

PARABLES

Bringing Hidden Things to Light



Psalms 78:2-4

I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter dark sayings of old... We will not conceal them.

Parables Bookshelf - Series 1.14.4

This newsletter concludes the book titled "*The Way of the Disciple*."

One purpose in writing this book is to encourage the saints to expect hardship and suffering in life. Too many Christians today view suffering as abnormal. To use the words of Peter, they "think it strange" when their lives are filled with fiery trials.

Yahweh's desire is to bring many sons to maturity in this age that they might receive promotion, glory, and honor in the ages to come. If we are to be readied for that promotion, we must experience hardship at

this time.

The apostle Paul sought to encourage the young man Timothy to have a proper mindset regarding difficulty and suffering. He wrote to Timothy the following words.

II Timothy 2:3

Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Yahshua.

II Timothy 4:5

But you, be sober in all things, ***endure hardship***, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Even as Paul sought to encourage Timothy, so too is Christ encouraging His people to endure hardship in this hour. We must look to those things to come. If we believe this life is all there is, we will certainly become despondent when we find that our life is hard and filled with sorrows and difficulties.

This life is passing quickly. Soon all weeping, mourning, and pain, sorrows and tears will be at an end. Then will come joy unspeakable forevermore.

Let us hold fast and not be discouraged. Yahweh knows what He is about.

Food for Thought

"We must feel toward our people as a father toward his children; yea, the most tender love of a mother must not surpass ours. We must even travail in birth, till Christ be formed in them. They should see that we care for no outward thing, neither liberty, nor honor, nor life, in comparison to their salvation... When the people see that you truly love them, they will hear anything from you.." Richard Baxter

Scripture Memory

Jude 24-25

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Parables Newsletter

- Series 1.14.4
- *The Way of the Disciple*
- Chapters 9-11

The Way of the Disciple

The God Who Wounds

Note: I am writing this from the hospital. Following a doctor's appointment Monday, the doctor brought me back into the hospital due to infection around the site of the compound fracture I recently sustained. He needed to cleanse the area and cut away all of the dead skin. Wednesday I was taken back to the operating room and the procedure was repeated again.

The doctor told me that such actions are common for people who have sustained this type of injury. He sounded confident that the area

“Was it the Father who wounded me?”

would heal up well, but that infection would have to be guarded against. He mentioned that there is a possibility that a skin graft will be

needed at the site of the wound if it does not close up by itself. I appreciate your prayers regarding this matter.

I would also share a note that I received from a brother in Christ who had read the chapter that mentioned the apostle Paul being shipwrecked three times. This brother accurately pointed out to me that when Paul wrote to the Corinthians about having been shipwrecked three times, he was on his third missionary journey and was residing in Philippi. This was prior to Paul being taken captive as a prisoner and shipped off to Rome. Therefore, Paul actually experienced shipwreck a total of four times in his life.

The God Who Wounds

Hosea 6:1-2

“Come, let us return to Yahweh. For He has

torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us. He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day that we may live before Him.”

I write these words from a hospital bed. My left leg is wrapped from the knee down to the toes. It is propped up on two pillows in the bed that has become my narrow sphere of activity. I have an IV line in one arm, and my crutches are leaning against the end of the bed should I need to get up. My left leg now bears numerous external scars, and internally has titanium plates and screws attached to the bones.

The question arises, “Was it the Father who wounded me? Was it the Shepherd of my soul that led me to this experience of suffering?” It is hard for many Christians to confess that the Father would inflict experiences of suffering upon anyone, much less His own children. I often hear Christians speak of some injury inflicted upon themselves, or others, with expressions such as “God **allowed** this to happen,” or “God did not cause this suffering, but He **permitted** it.”

Why do we have such reticence in stating frankly that God is the One who inflicts injury, or subjects a person, to suffering? The answer, I believe, has much to do with mankind viewing suffering as evil. Logic leads the natural mind to conclude that only an evil being would inflict suffering on another person. It has been my goal in this series of writings to set forth a different view of suffering. Suffering, rather than being evil, is necessary for the development of God's sons and daughters. The role of suffering in bringing mankind to spiritual maturity is revealed in a number of Scriptures that speak of the suffering of Christ.

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Hebrews 2:10

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, **to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.**

Hebrews 5:7-9

In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, **though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.** And **having been perfected,** He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him...

The Greek word translated as “perfect” and “perfected” in these verses is “teleios.” It means

Christ was perfected through suffering...

“To bring to maturity. To make whole, entire, and lacking in nothing.” It is the will of God the Father that He have many sons (both male and

female) who will attain to spiritual maturity. Christ was the forerunner. He was perfected through suffering, and this is the manner in which all sons must be brought to that full maturity Yahweh desires for His saints.

