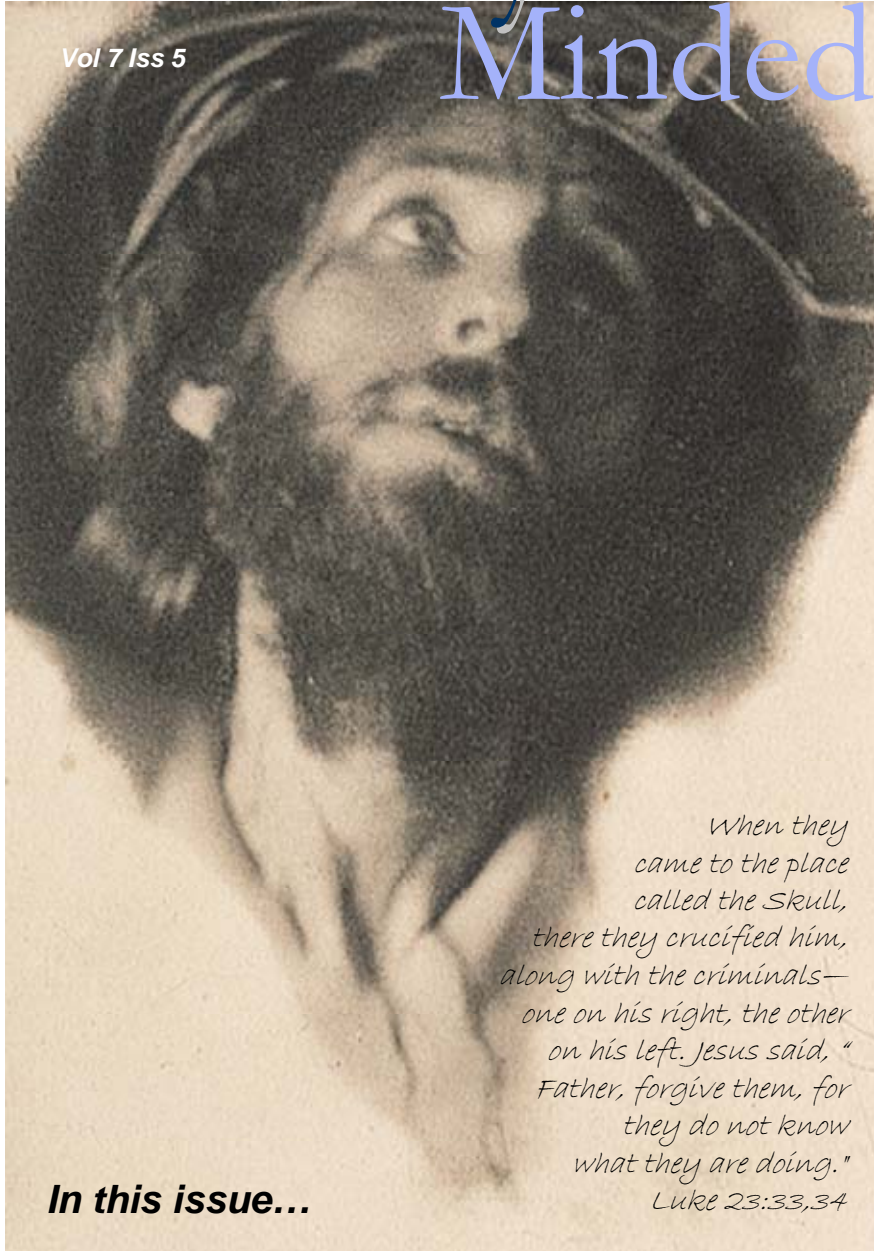


You're of no earthly value unless you're...

Heavenly Minded

Vol 7 Iss 5



*When they
came to the place
called the Skull,
there they crucified him,
along with the criminals—
one on his right, the other
on his left. Jesus said, “
Father, forgive them, for
they do not know
what they are doing.”
Luke 23:33,34*

In this issue...

