will never be able to meet temptation under our own power. Don't be careless. Don't become arrogant. Don't intentionally place yourself in situations that put you directly in the line of fire, especially if God has provided a way out. And God **HAS** promised a way out if we listen to him!
- Our world struggles to recognize the equal value of women. Unfortunately, Christian churches are not immune to this struggle and are sometimes the worst offenders. In God's eyes, women can act like women, because He values them and sees them as equal to men already.
- The culture of the church and the society in which it resides will have an impact on how a church implements the principles of the Bible – unity in diversity. The message of the Gospel should always be the same, but how it is communicated will be different from place to place.
- If you are a member of God's family you have something to contribute. God has uniquely gifted you for the building up of the church. If you don't know what your Spiritual Gifts are you need to discover them – not only because you dishonor God by ignoring the gifts He's given you, but the church needs you and can't function properly without you!
- Love is not a spiritual gift in the sense that some receive it and others do not. Godly love is seen in the patience, kindness, selflessness and forgiveness which **SHOULD BE** demonstrated in the life of every Christ-follower and is a **"more excellent way"** of gauging spiritual maturity.
- Corporate worship is a meeting between God and His people. The primary focus of worship is on what brings joy to the heart of God. We should enter His presence with a deep sense of awe, thanksgiving and praise. Secondly, worship should be designed in such a way that it builds up the body. We should worship in spirit and truth engaging both our emotions and our intellect.

The God we serve is alive!! We do not worship a dead prophet. We worship a living, breathing God who loves us and wants to spend eternity with us. Our faith is not in vain! Our preaching is not vain! Our hope is not in vain! Our worship is not in vain!

-2nd Corinthians-

- Do not be afraid of trial:
 - It teaches us reliance on God and a level of trust that will not develop otherwise.
 - It is intended to burn away all those things that keep us from Jesus **{Malachi 3:3}**.
 - It gives us empathy for people who experience trials.

- Paul's firmness in dealing with a rebellious member and his tenderness and desire to restore are important examples. Sin must not be tolerated and discipline is for the purpose of bringing someone to repentance. Once repentance occurs the church should work to restore the individual.
- There is a difference between Godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. Worldly sorrow leads to guilt and regret **{I'm sorry I got caught}**, for which there is no remedy. Godly sorrow leads to repentance **{I'm sorry that my actions caused a fracture in my relationship with God – Ps 51}**, which leads to forgiveness and reconciliation, which leads to peace, which leads to new life.
- Giving is not about money – God owns everything anyway. Giving is about faith and trust – believing that God is who He says He is and does what He says He will do. This truth should drive every aspect of our worship – including our giving.
- God's goal is to accomplish inner transformation. Human authority structures which are designed to control another's behavior, simply have no place in the life of God's people. Instead leaders should exalt Christ, point people to Him and seek to build allegiance to Him. **Be careful of any person who insists on personal allegiance for themselves.** It will lead you away *“from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ”*.
- Spiritual leaders exercise their God given authority in two ways –
 - Teaching
 - Example **{1 Timothy 2:24-26; 3; Titus 1}**

Paul suffered much for the cross of Christ, but he believed the reward completely exceeded anything he had to suffer.

Our best message to the world is not some clever argument to prove Jesus really rose from the dead. Our Christianity will be judged not by what we say but how we live our lives and how we respond when trials come. To live greatly, we must develop the capacity to face trouble with courage, disappointment with cheerfulness, and triumph with humility.

-Galatians-

The overarching theme of Galatians is the freedom we possess in Christ.

Only by faith in Christ **{who He is and what He did}** are people declared **NOT GUILTY** by God. The law was never intended to save us, but instead, to point us to the One who does save us - **the goal of the law is to lead us to Christ**. When this goal has been reached, the law is no longer necessary as an outward motivation. **HOWEVER**, the law does not cease to exist, instead, we have matured and our motivation for keeping the law has changed. We no longer keep the law because we **HAVE** to but because we **WANT** to. Law-keeping becomes an inward reality.