Ephesians 4:13

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.

From the time of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, Yahweh revealed that suffering would

play a key role in bringing forth sons in the image and likeness of God. In Yahweh’s words to the woman we find a profound parable revealing suffering’s role in producing sons that are pleasing to God.

Genesis 3:16

To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you shall bring forth children; Yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

Much has been written and taught about this passage, but few have understood the spiritual parable contained in it. Adam is a type and shadow of the Last Adam, who is Christ.

I Corinthians 15:45-47

So also it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual.

Eve is also given as a type and shadow of Christ’s bride, the church.

Ephesians 5:31-32

For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

When God spoke to Eve in the Garden, He was revealing spiritual truth relating to the church. It is Yahweh’s desire that He have many sons in His image. Through the natural experience of the woman He has revealed that these sons can only be produced through experiences of pain.

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Yahweh, in His infinite wisdom and love, has determined this. Notice that He declared to Eve, “**I** will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth.” It is Yahweh who is the initiator of this pain.

Despite the suffering and pain associated with natural childbirth, billions of women have survived it and have brought forth offspring. Similarly, the church can only bring forth mature sons through experiences of pain...

The church can only bring forth mature sons through experiences of pain...

The church must accept this suffering as the will of Christ. This is what is indicated in the words:

“Yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

Christ is the husband to the church. He is Lord, and rightfully must rule over the individual members of the church. In His role as Lord, Yahshua has revealed to all who would follow after Him that they must experience suffering. He has invited men and women to “take up your cross and follow Me.” Despite the fact that Christ would lead men and women into experiences of suffering, there are those whose “desire” is for Christ, and they willingly submit to Him ruling over them.

We previously looked at a Scripture passage where Christ compared the sufferings of His disciples to a woman in the pains of childbirth. This is an apt analogy. Yahweh does everything with great design and purpose. The suffering of the woman in childbirth was given to reveal a profound kingdom truth. Mature (perfected) sons can only be produced through suffering.

I Peter 5:10

And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

It is appointed to you and I to “suffer for a little while.” Our sufferings may seem terrible and unending, but in God’s sight they are but a moment. Soon they will be forgotten. Christ will wipe away every tear from the eyes of His holy ones, and sorrow and suffering will be no more. The apostle Paul saw these present experiences of suffering from God’s perspective. Paul freely admitted that if this present life were all there is that Christ’s disciples would be among all men the most to be pitied. At the same time, Paul saw beyond these present experiences. Yahweh had given Paul visions of things to come. With the future ages in view Paul wrote:

Romans 8:18-23

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

Paul continued the analogy of childbirth. He acknowledged the role of pain and suffering in this process. Paul begins this passage by speaking of the “sufferings of this present time,” and

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he ends by speaking of groaning and suffering.

Quite often when thinking about the “sufferings of Christ” we think only about persecution. I have already touched on this aspect of the sufferings of Christ. In the passage above Paul reveals that the sufferings Yahweh subjects His sons to includes suffering that is common to the entire creation. Sickness and injury are forms of suffering we find everywhere throughout the earth. Yahweh will use these also to bring His people to perfection. Let us look at two verses that affirm this truth of Yahweh being the originator of the suffering of the saints.

Micah 4:6-7

"In that day," declares Yahweh, "I will assemble the lame and gather the outcasts, **even those whom I have afflicted**. I will make the lame a remnant and the outcasts a strong nation, and Yahweh will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on and forever."

The highlighted portion of this passage states plainly that Yahweh is intentionally, deliberately, and with great purpose, choosing to afflict those called to be overcomers in Christ. The ways in which Yahweh will afflict a man or woman are varied. The apostle Paul was given to the body of Christ as an example of a man who was brought to spiritual maturity through suffering. I have previously cited Scriptures where Paul spoke of being stoned, beaten, whipped, chained and imprisoned. Paul also suffered the experience of being shipwrecked. Storms are a natural part of the suffering the creation has been subjected unto. God does not spare His sons and daughters from passing through storms, but He has promised to walk with us through them. Yahweh sustained Paul through repeated shipwrecks.

Paul also experienced another type of natural suffering: sickness. Paul had a severe affliction of his eyes that left him nearly blind. This affliction was evidently something that marred his appearance, for Paul described it as a trial to those who observed him in this state.

Galatians 4:13-15

But you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Yahshua Himself. Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness, that if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.