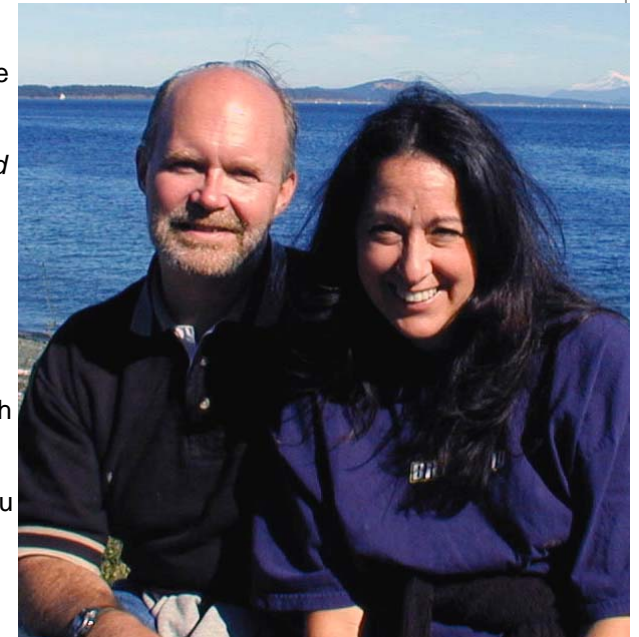
Monster or Messiah Last Days Identity Crisis A Most Magnificent Mission

See www.heavenlyminded.com for this issue and much more!

Dear Friends,

Listening to someone reading from the book of Exodus this morning, we were impressed in particular by this part, “...take for yourself quality spices... and a hin of olive oil. And you shall make from these a holy anointing oil, an ointment compounded according to the art of the perfumer... And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations.’” This perfumed oil was to be used **only** for anointing the articles of the tabernacle and the priests – all beautiful pictures of Christ. Indeed, Jesus is unique and yet when we see Him, we shall be like Him! And even now, IN Him, we have the opportunity to benefit from the same anointing of God’s Spirit. But I need to be reminded that it is **only** by this anointing, this perfectly scented oil that we can live like our Lord, to follow in His footsteps, to be salt and light and to honestly forgive. My ‘old man’ cannot be made to smell any better (just ask my wife!). Our old nature cannot be adequately reformed; it’s dead in Christ. Thus this same passage says that this sweet smelling oil,

*“... shall not be poured
on man’s flesh; nor
shall you make any
other like it...”* As sincere believers we are all in-dwelt by the Spirit. However, may we each seek continually for the fresh sweet expression of God’s Holy Spirit in our lives! And may you all be extraordinarily blessed, encouraged and comforted in Him.



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Cover Artist: FH Day

Monster

OR

Messiah

If there was ever a potion that could turn a man into a monster it is surely unforgiveness. Beginning with the pain of a real or perceived wrong, it unleashes sinful hatred from our fallen natures and foments hideous imaginations in our minds and hearts. It is the front line of an enormous battle in our heart for it seeks to annihilate loving trust in God and inflict an amplified vengeful wound in someone else.

Unforgiveness puts distance so to speak between us and God and without His help, it can stick to our souls like hot tar. I've seen it destroy very godly people, marriages, missionaries, churches...you've seen that too, haven't you. It tests what we believe, what we really believe...

His name was Ahithophel. It means something like, "my kinsman is a fool" or "unsavory relative". He had power and great prestige in the court of David. How he came to such a position is not clear but many scholars attribute the following passages to his relationship with the king:

"Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."

Psa 41:9

"For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng."

Psa 55:12-14

Yes, Ahithophel turned on David. At one point, his counsel had been as if he were the very oracle of God. In listing the most senior members of David's court, the scripture places him very prominently (see 1 Chron 27:33). Few if any enjoyed a greater or more trusting relationship with the king.

But all that went sour. Acidic. You see, Ahithophel was wronged by David. Someone he dearly loved was taken advantage of, and another he cared about was murdered by the king. I understand this to some degree. When someone did that to me, I also was incensed. Hateful, vengeful imaginations played over and over in my own mind. I related to Ahithophel's feelings and some of you may as well. He hated David as passionately, or more so, than he ever loved him. Why?

Bathsheba. Most of you know the story of David's adulterous affair with her, (see 2 Sam 11:2-5) but what you may not have known is that her grandfather was Ahithophel. Eliam, her father, was one of the king's mighty men.(2 Sam 23:34, 2 Sam 15:12) When David forced himself upon her and sent her husband, Uriah, to his death, he didn't just ruin his own life and his own family but he effectively destroyed much of Ahithophel's as well. And his cover up only made things worse.

