

You're of no earthly value unless you're...

Heavenly Minded

Vol 4 Iss 8



Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

"My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives." Hebrews 12:1-6

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Dear Friends,

World terrorism, political posturing, homosexual advocacy, abortion 'rights', human cloning, sub dermal chips...and I thought the 60's were wild!! The closer we get, the 'worsen' we get or so it seems. Praise God that He is still at work changing hearts around the world one at a time! Our hope and prayer for each of you is that Christ will be all in all – your whole life – and that His Spirit will lead and empower you in His service more than ever. May you be exuberant in your calling whether as a parent, parson or any other of a b-zillion jobs the Lord may want to use you in. This is a time to hold fast to the word of truth, to store it in your heart, to passionately pursue the doing of it throughout each and every day. This is a time to forgive – to make your relationships right with your friends and fellow servants. He's coming soon. God bless you!

In Christ's Love, John and Darlene Dickey



For thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream. Then you shall feed; on her sides shall you be carried, and be dandled on her knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

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As Many As I Love

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Rev 3:19, 20

In Christ's address to the seven churches of Revelation chapters two and three, two of them are explicitly described as being loved. Clearly, God loves them all but let's focus on the two last churches, Philadelphia and Laodicea, to glean from this distinction. To preface, let's review a well known story:

"You are the man!" stated the prophet to which a deafening, awkward silence stormed into the room. Most if not all of you already know the dark episode of David's life involving secret sin and Bathsheba. You recall how he let his sexual lust lead him into adultery, deception and murder.

Nathan continued, *"Thus says the LORD God of Israel: "I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you*

have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' Thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun."

So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die."

Just as God said, David reaped what he had sowed. For taking another man's wife, his own wives were taken by his rebellious son Absalom. For destroying another man's family, his own was thrown into the chaos of incest, murder and revolution. For his subterfuge, his own judgment was placed before all of Israel and via the scripture, before the whole world. For murdering his servant Uriah, a devoted man, three of his own children died including Bathsheba's. In addition, we could point out that as he "despised" the Lord, so he learned what it was like to be despised by his own. Whew! Very tough discipline.

And it is important to realize that these very difficult events which God determined were not the basis for David being forgiven. God forgave him the moment he acknowledged his sins and repented. The corrective discipline came afterwards, some of it years later. God said David despised Him and His commands. Was His

response because He in turn despised David? No. No way.

My boys used to say that when they had been unruly or just really blew it, all Mom had to say was, "OK, you won't listen to me... I'm just going to have to tell your father when he gets home." And that was the end – the whole day was shot. For them, the clock ticked visibly slower and slower until about six when I would pull in, and until then it was impossible to have any more fun because judgment was on its way. By the time I got there, Mom had inevitably forgiven them but correction was still important.

Like them, I'm one who wishes my Father would let His correction somehow slide cause I'm so sure that 'my bad behavior will never happen again – no Sir.' But to my 'chagrin' He hasn't read Dr. Spock. And though, in my carnality, I sometimes wish he had, I know the truth of the scripture which says, *"...the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes (spanks, if you would) everyone he accepts as a son."* Why? *"...for [our] profit, that [we] might be partakers of his holiness."*

Oh, how I sometimes wish it weren't necessary for *"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."*

God doesn't discipline His children arbitrarily or even, I'm convinced, mysteriously. This is one reason Job was so perplexed. He could say, *"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."* But the harshness of the tragedies that befell him were never stated by the Lord to be in response to some sin in his life or intended as a

corrective chastisement. Consequently, Job was befuddled.

Throughout scripture, we find the Lord bringing discipline, that is corrective training, to His children which directly relates to their sin, and at some point He makes it clear what He's doing. Consider the sons of Jacob standing before their betrayed brother Joseph – they knew God was involved (Gen 42:18-24), or the Jewish nation wandering in the wilderness – the Lord said, *"And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you."* (Deut 8:2-5) or in the days of Jeremiah (Jer 30:14) or the periodic afflictions seen in the book of Judges (Jud 2:11-23). As with David, when God deals with us by chastisement, He wants us to know what's going on and that He's at the helm. Certainly, this is to ensure that the lesson is understood.