Did Paul have some loathsome condition, something difficult to look at? I believe it is very possible, for that affliction God sent to Paul was intended to keep him humble. That which keeps us humble is humiliating. Paul had been used of God to heal myriads of people, but he could not heal himself. Three times Paul requested that Yahweh remove this affliction from him, but God would not do so.

II Corinthians 12:7-10

And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me - to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will

*Sickness and injury
are forms of
suffering...*

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

A thorn in the flesh is another way of saying “a bodily affliction.” Yahweh afflicts the bodies of His sons and daughters in many ways. I was born with Osteogenesis Imperfecta, commonly called “Brittle Bone Disease.” I am laid up in a hospital bed at this moment with multiple fractures to my left leg. I experienced my first fracture at the age of seven when I broke my

*I confess that He
causes me to suffer.*

thumb. Soon thereafter I broke my right leg twice, my left leg once, my right elbow twice and my left elbow once, and fractured ribs. All of this

occurred by the time I turned 15. In my adult years I broke my right ankle while in my thirties, experiencing a partial tear to the anterior cruciate ligament in the right knee at the same time. I have dislocated my shoulders numerous times, and now I have sustained several fractures to my lower left leg.

Even as a child I understood that it was ultimately God who determined my afflictions. When I was around ten or twelve years old and had just experienced another fracture, I remember asking my Dad why God chose for me to suffer these things. I have learned much about the purpose of suffering in the years since then. I still perceive the hand of God in the things I suffer. I do not merely say that He permits me to suffer. I confess that He **causes** me to suffer. Yet, I also understand that a God of love will only afflict His children with good intent. There is no evil judgment, or censure of God, when I say that He causes me to suffer.

Some Christians attribute all suffering to Satan. Paul himself spoke of his affliction as being “a messenger of Satan.” The Scriptures reveal that Satan’s access to the Christian is restricted. He can only do that which God grants him permission to do. In the Gospels Christ tells Peter that Satan had demanded permission to sift Peter as wheat (Luke 22:31). Had Christ not granted permission to Satan, he could not have come against Peter. We see the same truth revealed in the book of Job. Satan could only touch Job’s life insofar as Yahweh permitted.

Job 1:12

Then Yahweh said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him."

Job 2:6

So Yahweh said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life."

There is a magnificent promise found in the New Testament whereby God assures Christians that their trials and tests will always be measured to them with great care. Yahweh has promised that no child of His will ever face a trial, or temptation greater than their ability to walk victoriously through it. I have often found great consolation in this verse that I memorized in my youth.

I Corinthians 10:13

For no temptation (no trial regarded as enticing to sin), [no matter how it comes or where it leads] has overtaken you and laid hold on you that is not common to man [that is, no temptation or trial has come to you that is beyond human resistance and that is not adjusted and adapted and belonging to human experience, and such as man can bear]. But God is faithful

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[to His Word and to His compassionate nature], and He [can be trusted] not to let you be tempted and tried and assayed beyond your ability and strength of resistance and power to endure, but with the temptation He will [always] also provide the way out (the means of escape to a landing place), that you may be capable and strong and powerful to bear up under it patiently.

[Amplified Bible]

There are times when it certainly feels like we are being tested beyond our ability to bear. It is at such times that Yahweh stretches us, inducing us to force our roots deeper into the life of Christ, to find a greater place of abiding in Him. We must be pressed to our limits at times that we might grow stronger spiritually. Our Father will never permit us to face any temptation, or experience of suffering, that is greater than our ability to patiently bear it if we will avail ourselves of the grace made freely available to us. When Paul entreated Yahweh to deliver him from the affliction he was suffering, the Father's answer was "My grace is sufficient for you." Yahweh's grace is always sufficient. Nothing can separate us from His love.

There have been times recently when my soul was weary of dealing with bodily affliction. At such times we are tempted to voice some complaint to God. We need to resist the temptation to grumble, murmur, or find fault with what Yahweh chooses for us. Grace is always present to enable us to rest in God and to trust Him in the time of suffering.

I have found it helpful to not allow my mind to dwell on the entirety of the experience before me. It may be months before my body is healed from my present injury. The thought of enduring week after week of bodily affliction can be overwhelming. At such times, the words of

Christ prove to be of great value.

Matthew 6:34

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

It is enough to live one day at a time. Yahweh's grace is sufficient for each day, being perfectly matched to those experiences of suffering He chooses for the perfecting of His sons and daughters.

Before I end this chapter, a word needs to be shared concerning discerning the various reasons for suffering. There are certainly times when Yahweh will remove an affliction if we ask Him to. There are times when Yahweh would have us to stand against a demonic attack. Additionally, some sickness comes in order to demonstrate the glory of God as He brings supernatural healing. The people of God should always seek to know the Father's mind concerning those experiences they are passing through. It was well that Paul sought God concerning his affliction. It was also good that Paul accepted the Father's will when Yahweh revealed the reason for the thorn in his flesh.