When he was finally confronted about it by the prophet Nathan, he repented. Perhaps this is when Ahithophel found out the truth or perhaps earlier. Whatever the case, he refused to believe or accept David's repentance and continued to seek revenge. It may be that David never acknowledged his sin to his counselor for Psa 51:4, in recording

his prayer about this to God, says, *"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done [this] evil in thy sight."* Whether that be the case or not, their relationship, once beautiful, became a bitter enmity.

Later, when David's son Absalom fomented a rebellion against him, Ahithophel joined with the would-be king. (2 Sam 15:12) Upon entering the vacated city of Jerusalem, the counselor advised Absalom to have sexual relations with all the concubines of David who had been left behind to care for the house. Not only this, but he was advised to do it in full view of the people of Israel.

Meanwhile Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem; and Ahithophel was with him... Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give advice as to what we should do."

And Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house; and all Israel will hear that you are abhorred by your father. Then the hands of all who are with you will be strong." So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the top of the house, and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

Now the advice of Ahithophel, which he gave in those days, was as if one had inquired at the oracle of God. So was all the advice of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom. (2 Sam 16:15, 20-23)

Can you see how his counsel was intended to hit back at David in the same way his family was hurt? Only note that it was magnified ten fold and done in public. This is the way of the vengeful heart, one that is filled with unforgiveness. 'You hit me once, I'll hit you back ten times!'

But it didn't stop there for such a heart is rarely satisfied. *Moreover Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Now let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue David tonight. I will come upon him while he is weary and weak, and make him afraid. And all the people who are with him will flee, and I will strike only the king. Then I will bring back all the people to you. When all return except the man whom you seek, all the people will be at peace."* (2 Sam 17:1-4) You see, this is why John said that the hateful heart is one full of murder. (See 1 John 3:15)

Now, ultimately, Ahithophel's counsel was not taken, and it so drastically affected him that he road home, set his affairs in order and hanged himself. Can the lesson be any more obvious? Can it be any more poignant? Unforgiveness not only seeks to take vengeance on others but in the end, it kills you as well. The only other person to hang himself in the Bible was Judas Iscariot. It is a traitorous emotion. It will suffocate your soul.

It made Ahithophel a monster.

But the reverse is also true. Crying out for mercy, he shuffled frantically in the deep pit below his hateful brothers. It was no use trying to climb out for they were talking about killing him. He continued to cry but they ignored him. Finally, a rope was let down and he found himself sold as a slave to a caravan of traders headed south.

Years later, after faithfully serving the household of a senior military officer, he was falsely accused of gross misconduct and was put in prison – again in a pit so to speak.

Nevertheless, he faithfully served the other inmates. When the opportunity came and he flirted with vindication, he was left to serve two more years in the pit.

You all know the story of Joseph in Egypt. It may have been 14 – 16 years that he dealt with the harsh consequences of his brothers' betrayal. But then came his exaltation – from pit to Prime Minister in a day. Yet his past was so painful that he praised God for helping him forget it. He even named his first son as a testament to that fact. His life had been a long series of betrayals but through it all he kept his heart humble before God.

Nine years later, he had a chance to 'get even' for some of it. *Now Joseph was governor over the land; and it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him with their faces to the earth. Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he acted as a stranger to them and spoke roughly to them. Then he said to them, "Where do you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan to buy food." So Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him.* (Gen 42:6-8)

Joseph feigned a harshness in order to test the hearts of his brothers but treated them generously. When his brother Judah, some time later finally showed that they were sincerely concerned for the welfare of their father and offered himself as the Prime Minister's slave instead of his little brother Benjamin, "... Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Make everyone go out from

me!" So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; does my father still live?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near. Then he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life." (Gen 45:1-5)

Shortly thereafter, the family was reunited and for seventeen more years they dwelt in the land of Goshen under Joseph's authority and graciousness. Then Jacob, their father, died.

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him." So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, "Before your father died he commanded, saying, 'Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you."' Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we are your servants."

Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this

day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (Gen 50:15-21)

For some 40 years, the older brothers had lived with the guilt of their betrayal. In considering the passage above, several questions arise:

- What was their expectation? They anticipated that with Jacob gone Joseph would reveal his hatred and repay them for the evil they had done to him.
- What was the quality of their repentance? They never express repentance or sorrow of heart but rather a fear of retribution first from God (in an earlier chapter) and then from Joseph.
- What was the nature of their confession? They claimed the request for forgiveness came from Jacob and were quick to position themselves as the servants of the God of Jacob. (Very transparent, huh?)
- What was Joseph's response? He wept.
- What was Joseph's perspective? God. Regardless of their purposes, God had His own and that is what Joseph kept in front of him.
- What was Joseph's counsel? "Do not be afraid." He comforted and spoke kindly to them.
- What was Joseph's promise? "I will take care of you." The opposite of the expected retribution.