When the Holy Spirit is invited to take possession of the heart and mind, natural human desires are transformed. A transformed person will begin to do what is right because he/she wants to and not for the sake of duty or reward.

- **John Ortberg {The Life You've Always Wanted}**: When morphing happens, I don't just do the things Jesus would have done; I find myself wanting to do them. They appeal to me. They make sense. I don't just go around trying to do the right things; I become the right sort of person.

The question Paul then raises is this – If you have been made free in Christ, why would you voluntarily go back to being a slave?

Good question!

Two Wolves

One evening an old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people.

He said, “My son, the battle is between 2 “wolves” that are inside us all.

One is Evil: It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority and ego.

The other is Good: it is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith”

The grandson thought about it for a minute, then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf wins?”

The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”

-Ephesians-

Paul told the members of the Ephesian church that they were:

- Specially Chosen
- Intentionally Adopted
- Freely Redeemed and Forgiven

Ephesians 2:8 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God –

Through Jesus God has done it all - our **Adoption, Redemption and Forgiveness!**

Then he told them to ***“live worthy of their adoption”***:

- Don't live like people who don't know Jesus!! Put aside your old life and embrace a transformed life which has been given to you by God --- a life of humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, mutual submission, righteousness, holiness and truth. A life rooted and grounded in the love of Jesus.

Paul left the church in good hands. They were strong and spiritually sound... However, just about 60 years later... John writes the Ephesians a postcard:

- **Revelation 2:1-7** - To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: ² I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³ You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. **4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.** ⁵ Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. ⁶ But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Something has happened ... the Ephesians were still working, still zealous for the truth, still faithful... **but they were no longer a church that loved.** The religious fog had descended upon them. Their love had faded and had been replaced by lifeless legalism.... Hmmm!

- **Ellen White {AA 9.1}** - The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to "the principalities and powers in heavenly places," the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10.
- **Ellen White {AA 12.1}** - During ages of spiritual darkness the church of God has been as a city set on a hill. From age to age, through successive generations, the pure doctrines of heaven have been unfolding within its borders. Enfeebled and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard. It is the theater of His grace, in which He delights to reveal His power to transform hearts.

-Philippians-

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

Paul expressed joy and faith in sharp contrast to the circumstances he was facing. His personal experience had taught him a vital truth – it is possible to have joy and inner peace no matter the circumstances of life – because of Jesus:

- Joy and peace – when it seems the world has turned against you.
- Joy and peace – when life is broken and falling apart.
- Joy and peace – when sickness and even death threaten to derail you.
- Joy and peace – when the bank account is low but the stack of bills is high.
- Joy and peace – when your little boat is tossed to and fro or when you are in the deepest valleys.
 - **John 14:27** - Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.
 - **Romans 8:18** - I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

- **Romans 8:28** - We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.
- **Romans 8:38-39** - For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

-Colossians-

God acted through Christ in both creation and redemption. In **HIM** all wisdom and knowledge is found.

Our understanding of who Christ is and what He did and is doing will impact every area of our life.

When Christ is the foundation and focus of your life, you will be transformed. It will be evident in our private life, work life, school life, social life and church life.

- **John Ortberg {The Life you've Always Wanted}**: When morphing happens, I don't just do the things Jesus would have done; I find myself wanting to do them. They appeal to me. They make sense. I don't just go around trying to do right things; I become the right sort of person.

-1st Thessalonians-

The most impressive statement in 1st Thessalonians is – **our gospel came to you – you received it – it rang out from you.** That is God's simplest plan for evangelizing the world. Not only did the word of the Lord go out from Thessalonica, but also news of their conversion, their bold rejection of Idolatry, their joy in the midst of opposition, their transformed values, their faith and their love. As a result, others were converted.

No church / or individual can spread the gospel with any degree of integrity or success unless it has been visibly changed by the gospel it preaches.