It is beyond the scope of this writing to discuss all the reasons afflictions come into the life of a Christian, and to know when the suffering is to be resisted as an attack of the adversary and when it is to be accepted as the will of God. Suffice it to say that the saint should always seek to know the mind and will of the Father. Yahweh has given His Spirit to indwell us that we might know His thoughts, and gain an understanding of His

We need to resist the temptation to grumble, murmur, or find fault ...

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will.

A great deal of suffering comes into the life of the Christian due to their own disobedience. I have suffered much in my life because of sin. I

He wounds, and He heals.

*He tears us, and He
bandages us.*

have been slow to subdue the appetites of my flesh. In my body I have suffered ill health due to being overweight and eating things that were not

health promoting. The saint should always seek to discern whether his/her experiences of suffering are due to some disobedience in their life. Only by identifying the disobedience can repentance and healing come.

Some have gone too far down this path and have suggested that all sickness and injury is the result of disobedience. Others respond to all sickness and injury as if it were an attack of Satan and they immediately begin rebuking the devil. There are also those who are too complacent in accepting all injury and suffering as being the will of God. In all things we need the mind of Christ. We are called to walk by the Spirit. Let us press in to know His mind regarding the experiences of our lives. We have a loving Father, and He will not leave us without direction.

What the Scriptures do reveal is that Yahweh does afflict His people. He wounds, and He heals. He tears us, and He bandages us. There is an afflicted path that leads to life. Yahweh's Spirit will guide all faithfully down that path who will yield their lives to follow in the steps of Christ.

II Corinthians 4:17

For momentary, light affliction is producing for

us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison...

Suffering's Role in Spiritual Growth

There is a very important, and little understood principle, to be addressed in this chapter. The principle can be summarized as the following:

The strength of the natural man must be broken in order for a spiritual creation born of the seed of Christ to be revealed in us.

Whenever a man is strong in a natural sense, the development of the spiritual man is inhibited. I would include here an excerpt from a previous writing titled *The Shattered People* that speaks of this principle.

All of us are like the seed of an oak, or even the seed of a grain of wheat. The life within the seed is there with all of the potential to grow into the pattern of that which it came from. Yet the outer shell restricts this life from coming forth. Even as a seed must fall into the ground and die, being subjected to freezing, flood, heat and pressure, resulting in the outer shell being broken open, so too must the lives of the saints be subjected to great stress in order for the life of Christ to be revealed. Christ Yahshua said we had but two options: we can fall on the Rock and be broken to pieces, or the Rock can fall on us and scatter us like dust (Matthew 21:44).

Recently, the Spirit revealed this truth of the necessity for brokenness in a most poignant way. I know of a man in his sixties who has been a child of God nearly forty years. There was much hardness in this man's life, and the

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outer shell of his natural man greatly constricted the flow of the Spirit within him. He was prone to speak very cutting and hard words to members of his family, wounding many of them.

About a year ago this man had to undergo major surgery, and he nearly died. After his surgery he was left in a very weakened state physically, mentally, and emotionally. His natural strength was abated. In his weakened condition the Spirit was able to move in his life and to express qualities of meekness, gentleness, humility and love. In his vulnerability and weakness he expressed many words of regret about his past hardness, and the failures of his life. He called up family members, and with tears he spoke of his regret over his hardness, and he asked forgiveness of those whom he had hurt.

Over time this man's strength began to return, and as it has the former hardness that was a characteristic of his natural man has also returned. He has returned to speaking hard and injurious words to those around him. As I contemplated this I saw clearly why the Spirit must bring all of God's children to places of brokenness. We all "have this treasure in earthen vessels," even the very life and Spirit of Christ. Yet this life will be as a bottle of precious and costly perfume that has never been opened if we protect it and do not allow it to be shattered. The scriptures give us a beautiful picture of this.

Mark 14:3

While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head.

John 12:3

*Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; **and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.***

Alabaster is a white, marble-like mineral that people used to store ointments in. While the alabaster vial remains sealed and unbroken, the contents are completely hidden, closed off from the world. When Mary broke her alabaster vial we are told that "the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." If we want our environment to be filled with the fragrance of Christ, then we too must be broken vessels.

[End Excerpt]

I recently received correspondence from another saint who has embraced a surrendered life in recent years. She was directed by the Spirit of Christ to make many radical changes to her life, and they have proven costly. Where she formerly had financial security and a settled life, she now has to look to Yahweh daily for her provision and she has moved about from place to place. Eventually the Spirit led her to move back to her hometown where her parents and family live.