Regardless of the brothers' lack of sincere repentance, Joseph had forgiven them long ago because his eyes were on heaven, on the

heavenly Father. He understood, probably after much prayer and weeping, that the betrayals were just the beginning of a glorious plan.

The forgiveness in his heart made Joseph a messiah, a savior to his family and a type of Jesus Christ, our true Messiah who likewise prayed as He hung on the cross, "Father, forgive them..."

The same choice is presented to each of us at some time or another. Monster or messiah – one who destroys or one who delivers. "At last I understood: in the final analysis, forgiveness is an act of faith. By forgiving another, I am trusting that God is a better justice-maker than I am. By forgiving, I release my own right to get even and leave all issues of fairness for God to work out. I leave in God's hands the scales that must balance justice and mercy."- P. Yancy

"We must forgive those who have hurt us because God commands it, because our own forgiveness hinges on it, but also because it is the best thing for us. When we refuse to forgive, the bitterness grows like a cancer within us and it eats away at us, causing stress and illness and great lack of joy. The only therapy for this cancer is the surgery of forgiveness. When we refuse to forgive, we allow the sin that was committed against us to hurt us twice: once when we were first sinned against, and again by keeping us from receiving God's forgiveness. We need to stop the pain and forgive." – M. Wilkins

The Last Days Identity Crisis

Like 'bookends' to His earthly ministry, Jesus' declarations to His disciples in Mat 5 and Mark 16 initiated and punctuated His message to (and mission for) the Church. In this day in which western Christianity is often being confused with economic, political and entertainment/popular values, we would do well to study and understand again what He said in them.

His great declarations in Matthew five are:

You are the salt of the earth.

And...

You are the light of the world.

His great commission in Mark sixteen is:

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

Now, both of these are saying basically the same thing – let's see how...

First, we'll consider salt. The first mention of salt in the scriptures is in what we would most likely deem to be a negative context. In Genesis 14:3 we read of a battle between nine kings that took place in the valley of Siddim which is explained to be the same place that became the **Salt Sea**. This is the Dead Sea. Now the reason the Salt Sea is called the Dead Sea is because it's dead. Nothing lives in it, no fish, no plants, not even bacteria. There's just too high a concentration of salt in the water.

The second mention of salt is also seemingly uninspiring; in Genesis 19:24-26 we read, "*Then the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of*

*the heavens. So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. But his wife looked back behind him, and she became a **pillar of salt.**"*

At this point, you may be thinking, 'Wow, I'm not so sure I like the fact that the Lord said we are the salt of the earth!' But, hang with me.

In the next mention, we learn that every offering to the Lord was to be made with a 'dash of salt'. (Lev 2:13) And in the next, we learn that an eternal covenant was termed a covenant of salt. Later in second Kings, the prophet Elisha healed a spring of poisoned waters by casting in some salt.

Continuing on to the New Testament, Jesus said, "*For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt.*" (Mark 9:49) And "*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.*" (Mat 5:11-13)

Paul wrote, "*Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.*" (Col 4:6)

So having these verses in mind, what did He mean? What was Jesus saying when He asserted that believers are the salt of the world?

First of all, salt in too high a concentration is deadly. In fact, the primary meaning of the Hebrew verb,

to salt, is to tear away or to disperse. Jesus was saying that our purpose is to spread abroad, to disperse, as in "Go into all the world..." You know, the Dead Sea is dead because it has no outlet. Fresh water flows in but has nowhere to go. In like manner, the water of the Word of God or the Spirit of God can flow into the concentrated group of believers but without 'dispersion'...muchas problemas.

Next, why did Lot's wife, while looking back longingly to Sodom become a pillar of salt? Why not carbon or granite? Why sodium chloride? In a previous letter entitled, "Remember", we studied the symbolism of this in some detail. In examining the original language, we found that it could be that she simply vanished. However, whether she became salt or 'thin air', Jesus said, "*Remember Lot's wife.*"

If she became salt, it is still indeed a poignant picture. Christ warned us that the last days would be similar to the days of Lot. Recall, Lot, his wife and two of his daughters were physically taken out of Sodom before its judgment. She however, at the point of calamity, refused to "disperse", to be "torn away". In like manner, Christians today are highly over emphasizing the value of larger and larger 'concentrations' (congregations). In a sense, they are spiritually repeating the folly of Babel.