Thus, to view all tragedy or crisis as God's discipline would be wrong. The word for chasten in the Greek means to train children or to chastise for the purpose of teaching.

It is derived from the word for child or servant.

God's judgment as with the flood of Noah or the destruction of Sodom is not corrective for the individual. Also, sin itself has consequences as may be seen in the life of Samson or as when Jesus admonished the lame man He had healed at the pool of Bethesda. In addition, we must remember that we are in a fallen world and that just living a godly life therein will bring affliction as with the three Hebrews thrown into the fiery furnace of King Nebuchadnezzar. And then there are those who will simply seek to persecute the godly as with Daniel when he was placed in the lion's den. Finally, God's tests can be difficult as with dear father Abraham and his son Isaac. None of these are specifically corrective in nature though. Of course, for the godly, the Lord uses all things for His good purposes. For example, God specifically used Bathsheba to bear Solomon and Nathan – the progenitors of both Messianic lines seen in Matthew 1 and Luke 3.

How then, do we know if some experience should be received as the Lord's discipline? Why should we care to know?

Whether for discipline or some other reason, nothing passes into the life of one of God's children apart from His will. Discerning discipline from the Lord is not a matter of trusting whether or not He's in control. Even unto death, nothing will touch you as a believer that is accidental or out of His control. This is one of the most difficult things for contemporary believers to accept. It requires faith that doesn't fit in many modern seminaries or sermons. It is the stuff of martyrs.

Chastisement? Part of the purpose behind it is to get us to seek Him fervently. Just as when I disciplined my own children, I told them why so they would get the point. So God does the same. There are plenty of mysteries in the ways of the Lord, but almost by definition, for corrective discipline to work in us, we must understand its reason. As you seek the Lord in the scriptures, in prayer and in godly counsel – He will let you know if He's dealing with you on something.

Corrective discipline is reserved for God's children, not His enemies. (Heb 12:6) He always disciplines us in love and for our benefit. (Heb 12:10) This is a key in our own dealings with one another as well. It's one thing to help someone 'face the facts'; it's totally another to nest corrective truth in love. So called 'tough love' can be necessary, but it can also be a callous cop out for not sincerely loving someone. It can be a convenient façade for many personal sins.

Consider the scripture, "*when we see Him we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.*" Talk about corrective change! This describes the ultimate metamorphosis – becoming like Jesus. Do you suppose this is something forced upon us? I submit that this change, just like all changes He wants for our good even now, may be voluntary. It will certainly be welcomed by His children because "*we will see Him as He is.*" When we see Christ, we want to change to be more like Him. The same is true now. When you recognize a truly loving heart behind the words or deeds of corrective discipline, you are drawn to repentance and change.

Now back to the two churches -- I believe that from a prophetic standpoint, the church of Philadelphia represents the group of sincere believers who will be raptured at the Lord's appearing. This is for two reasons. First, He says that He has set before them an open door. Some have said that this is an open door for ministry and missions. Historically, that seems like a good explanation and I personally support that view. However, from a prophetic standpoint, this seems to relate more directly to the 'open door' that is presented just 14 verses later at the beginning of Revelation chapter four which many scholars interpret as representing the rapture. Second, the Lord says specifically that he will keep this group "*from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*" which seems to be a clear reference to the tribulation period.

Laodicea however is rebuked and chastened. The tribulation described in the book of Revelation is both a time of judgment on a Christ-rejecting sin filled world and a chastisement upon His hard hearted Jewish children, many of whom will repent. Some say it may be a 'knocking on the door' for the 'left-behind' of Laodicea as well.

During this time, those who overcome in faith will pay with their lives because they are confident of God's love and will know there is joy set before them in heaven (See Rev 7). Jesus had this overcoming faith in the Father and knew that the chastisement He endured was for a gloriously good purpose. He says to this church, "*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand*

at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." (Rev 3:19-21)

Both churches are distinctly referred to as being loved. However, the word used pertaining to the Philadelphian church is 'agapao' akin to as we say agape love – godly love. 'Agapao' also is used in referring to espousal love and means to welcome, to entertain, to love dearly and to be well pleased which may have particular reference here to the wedding feast of the Lamb.