The strength of the natural man must be broken ...

In moving back this sister encountered much censure and criticism from family members who are Christians, but who have not come to the same degree of surrender to be directed by the Holy Spirit. As is the case with most Christians who are led by their soul, her family members led comfortable and outwardly successful lives. When these ones viewed her life, they saw the recent changes as being negative. She was

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reproached as one who is deceived, deluded, or has taken a wrong turn in life. Yahweh used the criticism and judgments of others to teach her meekness, gentleness, forgiveness and longsuffering. Rather than defend herself, she chose to bear the offenses patiently.

Many of these offenses came from her father. He expressed his concern to his daughter that she was in much error, making known his disapproval of her decisions, and the lack of wisdom in the course she had now embraced. Rather than commending her for taking up her cross to follow

The natural strengths of man are very often a hindrance to the release of the Spirit ...

Christ, she was subjected to judgments that she was less spiritual than other members of the family. These criticisms hurt, for this woman loved her father and desired to have a close and loving relationship with him.

About a year ago this woman's father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, or a similar form of advanced dementia. His mental decline was very rapid and he was soon wandering off and getting lost. His mind was reduced in its capacity to reason, to argue, and to determine his own way through this life. At the same time that his mental powers were in decline a transformation began to take place in the way he related to others. The former criticism that had marked his relationship with his daughter was replaced with a spirit of love and appreciation. A sweet, simple love exuded from his innermost being as he daily interacted with her. This man remained full of love until his death some months later.

What occurred in both of these examples I have listed is that the inner nature of Christ began to be revealed through individuals whose natural powers had formerly remained unbroken. As

the strength of the Adamic man was weakened, the inner life of Christ was able to come forth free of those restraints that had formerly bound it up.

The truth revealed in these things, and corroborated by the testimony of Scripture, is that the natural strengths of man are very often a hindrance to the release of the Spirit within our beings. It is necessary for every man to enter into a weak condition in a natural sense in order for the power of Christ's divine life to be revealed in and through them. The apostle Paul makes this very argument.

II Corinthians 12:7-10

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me - to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

People of God, consider how contradictory the attitude of Paul is with that manifested by the world and the church today. Paul said, "I will rather boast about my weaknesses." What do men boast about today? Do they not boast about their strengths? Yet, it is these very strengths that hinder growth in conformity to Christ.

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Consider some of the many things men identify as their strengths today. The ability to earn a prodigious amount of money is one of man's chief strengths. Having wealth accumulated, much property, investments, and money in the bank gives a man a sense of power and achievement. Some men boast about their intellect. They may have excelled in college, or earned advanced degrees; They may be highly knowledgeable in certain fields of endeavor, or have a great capacity to reason logically, and this gives them a sense of empowerment. Other men are strong physically. They have an athleticism that gives them a sense of invulnerability, of endless strength to accomplish whatever they set their minds to do.

In every such instance where a man comes to rely in, and operate from, a position of natural strength, there always exists the potential of conflict with the spirit. When a man has found that his natural strengths have carried him far in life, he very often will judge that these same natural strengths will bring him equal success in the kingdom of God. This is great error. Whenever Yahweh sets forth to accomplish anything, it must be by the following principle:

Zechariah 4:6

“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says Yahweh of hosts.

Truly, “It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing.” Among the last recorded words of Christ to His disciples before He ascended are the following:

Acts 1:8

“But ***you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you***; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remot-

est part of the earth.”

Some who heard these words might have wondered, “What is wrong with the power we already have? Are not our wealth, our physical strength, and our mental powers of the soul adequate? Cannot we look to our natural strengths as we labor to be Christ's witnesses?”

The church is seeking to manifest an image of power...

It was certainly the pattern of the Jews in that day to carry forth all their religious duties through the power of the natural man, for the Spirit had not yet been given.

Sadly, even after the Spirit has been given, a majority of Christians continue to operate on the basis of a soulish power. Much service to God is performed in the power of the natural man. The soul of man is guiding and directing, and the natural powers of man that are looked to in order to accomplish every task. The results are predictable.

Men who operate out of their natural strength will fall short of the mind and will of the Father. Man's ways are not God's ways. Look at the focus the church has placed upon prosperity, wealth, and worldly success today and it is evident that the soul of man is guiding. The church is seeking to manifest an image of power, success and strength to the world. The church seeks to meet the world head on from a position of strength, yet the Son of God came in much weakness.