You recall the story. "*And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.'*" (Gen 11:4) What you may not know is that the word "tower" can also mean "pulpit" and comes from

the word meaning "to grow, become great or important, promote, make powerful". In too many cases, it would seem that as church growth has become our modern 'mantra', the person behind the pulpit is inevitably faced with celebrity rather than servanthood. A pillar of salt is a powerful picture as is a tower of brick. Both illustrate the unwillingness to obey God's command to disperse. Both reflect a rebellious attachment to the world and its values.

Yet on the positive side every offering, every sacrifice was to be made with salt. You see, just as faith without works (i.e. offerings) is dead (James 2:17) so works without faith is valueless and vain (Gal 2:16). Yes, Jesus was also saying, "You are the salt", that is, "You are the faithful".

When the Bible speaks of a covenant of salt, it is referring to its preservative quality. Just as salt rubbed into meat keeps it from rotting, so an everlasting covenant was known as a covenant of salt. In addition, you can consider such a covenant as requiring its parties to remain faithful to it.

As Elisha healed the waters by adding salt, so a faithful person can bring health to a poisonous situation. Proverbs says, "*...a faithful ambassador is health.*"

Finally, it is significant that Jesus prefaced His statement in Matthew five about the faithful being salt by a promise of persecution for in confirmation, the book of Hebrews in its famous "Hall of Faith" Chapter 11, says, "*...Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and*

scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through **faith**,...” (Heb 11:35-39)

Even when Paul says in Colossians, “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with **salt**...” (Col 4:6) we recall that he also wrote, “For by grace you are saved through **faith**...” (Eph 2:8) Yes, as a **believer**, you are the **salt** of the world, the **faithful**.

But Jesus also gave a warning as well:

“But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.” (Mat 5:13)

As a believer, your constant witness – your lifestyle -- is a demonstration of your faith. It preserves, it seasons every situation you are in. If, however, for any reason you cease to be Christ’s salt in this world, if the world influences you more than you influence it, you’re losing your savor, your witness. Christ will never throw you out – but your witness in this world will be good for nothing. Men will cast it aside.

Consequently, to keep our savor so to speak, we must exhibit a faithful life before the world. That includes dispersing.

And next there’s the light. You know, light was the first item on

God’s agenda when He saw that the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. That’s right, top of the list. I suggest the principle this illustrates is that the first thing needed in an empty wiped out situation, be it planet earth or the hearts that inhabit it, is light. Spiritual light. (Psa 18:28)

So when Jesus said, “You are the light of the world.” He implied that we would be introduced into dark environments. Let’s see what else the Bible says about this light:

- In the holy place, the light was always provided by oil, pure olive oil which most of you recognize as a type of the Holy Spirit. (Ex 27:20)
- David declared, “The LORD is my light and my salvation;...” (Psa 27:1) So again, the source of true light is always the Lord.
- The psalmist also said, “The entrance of Thy words gives light;” (Psa 119:130) Entrance here means door and brings to mind that Jesus said, “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved...” (Jn 10:9)
- It is also noted that, “the path of the just is like the shining sun that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.” (Pro 4:18)
- Darkness, the opposite of light is declared to be death’s shadow. (Mat 4:16)
- John began his gospel by saying of Jesus, “In Him was life; and the **life was the light** of men.” (Jn 1:4)
- And Jesus said, “I am the Light of the world; he that follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the **light of life**.” (Jn 8:12)

From these and many other verses, it is clear that light is synonymous with life. But it’s not the existential life you and I are used to. You see, its

attributes are God Himself for John wrote, “...that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” (1 Jn 1:5) Yet at the same time the Word also tells us that, “... God is love.” (1 Jn 4:8) Clearly there is a linkage or perhaps an overlap or most likely, they are all virtually one in the same.

Light...Life...Love. He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. (1 Jn 2:9)

And as with the salt, Jesus gave us a warning concerning this light – “A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.” (Mat 5:14) There are basically two ways for light to be ineffective; first, as stated here, it can be hidden. Love and Life that are not expressed are hidden. Second, it can be absent. This happens when you have no oil. No Spirit of God - no Light; and since the primary fruit of the Spirit is Love – no Love either.