The word for love used in reference to Laodicea is 'phileo' – the relational love of friendship. You recall that in dealing with Peter on the shore of Galilee after His resurrection, Jesus used both words in his "Do you love me?" inquiries whereas Peter used just 'phileo' in his answers. You might think of it as a love that 'likes' someone as well.

One church is applauded while the other receives chastisement and rebuke. Both are defined as churches. In the Bible this means bodies of believers, not buildings. It is certainly true that many if not most large groups of believers also have those participating in worship who do not know the Lord, but then by scriptural definition they are not part of the church.

I'm personally inclined to believe that Jesus' knocking on the door of the Laodicean church is not necessarily an indication that they are unsaved but rather an encouragement to repent of their

tepid relationship and an invitation to renew fellowship with Him. They have cooled to a lukewarm Christianity leaving Him out. Consequently, the Lord tells them to be zealous (i.e. get hot) and repent. He says they are 'talaiporos' or enduring trial, 'elehinos' or pitiable/miserable, 'ptochos' or a cringing beggar, 'tuphlos' or opaque (by analogy, blind) and 'gumnos' or naked. This is the sad condition of the cooled down Christian, the one whose spiritual life is basically set in cruise control. When Jesus tells them to obtain gold tried in the fire, He may be talking of faith that endures tribulation; when He says to obtain white robes, He may be talking of His righteousness as opposed to their own – they may be looking to Him for salvation AND to their own righteousness for good standing in the church. Without the right robes they're not ready for the wedding – (See Matt 22:11,12); when He says for them to obtain eye salve it's because they are clearly blind to their condition and to His desire for them.

To Christ, it is nauseating because He cares so much. In fact the word translated "shall" used in "shall spue or vomit" in verse 3:16 of this passage is a strengthened form of the word 'melo' meaning 'to care'. Our English word, shall, is rather definitive implying a foregone conclusion whereas the word here in the original language means "to be on the point of doing or suffering something" so it would appear that the Lord is warning them and expressing His deep, deep concern. Whether or not they are 'left behind' as some assert remains to be seen.

In any event, both churches are loved. Both are loved. Jesus says

that Philadelphia is being run down by religious imposters but He loves them deeply with a holy agape love. They are 'dissed' by the religious but doted on by Jesus. They have but a little strength yet the put-downs they endure from the seemingly 'holy' although possibly hurtful are only vain words. Holding on to the real Word of God they receive Christ's encouraging commendation – they are loved. If religious condescension on the part of other perhaps well meaning Christians has hurt your heart, hold on to God's wonderful word. Hold on and know He's holding on to you. He loves you and will never let you go.

Laodicea is loved as well and is thus disciplined. They think they've got it all, health, wealth and hallelujahs so to speak. Maybe they've gotten side tracked on social issues, church programs, spiritual narcissism or living the good life. Though they don't seem to care about Jesus, He cares so deeply for them, it wrenches His gut if you would.

Is He knocking on your door? If you're His child by faith in Jesus Christ, know that He deals correctively with all of us at various times and in various ways. In times of trial, it may seem like the Lord is far away and apathetic. That is simply untrue! The very fact that He loves you so much is why He's sick over your lack of zeal. Don't ever doubt God's immeasurable love for you. Seek Him anew for faith that endures the trials, clean garments of divine righteousness and a new clear vision of your Savior. Remember, He says, "*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.*"

Bringing Down the House Revelation Seven

I wouldn't be surprised if there is a special session in heaven for all of us who have attempted to teach or expound upon the scriptures to set us straight on all the goofs we made. Fortunately, the Lord promised to wipe away all tears – ha! When it comes to discussing prophecy that is as yet unfulfilled, I'm especially leery of making strong stances yet in looking at Revelation, this is mostly the case so I'll try to be conservative with my 'table-pounding'.

The coming Tribulation is going to be the most perilous time the people of this planet have encountered. The stakes are high – eternity is in the balance. The power of deception will be supernatural. Herein, we'll try to shed light upon the topic by continuing our study of this last book in the Bible.

