

CHIEF MINISTRIES

February 2015

Blessings to all!

Is Christ your all in all? We are to be so absorbed in Jesus that a sense of his protection and presence surrounds us; yet our egos are ever on the chase for health and wealth.

"Believe and be blessed with riches!" This is the spiel and lure of religious hucksters. "Pray and grow rich," they promise. Where did these pitchmen ever get such enticing allurements to faith? Both Psalms 37 and 23 seem to say that believing is the brass ring on the merry-go-round of riches. We have only to believe and hold out our aprons to garner pennies from heaven? Do you love Jesus? Then you are guaranteed the good things of life! They say. If the Lord is your shepherd, you shall not want - anything, ever. There will be no turbulence in the tides of your trusting, for He will always lead you beside still waters. You will never hunger again, for He will feed you - yes, allow you to gluttonize - in green pastures! He will give you all those material things that shelter and secure life. Really?....

These passages speak to our insecurity. There is a clawed dragon that stocks every one of us and makes us fear our future. It's the Dragon of "What if?"

What if I never make parole?
What if I don't live that long?
What if everyone that supports me dies?
What if I can't get a job because I'm a felon?
What if I lose my job?
What if my paycheck doesn't come in time?
What if they cut my pay?
What if the bank goes bust with all my money and it?

But the "What ifs" of life all seem to say, "I told you so," when the material guarantees of life begin to fail. There are people who went through the Great Depression and the economic disaster after 9/11 that let those times remain a life-long terror for them. They live in mental fear it will come again. I have a friend whose mom stocked up so much stuff in the attic, garage, and storage facility for Y2K that they still are trying to get rid of all the food stuffed everywhere. She was fighting the dragon of "What if?"

"What if" is a good question. But no matter how well we live there is no such thing as complete security. Husbands cannot give it to wives, fathers to sons or daughters. This world has no complete security to offer. Life is fragile. There could be nuclear war by nightfall. Our fortunes and ourselves may be gone by morning.

The point of these Psalms was never to guarantee our security. Rather, they were written to say, *"Trust in the Lord and do good, and He will give you the desires of your heart,"* so long as your heart desires what it should. But what is it that our hearts should desire? Jesus Christ himself. When we set our hearts on having mere material things, our hearts are not right. The believer is to be in love with the Lord and to pursue Him as the great desire of life.

Did the martyrs die for their faith? No, few of them died for their faith; they died for Christ. Martyrs did not conceive of their horrible deaths as some grand scheme that would win them a statue niche in a cathedral. It was a matter of witnessing to what they believed. The meaning of the "martyr" is "witness". Martyrdom for those who faced it was merely a way of telling the world what they thought of Jesus. (Read Fox's Book of Martyrs or Jesus Freaks by DC talk) they would have preferred to do it with words, but when words were insufficient, they spoke it with their blood. It was the last step of self-denial, the ultimate step of Christ exaltation. It was a way to announce the truth, and all it required was the giving up of their poor, temporal, physical lives.

Ignatius of Antioch learned that the Christians of Smyrna were praying for him that he would be pardoned by the government and so not have to be killed for his faith in Jesus. He then wrote to the Romans.

I must implore you to do me no such untimely kindness, pray believe me to be a meal for the beasts, for it is they who can provide my way to God. I am his wheat, ground fine by lions teeth to be made pierced bread for Christ. Better still, incite the creatures to become a sepulchre for me, let them not leave the smallest scrap of my flesh. When there truly is no trace of my body left for the world to see, then shall I truly be Jesus Christ disciple.

To desire only what Christ gives and not to desire Christ himself is to be bought off by little trinkets, never to own the greater treasure of His indwelling presence. What shall we say then to intercession? Is it always wrong? To the contrary, it is always right to ask. But we should ask remembering that our heavenly Father knows what things we need even before we ask Him.

There are six verses in the book of John (KJV) that say "any thing" and "whatsoever" we ask in prayer believing we shall receive:

"Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do" (14:13)

"If ye shall ask in My name, I will do it" (14:14)

"I have chosen you... that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He will give it to you" (15:16)

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it to you. Hither to have ye asked nothing in My name; ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (16:23-24)

"At that day ye shall ask in My name" (16:26)

Yet to use these six verses to get material things we want is really asking the question, "Why don't we want Jesus instead of mere stuff?" Apart from Him, nothing else should ever have any value in your eyes.

Christ is to impact our lives with such force that all our "wants" are changed from things material to things eternal.

Various video evangelists tell us that if we but believe and send them a dollar or two, or twenty, God will dump his multiplied generosity back on our lives. God becomes a virtual vending machine: prayers in →dollars out, dollars in →blessings out.

The Bible teaches us that we are to trust in the Lord not to get the goodies of life but to be enriched by the Lord Himself. He alone is our enduring treasure.