When men are strong in natural things, they are weak in spiritual things. This is why we find so few great people on this earth embracing the meek and lowly walk of a disciple of Christ.

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I Corinthians 1:26-29

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God.

I have observed in my own life that natural strength does not promote spiritual growth. In those seasons of my life when I was earning a good salary and had much money to spend, my tendency was to make decisions for myself. I felt empowered

Physical strength would have engendered in me a carelessness about spiritual things.

by my success, and the result was a spiritual malaise. Rather than drawing closer to God, I found that I was pressing in less to His presence.

Yahweh knows our tendency to forget Him when we are full and experiencing abundance. Therefore, He will lead His willing people through wilderness places where the abundance is gone.

Hosea 13:5-6

I cared for you in the wilderness, in the land of drought. As they had their pasture, they became satisfied, and being satisfied, their heart became proud; Therefore they forgot Me.

If I had been a physically strong man, I am confident that this too would have been a great hindrance to my spiritual growth. Physical strength would have engendered in me a carelessness

about spiritual things. Yahweh in His wisdom and mercy permitted me to be born with brittle bones. From the time of my childhood I was more easily injured than other children. I was not athletic, and this natural weakness caused me to adopt a more humble attitude toward those around me than I would have had otherwise.

One of the greatest areas of natural strength men must overcome is the power of their mind. Men are naturally prone to rely heavily upon their own ability to reason as they pursue a course through this world. As Christians, such reliance upon natural reason will stymie spiritual growth. Christians, even after they have been born of the Spirit of Christ, still retain the ability, and tendency, to think as natural men. This tendency to operate from a natural wisdom must be cast down.

I Corinthians 3:18-19

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God.

What does Paul mean when he says we “must become foolish”? The natural man esteems things that God does not. Look at the world around you. Look at what is promoted on television and in all forms of media. A pursuit of material abundance is one of the chief tenets of worldly wisdom. Try to get as much of this world as you can. Seek a comfortable life. Enjoy as much pleasure as possible. Pursue popularity. Live large. Be filled and happy. This is the wisdom of the world. Yet the wisdom of Christ speaks in this way:

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Luke 6:20-26

And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way."

The wisdom of God esteems that which the natural man despises. The natural man seeks to walk in strength. The spiritual man boasts in his weakness, for then the power of Christ can be revealed in him. There are a multitude of ways in which Yahweh can bring His sons and daughters to experience this necessary sense of weakness. In the passage we previously looked at from the apostle Paul, he was writing about a thorn in the flesh. This thorn was some type of physical affliction that was very humbling. Yet, Paul acknowledged that there were other things Yahweh brought into his life, and ours, to produce in us this same sense of natural weakness so that we would look to the power of Yahweh to sustain us.

"Therefore I am well content **with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties**, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Has Yahweh brought you to a place where you are insulted and reproached? Does this not cause you to perceive your vulnerable position in this world? Those who are popular feel empowered by their popularity, yet those who are insulted are weak by comparison.

Have you been brought to experience various distresses? Perhaps you have distressing circumstances in your finances. Maybe the distress is in learning of some serious medical problem you are facing. Whatever the experience, distresses come into our lives to help break down the natural man so that the life of Christ can be revealed in us.

Are you persecuted for your obedience to Christ? It is certainly difficult to find that the Christian religious system holds you in contempt, or has declared you to be deluded and a heretic. When ministers close the doors of their churches in your face, and you find you have no place among

Our possessions give us a sense of security, of strength.

them, there is a sense of being alone in this world. This isolation drives us closer to our heavenly Father. The same is true when we face persecution from the world, from governments, and the courts of the land.

Paul said he had learned to be content with *difficulties*. All disciples of Christ will be led into difficulties. Yahshua said that there is an afflicted path that leads to life. His invitation is to take up your cross and follow Him. All of these experiences are designed to provide us with a favorable environment for spiritual growth. We grow best when our lives are difficult.

The Way of the Disciple

Consider now why Christ told those who would be His disciples that they must give up all they possess. Our possessions give us a sense of security, of strength. How many people wrap their homes, cars, and possessions around themselves as a security blanket? These worldly possessions enable them to feel comfortable and protected. Yet, what man needs to grow

Christ will ALWAYS lead His disciples to experience much weakness in this life.

spiritually is a sense of his vulnerability in this world. When we are weak we look to God constantly.

When we are weak we are cognizant of our need for God to come through for us each and every day, lest we be overcome and perish. When we are weak we look to God to perform that which we cannot accomplish in our natural strength. When we are weak we trust in God's thoughts more than our own. Therefore, God chooses for His children to experience much weakness in this world.