Our last study focused upon chapter six where we noted that the mostly gentile church was already in heaven (see chapter four and five). Safely ensconced to the Lord's presence, the believers observed as four riders proceeded from the heavenly scene to reek havoc on the earth. The chapter ends with the stubbornly rebellious haters of Christ hiding under rocks and crying out, "*Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?*"

Thus, we begin chapter seven. "*After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the*

earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, 'Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.'"

Even though the mostly gentile church is indeed, at this point in the text, departed from the earth, God is always faithful to provide a witness to the truth. Although the entire Tribulation should be viewed as the time of God's judgment and wrath upon a Christ-rejecting world, it can be seen as a three fold progression. The opening of the seals is, as we noted in our last lesson, the wages of sin, a payment of the lien so to speak on the planet. As the last seal is about to be opened, we can consider the next events each announced by a trumpet as a series of severe warnings coming from the throne of heaven; like God proverbially grabbing sinful man by the collar and shaking him. This is apparently very successful for we will later find a huge number of people getting saved.

In any event, at this point, holy angels are about to bring great harm to the earth and sea, but before this wake-up call begins, the servants of the Lord must be sealed. It is very important to note that they are termed servants – they have a service to perform. Why are they sealed? What does this mean?

Consider John 6:27 – Jesus was sealed as the Son of Man, providing us with everlasting life. Look also at

2 Cor 1:22, Eph 1:13 and 4:30 – we have been sealed for salvation. These people are sealed for salvation AND service. Indeed, this seal is most likely the gift of God's Holy Spirit and may be the fulfillment of Romans 9:27. If so, what is the service they perform?

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” Mat 24:14

Mat 24 is widely understood to be speaking of the Tribulation. Now, the church has been given the great commission to spread the gospel and to varying degrees has done so for the last two millennia. This passage, however, is nestled in the midst of Christ's message to the Jews specifically concerning the Tribulation and as such should be kept in its context. Jesus said that during the Tribulation years that the gospel will be preached in all the world. If the church has been raptured to heaven, who will do this?

I believe there are at least two sources of this final witness – in Rev 14:6 we read, *“And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people...”* Somehow, an angelic power will broadcast to the world God's truth.

In addition, I believe there will be a second group of witnesses – saved to serve. Sealed by the Spirit of God, with a holy commission. It is not some aspiring cult or sect of the current 'gentile' church. I'm convinced that it will begin with 144,000 Jewish believers in Christ. In fact, the following verses in our study chapter are very specific –

12,000 are sealed from each of twelve specific tribes of Israel. *“And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed:”*

Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin are specified in order (See Rev 7:5-8) Could God be any more clear? *“Why is Dan left out? Some think it is because Dan is thought to be the tribe of the Antichrist (based on Daniel 11:37 and Jeremiah 8:16); but without doubt, Dan was the tribe which introduced idolatry into the nation of Israel (Genesis 49:17; Judges 18:30)”*—David Gusik

Be that as it may, I believe that this will be both an expression of gratitude – a response to grace – as well as one of repentance. What repentance? Ezekiel the prophet recorded for the Lord concerning the Jewish people, *“And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which you have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I [am] the LORD, says the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.”* (Eze 36:23)

Even now, some of the most fervent believers I know are Jewish. Herein, it appears that they will be highly effective under God's anointing for if we view this whole passage as 'cause and effect', the very next scriptures display the results of this divine sealing -- *“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes,*

with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying:

‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom,

Thanksgiving and honor and power and might,

Be to our God forever and ever. Amen.’

Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?’

And I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’

So he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’”

It is wonderful to note that all of those close to God are in unity of praise – all the angels, the elders and the four living creatures. You know they couldn't do this sincerely if they didn't care. We sometimes think that when our loved ones go home that they are just so enjoying the heavenly scene that they must not give much thought to our state here on earth. This passage shows that those in heaven do indeed care deeply and thus when they behold the wisdom, power and love of God as evidenced in this countless number of people being saved in the middle of the most horrendous judgments, they fall on their faces and praise Him. Heaven, along with us is perhaps learning -- God knows what He's doing!