As light is active, we are called to be actively living out the gospel, walking and talking it. The world may not recognize it’s value, yet it’s our loving response to our loving God. Paul put it this way:

- “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” (2 Cor 4:4-6)
- “... grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior,

Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought **life** and immortality to **light** through the **gospel**.” (1 Tim 1:9,10)

So there it is – salt and dispersal or going into all the world as well as light and actively preaching the gospel. This is who we are in Christ. Honestly, you can throw the Dove awards away; tell the Christian Booksellers Association to stop the marketing hype; let us turn away from the seduction of ministerial notoriety and turn toward our servant-savior Jesus.

“... the average Christian in the average church is almost indistinguishable from the rest of society. The fundamental moral and ethical difference that Christ can make in how we live, is missing. When our teens we claim to be saved, get pregnant and do drugs at the same rate as the general teenage population - when the marriages of Christians end in divorce at the same rate as the rest of society - when Christians cheat in business, or lie, steal, and cheat on their spouses at the same statistical level as those who say they are not Christians - something is horribly wrong.”—George Barna,

“Either our lives are counting for good and for God or they are making an impact for evil and the enemy.... The way we live, the things we say the attitudes we entertain, the life style we adopt... are continuously producing either positive or negative results in society.... Our lives, whether we are aware or not either count for God or against Him. There simply is no middle ground.” P Keller

We cannot afford in these last days to have a spiritual identity crisis.

We are salt and light.

A Most Magnificent Mission

Luke 4:18-19

By Jon Courson

If you've been reading leadership or management journals, you know that a real trend in the past several years has been for every organization — whether business or ministry — to issue a Mission Statement, a succinct description of its vision or mission.

We find Jesus' Mission Statement in the first message He preached in Nazareth when He said, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.'
Isaiah 61:1-2

In his excellent work, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah*, Alfred Edersheim makes a strong case that the year Jesus began His public ministry was the Year of Jubilee, a year of celebration and liberation when all debts were cancelled, all slaves set free. If this be the case, Jesus' message would be especially fitting, for He was about to set people free from religious domination as well.

When Jesus read from the Book of Isaiah the prophecy concerning Himself, there were 613 commandments which the Pharisees had determined were

embedded in the Scriptures. Consequently, those who heard His words struggled under a heavy burden of what they were told constituted true religion and holiness. No wonder, then, that they marveled at the gracious words Jesus spoke to them (Luke 4:22).

But as He continued speaking to them of their need for Him, their marvel turned to wrath. 'How dare He give a word of correction to us?' they asked. 'We know Him. He grew up here. This is just Joseph's boy.' Jesus caught these people off guard because quite possibly there were boys in the town who were much better candidates to be Messiah than He. After all, the other boys wore phylacteries — boxes worn on the forehead or around their wrists which contained Deuteronomy 6:8. Jesus, evidently, never did (Matthew 23:5).

Because I like to take my Bible with me wherever I go, phylacteries seem like a good idea. Obviously, the scrolls were too big and bulky to carry about, so phylacteries would seem to be a wonderful way to express the importance of the Word of God. I'm sure I would have spotted the guys wearing their phylacteries faithfully and said, 'There are our leaders, right there.' But that's because I'm a closet Pharisee. I'm impressed with signs of spirituality — phylacteries, prayer shawls, broad borders, and all the rest.

Jesus, however, models something entirely different. As they watched Him grow up, the people in His hometown didn't say of Him, 'Now there's a spiritual young man.'

No, they wanted to kill Him (Luke 4:29). You wouldn't want to kill a man you thought was qualified to be Messiah.

Not only did Jesus not carry a Bible, but He evidently never gave a formal Bible study to His disciples. I look for every opportunity to hold a formal or an informal Bible study. That's what the Pharisees did too. Endlessly. They unrolled the scrolls. They had discussions. They prodded and pontificated. But although Jesus knew the Word better than all of them by the age of 12 (Luke 2:47), His approach to spiritual life and Bible study was entirely different.

And because Jesus was able to move about without a big Bible in hand, impressing people with His knowledge, He was able to do incarnational ministry which was completely non-intimidating — as when He would derive a succinct lesson on spiritual life simply from seeing a man casting seed into a field (Luke 8:5).