When a man or woman comes to Christ they must lay aside the natural order of their former life. Whereas they previously sought to live life from a position of strength, they must now embrace weakness. Rather than relying upon their natural abilities to carry them through life, they must now look to the Spirit of Christ to direct their steps and empower them for every task.

Because natural strength is such a detriment to spiritual growth, Christ will ALWAYS lead His disciples to experience much weakness in this life. We often read or hear about in the news of some young person who has had much fame and fortune at an early age. These ones have been overcome by their natural appetites and sinful impulses. They have fallen into a lifestyle of sexual immorality, of illegal drug use, or drunkenness, or even theft. Has not the church fallen into deception when they would desire to

have the same wealth, affluence and popularity as these ones who have made shipwreck of their lives? I thank God that He has chosen for me an afflicted path, for had I the experience of many of these young movie stars and singers I would surely have strayed far from the path of life and lost all thought of God.

When you and I surrender our lives to be led of the Spirit in all things, Christ will upset the normal course of our lives. In some way, indeed in many ways, Yahshua will produce weakness in a man or woman. Some who were formerly financially secure will find themselves emptied of worldly possessions and wealth. Some who were physically strong will find themselves made weak. Some who were accounted as wise in this world will be brought into circumstances where they are judged to be fools. As we follow Christ we will find that weakness becomes our companion.

Weakness produces for men and women the proper environment for spiritual growth. The fruits of the Spirit grow abundantly in the fertile soil of an Adamic life that has been brought to poverty. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, self-control...

Does not weakness act as a catalyst in the promotion of these spiritual fruit? Do you not find it easier to act and speak in a patient, kind, and humble manner when you are approaching others from a position of weakness, rather than strength? Are not the rich prone to pride and haughtiness? Are not the strong tempted to bully those weaker than themselves? Yahweh

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will abase His sons and daughters that they might find it easier to manifest the fruits of the Spirit.

Considering these things, we should think it not strange that in yielding our lives to Christ to follow wherever He would lead that we are soon brought to poverty, illness, injury, weakness, or reproach in this world. Christ existed in the form of God. He had great power, glory and authority in the heavens. Yet He became weak to prove the excellency of the power of God in mankind. Yahshua knew hunger, poverty, reproach, and the injury of the cross. Yet as He accepted these things He showed forth the power of love, peace, patience, humility and every other divine attribute of the Father.

II Corinthians 13:4

For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you.

Surrender your life to Christ to be directed by Him and you too will be brought to weakness that you might find the power of God revealed in you. This is a principle of the kingdom of God.

Suffering as True Worship

I can think of no better way to end this series on suffering and discipleship than to reveal the relationship between suffering and the worship of Yahweh. As with many of the church's teachings in this hour, truth has fallen by the wayside. It is needful at this hour to re-establish the critical link between suffering and the worship of Yahweh.

I was visiting with a brother in Christ this past week when our conversation turned to the subject of worship. He shared with me that he had recently completed a study on the subject of worship and he uncovered a very important fact. The very first mention of worship in the Bible describes an act of profound sacrifice and suffering. When Abraham is taking his son Isaac up to the mount to offer him up as a sacrifice to Yahweh, he refers to this act as worship.

Genesis 22:3-5

So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will **worship** and return to you."

The first mention of anything in the Bible is very significant. The meaning of a thing is often found in first occurrences. As we examine this passage we find that Abraham had a very different concept of worship than that which the church has in this hour.

I have often pondered this experience of Abraham, and I think it would be well for all saints to spend much time considering it. There was no act of man found anywhere in the Old Testament that was more pleasing to Yahweh than this costly obedience of Abraham, the friend of God.

Genesis 22:15-18

Then the angel of Yahweh called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By Myself

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I have sworn, declares Yahweh, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

It is difficult to imagine the pain and conflict that was present in the soul of Abraham as he journeyed for three days on his way to the mountain to slay his beloved son. Surely this must have been Abraham's Gethsemane moment where his soul was crushed as unto death.

I believe that during the three days Abraham journeyed to the mount he experienced great wrestling in his soul. It was possible that he could turn back and follow the counsel of his own soul rather than heeding the command of Yahweh. Yet, after three days of wrestling, and not shrinking back, Abraham laid the matter to rest. The will of God must be done no matter the cost. I believe the moment of Abraham's victory is revealed in a small, often overlooked detail that serves as a parable of what has transpired. In the passage above we hear Abraham's first utterance in this experience.

Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you."