- **John Stott**: Paul's recurring emphasis is how to live while waiting for Jesus to return. It may come as a surprise to Christians, but holiness, separation from the ways of the world, commitment to the ways of God and dependence upon His power are commanded.
There is an urgent need to give people plain, practical and ethical teaching. Parents must teach their children to love and obey God's law. Teachers and Pastors must not be afraid to uphold Biblical standards, so that the congregation understands the relationship between gospel and law. And right from the beginning converts must be told that a new life in Christ is a holy life, a life bent on pleasing God.

Different words from Leviticus – same message. **BE DIFFERENT. BE TRANSFORMED. BE HOLY.**

-2nd Thessalonians-

Paul wrote 2nd Thessalonians to meet an urgent crisis that threatened to destroy the new church from both the outside and the inside. Strong language was needed in the face of imminent disaster.

Suffering and Persecution:

Paul stated that present sufferings are ***"evidence of the righteous judgment of God"*** and are a part of the process by which His people will ***"be declared worthy of the kingdom of God"***.

That sounds like strange logic to the modern mind. Most of us view suffering as an absence of God's presence rather than evidence of it. While we think of suffering as nothing but evil, the New Testament presents it as a part of the providence of God as He works out our salvation. Paul presents a lesson that his first readers desperately needed to hear—persecution is not a sign of their rejection by God, but a symbol of their acceptance by Him. He would use it to develop them for His kingdom.

Joseph {**Genesis 37-50**}:

- **Genesis 50:19-20** - But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? ²⁰ "And as for you, you meant evil against me, *but God meant* it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

Paul:

- **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** - And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me-- to keep me from exalting myself! ⁸ Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹ And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is

perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

- **Romans 5:3-5** - And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; ⁵ and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Jesus:

- **John 16:33** - "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation but take courage; I have overcome the world."

God can use each situation to develop Christian character. He lets no opportunity pass in the development of His people for eternity.

Judgment:

While the topic of the final judgment of the wicked may have brought comfort to the early believers, it is often rejected now. **"A God of love wouldn't do such a thing"**.

Is it more **"loving"** for Him just to sit eternally on His hands and do nothing? Or should He just **"force"** everyone to love Him and become good?

From one end of the Bible to the other, it is clear that one day God - **in His love** - will terminate the mess we started and brought on ourselves. To reject the idea of the final judgment is not merely to avoid **Paul {2 Thessalonians 1:6-10}**, but also **Jesus {Matt. 7:19; 10:28; 25:46}** and **John {Revelation}**.

The promise that one day God will correct all injustices should actually be an encouragement to His followers.

False Teaching:

The Thessalonians accepted false teachings because of the way it came to them.

Modern Christians need to understand that the message of every radio or television preacher, or every person who stands behind a pulpit, needs to be examined through the lens of the teachings contained in Scripture. The alternative is to be led astray by those who claim to have a word from the Lord, but who are out of harmony with biblical teaching.

The basis for Christian belief, doctrine and practice is what the **BIBLE** teaches and must be the test for all other teachings that come to Christians.

Church Discipline:

The topic most out of harmony with the modern church is that of discipline and biblical authority, no doubt as a result of the abuses of the past **{inquisition, abuses of the clergy, etc.}**. However, instead of maintaining a middle ground, we now embrace the idea that everyone is free to follow their own way without interference. We accept the Bible as having good advice, but reject its authority, especially when its teachings interfere with a chosen lifestyle or behavior.

When it comes to open sin - **"Let's just love them"** is the argument. By **"loving them"**, we generally mean keeping quiet about the offense – pretending as though it never happened. No such approach is seen the Scripture. Church discipline is necessary when dealing with public defiance and rebellion of biblical instructions:

- **Matthew 18:15-17** - And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ "But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. ¹⁷ "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.
- **1 Corinthians 5:1-13** - It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. ² And you have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst. ³ For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. ⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ *I have decided* to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*? ⁷ Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ

our Passover also has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. ⁹ I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; ¹⁰ I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. ¹¹ But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? ¹³ But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.