“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day

and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them.”

What a great promise to these tribulation saints – they will continually be with Father God and in fact, He will dwell in their midst. As a result, *“They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat;”*

The comfort they will be afforded is perhaps in contrast to the miseries they experienced on earth. And like most if not all of us, they will have some adjustments for heaven is quite different than earth – there, the lowliest is the greatest, the Lamb is the Shepherd. The One who died for all knows the way to the fountains of life. *“...for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters.”*

Unlike our day, being a true Christian during the tribulation will be a time of unimaginable extremes – hunger, thirst, suffering, grief and death. No one in their right mind will be offering the opportunity to be saved then by advertising health and wealth or better self esteem. Anointed witnesses will be talking about heaven not heaven on earth. They'll be pointing people to Christ - crucified, risen and returning, not trendy self-helps, social or political agendas. They'll know their time is short, and they'll not waste it. Persecution will be horribly severe and undoubtedly, there will be a great deal of mourning. But when they get home, the Bible says, *“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

You know, for thousands of years now, the Jewish people have

enjoyed God's special attention. They've had great anointings and great disappointings. They've had great strength of character and great failure. They remind me of the life of Samson. They began by way of God's special design, they entered the promised land with supernatural strength. They were seduced by the pleasures of this world and were blinded to their own Savior, Jesus. However, they will finish strong and by returning to their Lord in sincerity, enduring the persecution of believers in a Christ-hating world, and by a supernatural anointing of God's Spirit, they'll bring Satan's house

down so to speak – countless people will come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ – clean escaped from the devil's grasp. And like dear Samson, it will cost them their lives – *“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and [I saw] the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received [his] mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”* Rev 20:4

Hallelujah! May we all finish strong!



But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ

PETER'S REPENTANCE

Taken from “Absolute Surrender” by Andrew Murray

“And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly” (LUKE 22:61, 62).

That was the turning-point in the history of Peter. Christ had said to him: “Thou canst not follow me now.” Peter was not in a fit state to follow Christ, because he had not been brought to an end of himself; he did not know himself, and he therefore could not follow Christ. But when he went out and wept bitterly, then came the great change. Christ previously said to him: “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” Here is the point where Peter was converted from self to Christ.

I thank God for the story of Peter. I do not know a man in the Bible who gives us greater comfort. When we look at his character, so full of failures, and at what Christ made him by the power of the Holy Ghost, there is hope for every one of us. But remember, before Christ could fill Peter with the Holy Spirit and make a new man of him, he had to go out and weep bitterly; he had to be humbled. If we want to understand this, I think there are four points that we must look at. First, let us look at Peter the devoted disciple of Jesus; next, at Peter as he lived the life of self; then at Peter in his repentance; and last, at what Christ made of Peter by the Holy Spirit.

Peter the Devoted Disciple of Christ

Christ called Peter to forsake his nets, and follow Him. Peter did it at once, and he afterward could say rightly to the Lord:

“We have forsaken all and followed thee.”

Peter was a man of absolute surrender; he gave up all to follow Jesus. Peter was also a man of ready obedience. You remember Christ said to him, “Launch out into the deep, and let down the net.” Peter the fisherman knew there were no fish there, for they had been toiling all night and had caught nothing; but he said: “At thy word I will let down the net.” He submitted to the word of Jesus. Further, he was a man of great faith. When he saw Christ walking on the sea, he said: “Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee”; and at the voice of Christ he stepped out of the boat and walked upon the water.

And Peter was a man of spiritual insight. When Christ asked the disciples: “Whom do ye say that I am?” Peter was able to answer: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Christ said: ‘Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.’ And Christ spoke of him as the rock man, and of his having the keys of the kingdom. Peter was a splendid man, a devoted disciple of Jesus, and if he were living nowadays, everyone would say that he was an advanced Christian. And yet how much there was wanting in Peter!