I am anything but succinct. I don't make my points quickly. I love to go on and on. Jesus did just the opposite. When Thomas was doubting, Jesus didn't say, 'Let Me give you five reasons why the Resurrection is true, fifteen Old Testament prophecies which shed light on what is happening before you.' No, He simply said, 'Touch My wounds,' (John 20:27).

It's not that He didn't know the prophecies. It's not that He didn't have a grasp on Scripture. But it's as though He had distilled them to the point where the people He cared about could be effectively reached

without being intimidated by His knowledge. His was an incarnational ministry which amazes me.

Nonetheless, I find myself asking, 'Couldn't You have given some Bible studies to Your disciples and recorded them in the Word which we could use as a model for how Scripture is to be taught?' Oh, Jesus did this on one occasion — on the road To Emmaus. But, being that this is the only time such teaching is recorded, it was the singular exception rather than the rule — and even then, it was given to two individuals who were outside of His inner circle of 12.

Not only do we find an absence of recorded Bible study in the Word, but there is not one recorded instance in the New Testament where Jesus prayed with His disciples, not one recorded instance when He gathered His boys around a fire and said, 'Let's spend some time in prayer,' not one time where He said to His disciples, 'It's a great night. Look at the stars above. Let's talk to the Father together.'

Finally, after a year and a half, His disciples said, 'Lord teach us to pray. John does. The Pharisees do.' Indeed the Pharisees did pray in the parking lot, on the street corner, in the marketplace, they loved to give long prayers. I like that. That's spirituality. That's holiness. If I were Jesus, I would have taught on prayer, given seminars on prayer, called special prayer meetings.

But what did Jesus do? In response to His disciples' request

to teach them to pray, He not only repeated the simple prayer He had taught them a year and a half earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, but He shortened it by five words.

Jesus' disciples knew prayer was the foundation of His ministry. Seeing Him slip away before the break of day morning by morning (Isaiah 50), they knew He was a man of passionate prayer. And yet He didn't necessarily pray with them. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, He said, 'You stay here while I go and pray,' (Matthew 26:36).

Why? I suggest it was because, although prayer is a glorious privilege, it can also be very intimidating to people. Whenever I tell the congregation to break into groups for conversational prayer, I can feel the tension which fills the room. Evidently, Jesus was so kind, so gracious, so loving that He would not put that kind of trip on anyone. I like to pray with people — but when was the last time I spent all night alone in prayer? Jesus reversed the entire order. He talked about a prayer closet, about praying in secret, as if to say, 'Forget the outward expression because it intimidates people. They're burdened by your seeming spirituality, but I came to set them free.'

As a result, common people heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37). They were drawn to Him like moths to a flame not because He was well-groomed or well-attired (Isaiah 53:2), but because there was evidently something in His eyes which welcomed them, something

in His voice which warmed them. I'm ashamed to admit that I look for guys who are sharp in appearance as leadership material. The Pharisees did too. The best-dressed men of their day, they came across as very polished and sophisticated. But they also came across as stern and unapproachable.

Not Jesus. So easy was He to be with that for His inaugural miracle, He made wine for a wedding party. History tells us that in Jesus' day, when a baby girl was born into the family, her father would annually make a batch of wine for himself and one for his daughter's marriage celebration. Therefore, if the bride at Cana was fifteen or sixteen, there would have been presented to the happy couple 16 years' worth of wine. But after drinking all 16 years' worth, the wedding party in Cana ran out of wine.

So what did Jesus do? Did He give them a lecture on the danger of overindulgence? Did He make a bottle or two? No, He made 180 gallons (John 2:6). If I were Jesus, I would have kicked off my public ministry with a nice healing miracle, or by bringing someone back from the dead.

Instead, Jesus said, 'Here's a little bride and groom who are embarrassed. I want to help them.' He gave no teaching; He got no glory. He simply provided wine with no strings attached. In fact, in studying His miracles, very rarely do we see Jesus make application to the people He touched or healed or helped. With the exception of a couple occasions, no tract was given out, no teaching given.

'Sell your goods and follow Me,' He said to the rich young ruler,' (Matthew 19:21). But when he couldn't do this, Jesus didn't say, 'Let's get together for coffee and rethink your decision. I want to take you through Ecclesiastes and explain to you the emptiness of riches.' No, He simply let His invitation stand.