- **Hebrews 12:4-6** - You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; ⁵ and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reproved by Him; ⁶ For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives."

To love is to care enough to correct.

-1st Timothy-

1st Timothy gives us a good look at the challenges all pastors face. It is not an easy job to be given the responsibility for the spiritual care of other people, but Paul provides sound advice on how to properly deal with challenges when they arise and he places a strong emphasis on the personal character of a spiritual leader.

Church leaders fill important roles in the growth of the church and 1st Timothy presents the most detailed and complete instructions for church leadership found in the Bible. There is an emphasis on a Godly character demonstrated both inside and outside the church.

Do not underestimate the importance of Godly church leadership!

Sometimes we run into Biblical statements that seem out of place with the rest of scripture:

- Don't throw it out.
- Seek Holy Spirit wisdom and understanding
- Consider all the evidence.
- Search for context.
- If you can't come up with an answer, just leave it and trust that God will provide an answer when the time is right.

-2nd Timothy-

Paul knew what was at stake for Timothy and he wanted to encourage him in the strongest possible way to:

- Be faithful and courageous in his duties.
- Hold on to sound doctrine / guard and fight for the Gospel / know what your Bible says.
- Avoid error and turn away from arguing over words.
- Pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace and conduct yourself with gentleness, patience and humility.
- Accept persecution for the sake of the Gospel.
- Put confidence in Scripture and teach it relentlessly.

-Titus-

Paul is concerned about the reputation of Christians in the larger community. He wants Titus to impress upon the Christians of Crete that their actions, their words, and their deeds before others are what make the teachings of God attractive. This is not about public image, but rather avoiding barriers to the gospel message.

- **Titus 2:11-14** - For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope-- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.
- **Titus 3:4-7** - But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the **Holy Spirit**, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Our actions, words and deeds speak volumes about how much we know God and whether we are being transformed by that knowledge.

If we tell people about Jesus, yet live lives that are ugly and contrary to the message we preach, we not only misrepresent the Gospel, we misrepresent God. So called **“Christians”** have done significant damage to the cause of Christ by preaching one thing yet living something completely different. As a result, many have turned away from God. Shame on us!

-Philemon-

Philemon is about forgiveness and reconciliation.

All of us have sold ourselves into slavery to sin and we have run away from our Master.

- **Genesis 3:8** - They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

We are all God's **“Onesimus”**. When Jesus died for us, our status changed. We are no longer runaway slaves. We have been adopted as sons and daughters of God. We are forgiven and restored.

We are accepted - Accept

We are forgiven - Forgive

We are restored - Restore

-Hebrews-

Jesus is a Better Bridge

Christians live in **“the meantime”** between deliverance at the cross and our eternal home.

It is impossible to live on planet earth and not become discouraged by the state of Christianity!! A Christianity that does not look much different from the world around it. Compromise, hypocrisy cruelty, racism, sexism and downright ugliness demonstrated by so-called **“Christians”** – make us question the value of Christianity.

And what about Jesus? He said, “I’m coming soon” ... 2,000 years AGO!

- **Hebrews 3:12-13** - See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be **hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.**

Christian’s need to be careful not to make the same mistake the 1st generation of freed slaves made in the wilderness. We too have been promised eternal rest - the one that occurs at the end of the age when everything God has done for us is completed and we see Him face to face. Like Adam and Eve and Israel of old, we have done nothing to contribute to our salvation. It is a completed work done by Heaven for us, and yet we have been invited to participate in and benefit from that rest.

The weekly 7th-day Sabbath is a foreshadowing of the eternal rest promised to all who believe. Every week we are invited to participate in and benefit from God’s completed work on our behalf as Creator and Redeemer – **{Ex. 20 & Deut. 5}**. We enter this rest through obedience and by faith in God’s completed work.