Peter Living the Life of Self

You recollect that just after Christ had said to him: "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven," Christ began to speak about His sufferings, and Peter dared to say: "Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee." Then Christ had to say: "Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

There was Peter in his self-will, trusting his own wisdom, and actually forbidding Christ to go and die. Whence did that come? Peter trusted in himself and his own thoughts about divine things. We see later on, more than once, that among the disciples there was a questioning who should be the greatest, and Peter was one of them, and he thought he had a right to the very first place. He sought his own honor even above the others. It was the life of self strong in Peter. He had left his boats and his nets, but not his old self.

When Christ had spoken to him about His sufferings, and said: "Get thee behind me, Satan," He followed it up by saying: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." No man can follow Him unless he do that. Self must be utterly denied. What does that mean? When Peter denied Christ, we read that he said three times: "I do not know the man"; in other words: "I have nothing to do with Him; He and I are no friends; I deny having any connection with Him." Christ told Peter that he must deny self. Self must be ignored, and its every claim rejected. That is the root of true discipleship; but Peter did not understand it, and could not obey

it. And what happened? When the last night came, Christ said to him:

"Before the cock crow twice thou shalt deny me thrice."

But with what self-confidence Peter said: "Though all should forsake thee, yet will not I. I am ready to go with thee, to prison and to death."

Peter meant it honestly, and Peter really intended to do it; but Peter did not know himself. He did not believe he was as bad as Jesus said he was.

We perhaps think of individual sins that come between us and God, but what are we to do with that self-life which is all unclean, our very nature? What are we to do with that flesh that is entirely under the power of sin? Deliverance from that is what we need. Peter knew it not, and therefore it was that in his self-confidence he went forth and denied his Lord.

Notice how Christ uses that word deny twice. He said to Peter the first time, "Deny self"; He said to Peter the second time, "Thou wilt deny me." It is either of the two. There is no choice for us; we must either deny self or deny Christ. There are two great powers fighting each other — the self-nature in the power of sin, and Christ in the power of God. Either of these must rule within us.

It was self that made the Devil. He was an angel of God, but he wanted to exalt self. He became a Devil in Hell. Self was the cause of the fall of man. Eve wanted something for herself, and so our first parents fell into all the wretchedness of sin. We their children have inherited an awful nature of sin.

Peter's Repentance

Peter denied his Lord thrice, and then the Lord looked upon him; and that look of Jesus broke the heart of Peter, and all at once there opened

up before him the terrible sin that he had committed, the terrible failure that had come, and the depth into which he had fallen, and "Peter went out and wept bitterly."

Oh! who can tell what that repentance must have been? During the following hours of that night, and the next day, when he saw Christ crucified and buried, and the next day, the Sabbath — oh, in what hopeless despair and shame he must have spent that day!

"My Lord is gone, my hope is gone, and I denied my Lord. After that life of love, after that blessed fellowship of three years, I denied my Lord. God have mercy upon me!"

I do not think we can realize into what a depth of humiliation Peter sank then. But that was the turning point and the change; and on the first day of the week Christ was seen of Peter, and in the evening He met him with the others. Later on at the Lake of Galilee He asked him: "Lovest thou me?" until Peter was made sad by the thought that the Lord reminded him of having denied Him thrice; and said in sorrow, but in uprightness:

"Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

Peter Transformed

Now Peter was prepared for deliverance from self, and that is my last thought. You know Christ took him with others to the footstool of the throne, and bade them wait there; and then on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came, and Peter was a changed man. I do not want you to think only of the change in Peter, in that boldness, and that power, and that insight into the Scriptures, and that blessing with which he preached that day. Thank God for that. But there was something for Peter deeper

and better. Peter's whole nature was changed. The work that Christ began in Peter when He looked upon him, was perfected when he was filled with the Holy Ghost.

If you want to see that, read the First Epistle of Peter. You know wherein Peter's failings lay. When he said to Christ, in effect: "Thou never canst suffer; it cannot be" — it showed he had not a conception of what it was to pass through death into life. Christ said: "Deny thyself," and in spite of that he denied his Lord. When Christ warned him: "Thou shalt deny me," and he insisted that he never would, Peter showed how little he understood what there was in himself. But when I read his epistle and hear him say: "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the Spirit of God and of glory resteth upon you," then I say that it is not the old Peter, but that is the very Spirit of Christ breathing and speaking within him.