I'm intrigued by the Reformers. Reformers are intense, single-minded, committed. Yet the fire in their eyes, and the determination on their faces can cause people to be intimidated, to back away, to feel bad. Reformers can be uptight. Not Jesus. Why? He trusted the Father, that in due time the rich young ruler would see the truth of His words, the depth of His love and come back.

Even when He cleansed the Temple, John makes it clear the scourge Jesus made was a small scourge and that He took care to protect the doves (2:15-16). There's never any panic or frenzy seen in Jesus. Rather, He moved with serenity, certainty, tranquility.

As a result, although He was referred to as a glutton, a winebibber, and the friend of sinners, no one ever accused Him of being too busy. 'Master, all men seek for You in Capernaum. That's the hot spot of the northern region, the epicenter of the area outside of Jerusalem. What an invitation!' But what did Jesus say? 'For this reason came I forth,' — not from heaven but from His morning prayer time — 'to go to a little un-walled village to talk to the villagers there. And that will about do it for today,' (Mark 1:38).

Jesus cared about one thing: His Father's will.

That's all. That is how He was able to move around with serenity, focus, and a complete lack of busyness. 'My burden is easy and My load is light,' He said (Matthew 11:30). And He lived this out in such a way that no one ever once suggested or implied He was busy.

Jesus truly breaks the mold of what we perceive holiness and spirituality to be. Although we think this is seen in the fact that He hung around publicans and sinners, I believe it is seen more clearly in the fact that He dined with Pharisees. To be sure, He spoke harshly to the Pharisees because He knew that's what it would take to get through to those about whom He genuinely cared. But when they invited Him to their gatherings, He went.

You see, at the home of Simon, Jesus ministered to the Pharisee and prostitute alike (Luke 7:36-39). We understand so little of this. How easy it is for church congregations to say, 'We want more young people. What can we do to be more youthful and vibrant?' Or, 'We need some tithers. How can we appeal to the older set?' Or, 'We want hippies. We want to do the Jesus Movement thing.' Or, 'We want to reach yuppies. That's what is current.' Or, 'We want to be interracial. We want our Fellowship to be one about which visitors say, 'Wow, the people in your church are varied and cool.'

Jesus was completely not interested in this. Pharisee, prostitute, woman, man, old, young

— He loved anyone and everyone the Father sent His way.

‘Master, we saw Your disciples picking wheat on the Sabbath Day. This ought not be,’ (Matthew 12:2-4). ‘Have you not read of David stealing the showbread from the Temple in order to feed his men?’ Jesus asked, as if to say, **‘There are laws and there is love. But when love and the law collide, love always has precedence.’**

A mother in one of our services was called to the nursery to take care of her baby. But because she forgot to take her nursery identification with her, the nursery staff understandably wouldn’t let her have her baby. ‘I’ll get my card,’ she said. But when she returned to the amphitheatre to get it, she was stopped by the deacons who were doing their job to keep disturbances at a minimum. So she was stuck. Everyone was doing his job. Everyone was following the rules, but a woman was crushed in the process.

I like rules, parameters. I like everything in place. But Jesus said, ‘There’s something a whole bunch more important than rules. It’s people.’

Jesus dealt with the woman at the well without ever directly dealing with the issue of her living with a man who was not her husband. If I were Jesus, I would have made sure she understood the importance of getting out of that relationship, of making things right. But in recording the story, the Holy Spirit seems to say to any who question this, ‘That’s none of your business. You don’t need to know

whether Jesus dealt directly with that issue or not.’

Could this be because, knowing this woman had had five husbands and was living with a man to whom she was not married, she would have obviously been branded as an immoral woman whose only option to survive financially was through prostitution? Could it be that Jesus was saying, ‘What the religious are concerned about, I’m not all that concerned about. And what the religious aren’t concerned about, namely love, concerns me to the utmost’?

‘I am anointed to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, to give sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are bruised,’ Jesus said in the most magnificent Mission Statement ever conceived. And He fulfilled it perfectly, exquisitely, completely.

Jesus blows apart every idea I have about spirituality and ministry. And in so doing He sets us all free from the burdens and baggage of grumpiness and condemnation, of fear and intimidation.

Revisit Jesus — this laid-back Lover of people Whose intensity was private and personal, Who didn’t put pressure on people.

Re-acquaint yourself with the Friend of sinners, the Man Who spoke gracious words continually, Who healed unconditionally, Who loved sacrificially — for although He is unrecognized by most religious people, He alone defines true holiness.