This is the primary difference between Sunday worship and Sabbath worship. Sunday worship has its foundation in man’s ability. Sabbath worship has its foundation in God’s ability.

Because of Jesus we have been invited into the very presence of God. Not to stand before Him as a convict/slave, but as a beloved son/daughter.

Jesus is a Better Sacrifice

Spiritual lethargy is not a Christian virtue. The Christian life is not static. We are either moving forward or we are falling backward. If you are not maturing in your walk with Jesus – there is a serious problem.

- It is our responsibility to progress in both our understanding of Christian truth and Christian living.
- It is the duty of every Christian to share what he knows and what he has learned with those who come behind him.
- The immature, dull Christian is a contradiction in terms. When we take to heart the Message of Salvation in Jesus we should be changed and motivated to greater understanding and greater ministry and greater joy.

God extends the gifts of repentance and forgiveness to each of us, but it's up to us to accept them. Even if we abandon Him **{as both Peter and Judas did}**, repentance is still ours if we turn back to Him **{as Peter did}**. Restoration is impossible, however, for those who continue to reject and abandon Him **{as Judas did}** – **Not even God can save the person who doesn't WANT to be saved.**

The age-old Christian problem is not an unwillingness to obey, but to attempt to obey outside a saving relationship with God. Whenever and wherever people think they can gain salvation through their own efforts they put themselves under the Old Covenant – **read Ex. 24:3 and 32 to be reminded how that worked out.** New Covenant obedience always flows out of a faith relationship with God.

We don't obey **TO BE** saved – we obey because we **ARE** saved. There **IS** a difference!!

Hebrews could not be plainer. Christ's once-for-all sacrifice did what the Jewish sacrifices could never do - **SAVE.**

Jesus is a Better Sacrifice. Never question whether He has done enough!

Therefore, Live by Faith

Christianity is a religion of hope based on faith in what God has done in the past, what He is doing in the present and what He has promised to do in the future. Christians are pilgrims with eternity in mind. The good news is that Christ has not only blazed the trail ahead of us, He also walks with us every step of the way – encouraging and cheering us on.

-James-

Does James contradict Paul? Not all. They are talking about 2 different yet complimentary doctrines:

- Paul says we are saved by our faith in the substitutionary death of Christ – Christ did it, we believe it, we're saved = YEP!!
- James says our faith in the substitutionary death of Christ will **dictate how we live**. If we claim a saving relationship with Jesus, yet do nothing for the benefit of anyone else or worse yet, are critical and malicious, "judgy", envious, bitter, selfish, self-serving, and self-centered – if we exploit other people, can't control our tongues and are proud and arrogant – than our faith is a lie and it is deadlier than a doornail = YEP!!

We don't **"do stuff"** in order **TO BE SAVED**. We **"do stuff"** because we **ARE SAVED**.... There **IS** a difference!!

What **we do** reveals the truth about what **we believe**.

-1st Peter-

What should be the priorities of a Christian?

- Rejoice because you have been saved by the **voluntary** death and resurrection of Jesus.
- Rejoice even in the midst of suffering because suffering refines and grows your faith and brings glory and honor to Jesus.
- Fix your hope on Jesus

1 Peter 2:9 - But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

THEREFORE: Live your life like you believe you're saved!

- Be obedient:
 - Because you have been set apart **{holy}**
 - Because you have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus - Obedience is an act of gratitude.
- Live in harmony with other people
- Be Sympathetic
- Be Compassionate
- Be Considerate
- Be Respectful
- Be Gentle

- Honor others above yourself
- Care more about the inside than the outside
- Be Humble
- Repay insults with Blessings
- Turn from evil
- Seek Peace
- Do good – even if it costs you something

How different our world would be if those who claim to be followers of Jesus lived like that!

-2nd Peter-

Peter understands the battle that goes on in daily life and so he reminds his readers that in Jesus we have everything we need to remain faithful and to live lives that reflect our standing as son and daughters of God.