I read again how he says: "Hereunto ye are called, to suffer, even as Christ suffered." I understand what a change had come over Peter. Instead of denying Christ, he found joy and pleasure in having self denied and crucified and given up to the death. And therefore it is in the Acts we read that, when he was called before the Council, he could boldly say: "We must obey God rather than men," and that he could return with the other disciples and rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ's name.

You remember his self-exaltation; but now he has found out that "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price." Again he tells us to be "subject one

to another, and be clothed with humility.”

Dear friend, I beseech you, look at Peter utterly changed — the self-pleasing, the self-trusting, the self-seeking Peter, full of sin, continually getting into trouble, foolish and impetuous, but now filled with the Spirit and the life of Jesus. Christ had done it for him by the Holy Ghost.

And now, what is my object in having thus very briefly pointed to the story of Peter? That story must be the history of every believer who is really to be made a blessing by God. That story is a prophecy of what everyone can receive from God in Heaven.

Now let us just glance hurriedly at what these lessons teach us.

The first lesson is this — You may be a very earnest, godly, devoted believer, in whom the power of the flesh is yet very strong.

That is a very solemn truth. Peter, before he denied Christ, had cast out devils and had healed the sick; and yet the flesh had power, and the flesh had room in him. Oh, beloved, we want to realize that it is just because there is so much of that self-life in us that the power of God cannot work in us as mightily as God is willing that it should work. Do you realize that the great God is longing to double His blessing, to give tenfold blessing through us? But there is something hindering Him, and that something is a proof of nothing but the self-life. We talk about the pride of Peter, and the impetuosity of Peter, and the self-confidence of Peter. It all rooted in that one word, self. Christ had said, “Deny self,” and Peter had never understood, and never obeyed; and every failing came out of that.

What a solemn thought, and what an urgent plea for us to cry: O God, do discover this to us, that none of us may be living the self-life! It has happened to many a one who had been a Christian for years, who had perhaps occupied a prominent position, that God found him out and taught him to find himself out, and he became utterly ashamed, falling down broken before God. Oh, the bitter shame and sorrow and pain and agony that came to him, until at last he found that there was deliverance! Peter went out and wept bitterly, and there may be many a godly one in whom the power of the flesh still rules.

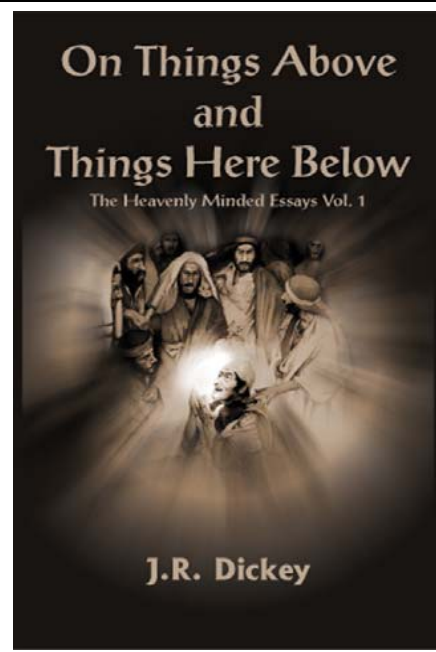
And then my second lesson is — It is the work of our blessed Lord Jesus to discover the power of self.

How was it that Peter, the carnal Peter, self-willed Peter, Peter with the strong self-love, ever became a man of Pentecost and the writer of his epistle? It was because Christ had him in charge, and Christ watched over him, and Christ taught and blessed him. The warnings that Christ had given him were part of the training; and last of all there came that look of love. In His suffering Christ did not forget him, but turned round and looked upon him, and “Peter went out and wept bitterly.” And the Christ who led Peter to Pentecost is waiting today to take charge of every heart that is willing to surrender itself to Him.

Are there not some saying: “Ah! that is the mischief with me; it is always the self-life, and self-comfort, and self-consciousness, and self-pleasing, and self-will; how am I to get rid of it?”

My answer is: It is Christ Jesus who can rid you of it; none else but Christ Jesus can give deliverance from the power of self. And what does He ask you to do? He asks that you should humble yourself before Him.

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