I often meet people who try to intimidate me with some false materialism. If it was habitable, trust me, I have had it. But it took me going after it to get it to make me realize I didn't need it. I've had friends that swore they got the up-front parking space or the new car or house because, "My Father loves me so much."

If you look at material evidences in this world as a sign of God's love than there are many who are disappointed. Is it because God "loves" them less? Of course not! God's love for us is demonstrated in what He's done for us eternally, not for what He does in the material moment.

Love and her sister Grace are the greatest of all the attributes of God. God in innumerable ways is always offering His love for us. Why should we ever doubt that we are loved. To grow in the things of the Spirit, love must go hand-in-hand with learning. At a certain point, we must leave study behind while the heart runs ahead with joy to the gift that is God Himself. But then, on the other hand, devotion can never be informed without the discipline of study. If I make any application on the material side of logic, do I make the wrong assessments about God's love? The real point of Psalms 37:4 is that we are to trust in the Lord and delight ourselves in the giver and not His gifts. If you receive from God and you think only of what God has given you, you have missed the point of God's bounty. If little things like oxygen and fried eggs remind you of God's goodness and turn your praise Godward, then the material blessings of God will have a noble purpose.

A friend told me sometime back, "I gave my fiancée and engagement ring. She took the ring then broke off the engagement. Now she won't give it back!" "Thank God for that," I said to him. "How can I thank God? It cost me everything I had to get that ring!" he said.

"But look at it this way: thank God she's gone. You don't have to worry anymore. She esteemed the gift more than the giver. Who would want to be married to a person with such misplaced esteem?"

Still it was hard for him to thank God. When we receive material gifts from God, we must war against our craving for having more and more. The psalmist had it right. It is important to "*Delight yourself in the Lord.*" Material things are not lasting delights. When God doesn't give us what we want when we want it, we should remember what Job said, "*Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.*" (13:15) Here is a word from a man who had lost everything. No family, no money, no house, nothing left! He had met the "What if?" dragon and lost. Go on trusting the Lord, says Habakkuk in 3:17-18; *Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, ^{v18} yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. (ESV)*

The great lovers of God are those who love Jesus not because of what He's done for them but because He died for them. If we live in such a way that others don't see us as wealthy in the spiritual sense we're sinning against God. Paul wrote from a prison cell, *"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."* Was Paul happy? How could he be otherwise? He was in love with the Giver. It's a sin to make God look bad. The sin of the prodigal son was making his father look bad. Anyone who saw him down in the pig trough eating with the pigs would surely have believed his father didn't care much for him. Yet the prodigal was loved by a father who doted on him day and night. The Scriptures say *"He came to himself,"* and got up and went home to his father who was delighted to have him back home.

Act like it's a great pleasure to know God! Act like your Father is rich! Delight yourself in His abundance! Psalms 37:11 says *"the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."* Abundance is never measured in those things we claim to have. Do you know what a thief says with his life? It's an admission of poverty: "I am not complete. If only I can steal this, I will be more so!" Contentment doesn't come from what you grasp, but from what grasps you. Die to the world by renouncing the madness of its stir and bustle. Live for God by throwing off the old man in you through recognition of His nature. Our completeness is measured by the Greek word *teleios*. Often in the New Testament *teleios* means God is in the process of finishing us. When we stand in His presence, the meek will not only inherit the earth but they will also be closed in His abundance.

In the meantime, knowing what our inheritance is, we ought to decide that we will make our Father look rich. I learned this truth in the oddest of ways. Even as I write this, my mother has taught me many things. She fell the other day and broke her nose, possibly a rib and her wrists were swollen from trying to stop her fall. I called to see how she was doing. She said she was "practicing". "Practicing what", I said. She said, "to see if I could still write." You see she writes upwards of 200 letters a month to inmates all over the place. And she has to make sure that she could still fulfill her calling, swollen wrists and all. She told me she got three letters finished the next day. She makes our Father look rich.

As I write this letter to you all. I'm thankful for a mother, not because she's given me a gift but because I am loved by a woman whose character it is to be a giver. She's proud of me too. Because of my writing gift, or musical gifts? No. Because our hearts resonate in delight at the abundance we found in each other's love as mother and son. We know the Giver.

"Trust in the Lord and do good. Delight yourself in Him and He will bring it to pass." Make your Father in heaven look good. Live rich in spiritual abundance and crave peace! Tell all who see your possessions as evidence of God's love *that eye has not seen, nor ear has heard, neither have entered into the heart of man those things which God hath prepared for them that love Him* (1 Corinthians 2:9). You might have a Mercedes or Jaguar on earth but we're going to have a chariot of fire one day. Christ is such a treasure that billionaires are to be pitied. Trust in the Lord and make Him the desire of your heart; and you shall readily have all you desire.

Jesus is our calling, our life, our all in all. His adoration is the only worthy passion of our lives. Make Jesus the love of your life and everything will fall into place.

You're calling, your contentment. It's all about Him

Be blessed!

Chief

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