He wants us to have a knowledge of God and Jesus, not just an intellectual knowledge, but a knowledge we experience and carry with us in our daily lives. For Peter, knowledge of God is revealed in Scripture {**Genesis-Revelation**} and is rooted in a personal faith relationship with God. There can be no division between what we believe and how we live and in Scripture we have all the information we need to become like Jesus.

Satan knows the best place to derail a believer is in church. It is a guarantee that false teachers will come. The only way to protect yourself is to:

- Know their coming.
- Love and live the truth so that you cannot be fooled.

The mockers seem right. Jesus promised to come back – 2000 years ago. That's a long time to wait.

God seems slow, but it's not because He has forgotten. God sees time from a perspective that we lack and with an intensity that we cannot possibly understand. Eternal life is open to all and God desires that all who **WANT** to be saved are given a chance and so.... He waits. However, there will come a day when there will be no more delay. That day will come as a complete shock and when we least expect it – notice the words of Jesus and Paul:

- **Matthew 24:37-39** - As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.
- **Matthew 25:5-6** - The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. ⁶ "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'"
- **Luke 12:39-40** - But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."
- **1 Thessalonians 5:1-3** - Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ² for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

The bottom line is that it doesn't matter how long He takes, but what we are doing while we wait. The whole of the Christian life should be lived in the light of the promise of Christ's return not in moaning about the slowness of His coming.

Those who belong to Christ and live in the expectation of His return do not live in fear because they believe the promises of God to restore the earth and bring His people home to be with Him for eternity. **Therefore..... Remain Faithful!**

-1st John-

There is a universal truth – by beholding we become changed. We reflect what we admire most.

The devil would like us to believe that behavior doesn't matter. While it is true that behavior does not save us, it is also true that behavior reflects the state of our hearts. It reflects what we admire most - God or Satan. You choose.

God/Christ	Satan/Antichrist
Light	Darkness
Love	Hate
Righteousness	Unrighteousness

Jesus came, in part, to destroy the work of the devil. That is why a genuine follower of Jesus cannot continue in rebellion **{sin as a way of life}**, because from John's point of view, becoming a son/daughter of God is such a radical departure from our old life. We are literally *"new"* from the inside out.

1st Century Christians are not the only ones in danger of getting caught up in dangerous theories. There are movements within Christianity challenging the doctrine of the Trinity and the Divinity of Christ. These groups, whatever their rationale might be, are promoting the very thing John warned us about 2000 years ago – that Jesus **IS NOT WHO** says He is and therefore, **DID NOT DO** what He claims to have done.

- **1 John 4:1-3** - Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

The only way you will know the difference between truth and error is by **KNOWING** what your Bible says.

- **Psalm 119:30-37** - I have chosen the way of truth; I have set my heart on your laws. ³¹ I hold fast to your statutes, O LORD; do not let me be put to shame. ³² I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free. ³³ Teach me, O LORD, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. ³⁴ Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. ³⁵ Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. ³⁶ Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. ³⁷ Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word.

-2nd John-

John calls readers from every age to live by the love and truth of Jesus. We demonstrate our love for God and our fellow humans when live **{walk}** in faithfulness and obedience.

John gives a strong warning not be fooled or pulled into the deceptive teachings of those who claim to be Christians yet discount the Divinity and Ministry of Jesus.

The Christian church has always experienced tension between *"new light"* and established doctrines and beliefs. How do you tell the difference between genuine advances and deceptive ideas?

- Seek Holy Spirit guidance.
- Go back to the Bible. All other knowledge must be tested by the truths of Scripture.

Non-negotiable Issues:

- Incarnation and teachings of Christ.
- Salvation through Christ alone.
- Loyalty to God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) alone.
- Holy Spirit led life.
- Love for God and love for people.
- Surrender and Obedience to the Word of God.

Negotiable Issues:

- Dietary extremes **{Vegan vs. Vegetarian vs. Clean Meat}**
- Cultural religious differences and Human religious traditions
- Lifestyle issues not explicitly covered in Scripture **{1 Cor 6:19-20}**

Just because a serious issue needs to be dealt with does not mean it must be done in an unloving way.

- **Matthew 10:16** - I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

-3rd John-

John introduces no new theology, but provides a picture of church dynamics in every age. Every church is made up of Godly people who are intent on building up the body of Christ as well as people who are intent on doing the exact opposite.

- Gaius took John's command to love truth and people to heart. He used his spiritual gifts and his position within the church for the betterment of everyone.
- Diotrephes was a major troublemaker. He misused his authority and misrepresented God.

We all want to attend a church that contains only Gaius', but the devil has always managed to get the tares into the wheat field and so we have both Gaius and Diotrephes to deal with.

- Make sure you are a Gaius and not a Diotrephes.
- Don't run for the nearest exit. Keep our eyes on Jesus – the head of the church.

-Jude-

Jude was dealing with a crisis facing the church and his letter reflects that in a vigorous and pointed manner. Jude's message, however, does not resonate in today's world because of his emphasis on God's judgment of evil intruders who attempt to corrupt and divide the church. Many view his words as intolerant, unloving and contrary to the love proclaimed elsewhere in the New Testament. However, Jude is exactly what today's people of God need to hear, because we are in just as much danger from those who want to corrupt and divide the church as the people Jude originally wrote to --- they are:

- False teachers who claim to be spiritual, but are sexually corrupt.
- Lovers of money and personal gain.
- Loud and boastful - Grumblers and fault finders.
- People who live according to their own sinful desires - who cause division and rejected authority.
- Deniers that Jesus is our Lord and Savior
- Worldly and the Spirit of God is not in them. **{see Luke 20:46-47 and Romans 1:18-32}**

So, what do we do?

- Be aware that these people exist and that their mission is to corrupt and divide the church and destroy your faith in God.
- See the truth behind the grumbling, boasting, fault finding and rejection of authority – it is not of God!
- Know and love the truth for yourselves.
- Build your faith – exercise.
- Pray earnestly.
- Be grounded in God's love.
- Extend mercy but don't be gullible.
 - **Matthew 10:16** - I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy-- to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

-Revelation-

Jesus and the 7 Churches

Revelation is not primarily concerned with end-time events or to satisfy our obsessive need to know about the future. It was written to assure Christians of Jesus' presence with them throughout history and earth's final events.

The focus is on Christ in the midst of the churches. Jesus is walking among the lampstands helping the churches with their needs and in their circumstances. He is the churches only hope because He knows them and cares for them. As the church faces the end-time trial, she has the promises of Christ:

- "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" **{Matt 28:20}**.
- "Stop being afraid! I am the first and the last" **{Rev 1:17}**.

Jesus through History

- **Ellen White {CC 250.3}**: In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will. . . .

Jesus and the End of Time

Jesus is with His people when they suffer unjustly and we are reminded over and over again that God will judge the evil in this world. A day is coming when it will be eternally defeated - never to rise again. This will secure the eternal deliverance of God's people and bring them to their long-awaited home.

The people of God have and will face a formidable and enraged Foe, but remember, **Satan is already a defeated enemy!** He was defeated at the cross and he will be destroyed eternally at the end of time.

God's people will be able to overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb and by their faithful witness. We are not to be afraid of the future because Christ has promised to be with His people until the end.

Jesus Wins!

The book of Revelation closes with a benediction: ***"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all."*** It reminds God's people as they face oppression and hardship not to look to the things of the world but to fix their eyes on Jesus.

Revelation reminds God's people that this world is not their home. As Christians go through the hardships of life or experience oppression and opposition because of their loyalty to Christ, they must keep in mind that they are not home yet. The day is coming, however, when they will be welcomed home and the entire universe will be there to greet them.

- **Revelation 21:1-4** - Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."
- **Ellen White {GC 678.3}**: The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.