There are no details of God's word that are without significance. Yahweh does not waste words. Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey." The donkey is a symbol of the stubborn and rebellious soul of man. Abraham at this point was freed of the donkey. It had been firmly resolved in his heart that he would carry through with that which Yahweh

required of him. This resolution was spoken forth, "I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you." The matter was settled. The cross had been embraced. Now there was a perfect yielding to the will of the Father.

Abraham trusted Yahweh who years earlier had promised to bless Isaac. Abraham fully anticipated having to slay his son, but he believed also that Yahweh would have to raise Isaac up from the dead, for Yahweh's promises could not fail.

Hebrews 11:17-19

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

Consider for a moment the attitude and actions of Abraham at this time. I do not believe that Abraham was marching along rejoicing aloud about the goodness of God. He was not singing loud praises to the God of heaven. The church associates worship with such things today, yet the first pure act of worship to Yahweh mentioned in Scriptures was not attended with these things. I believe Abraham was walking along quietly, speaking very little, as his soul was full of the contemplation of what he must do. The following verse gives a clue to Abraham's silent introspection.

Genesis 22:7-8

Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abra-

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ham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

In these words we read of Isaac and Abraham walking silently together. A question is burning in Isaac's heart. Isaac begins by getting his father's attention. He says, "My father!" Abraham responds "Here I am my son." Abraham likely seemed far away, lost in his thoughts. He was full of the pain that arose at the thought of slaying his beloved son whom he loved so much. As Isaac speaks Abraham responds tenderly, assuring him that he is present with him in both body and thought.

Examining this experience reveals that worship does not necessarily involve the tongue of man. Worship is not simply something we speak forth. True worship is much more profound. It involves the very depths of a man's soul. Worship is revealed in both faith and obedience.

Hebrews 11:17

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac...

It requires confidence in the faithfulness of Yahweh for a man to obey God when He directs him to some painful course that involves sacrifice and sorrow. A man must believe that Yahweh has his best interests at heart and will cause all things to work together for good. Though Yahweh should lead the man down an afflicted path, the man must trust the One who is guiding him, believing that God has all wisdom and power, and is motivated by a perfect love.

There is no more profound act of worship than for a man to demonstrate great confidence in the goodness and faithfulness of Yahweh. Yahweh is pleased by man's trust in Him.

Hebrews 11:6

Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

The apostle Peter came to understand the value Yahweh places upon the faith of His saints. He wrote:

I Peter 1:6-7

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Yahshua Christ...

Peter speaks here of "the proof of your faith." In the churches there are many songs sung where people declare their faith and trust in Yahweh. There are also many sermons given and confessions uttered whereby men and women declare their trust in God. Words, however, are not proof. A man can speak forth things which are not reality in his life. Let the man be tested to an extreme degree; let his own life, or the life of those he loves be put on the line, then it will be proven whether he truly has faith in Yahweh.

Peter states that the proof of our faith is "more precious than gold which is perishable." To whom is man's faith precious? Is it not Yahweh that Peter has in mind? Yahweh finds faith to be an exceedingly valuable thing. As Paul said, "without faith it is impossible to please God." Faith, an active and practical trust in the goodness and trustworthiness of God, is an exceedingly precious thing in the eyes of Yahweh.

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Peter compares faith to gold. Gold is valuable for many reasons. Perhaps the greatest driver of the value of gold is its scarceness. If gold were as common as coal that is mined by the train loads its value would not be much. Faith is similar to gold in this aspect. Faith is uncommon. How many men in Abraham's day would have manifested the faith of that man? How many men today have this kind of faith?

Peter also mentions that gold must be refined by fire. Our faith is proven and made pure through fiery trials as we set our hope and trust in God. The outcome of proven faith is "praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Yahshua Christ." Will not Yahweh prove the character of every son's faith? Will He not subject all to trials as He did Abraham that His sons might have an opportunity to worship Him and obtain praise and glory and honor?

People of God, true worship is not proven by what we say, or sing aloud as praise unto Yahweh. True worship is proven as we follow Yahweh obediently down an afflicted and distressing path that He asks us to walk. Do you want to worship God and Christ? Then accept the invitation of Yahshua to "Come, take up your cross, and follow Me." This is worship.

We can find this definition of worship confirmed by the apostle Paul in the New Testament. Please consider carefully what is being expressed in the following verse.

Romans 12:1

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of **worship**.

I have often made reference to this verse as I

have shared with the saints the cost of discipleship. I have asked them, "What is a sacrifice? Is it not flesh that is laid upon an altar for the fire to consume it?" This is what Yahweh requires of His sons and daughters. He entreats us to yield our lives to Him. As we do, He will direct us to a sacrificial life where we encounter many fiery trials. The goal of these experiences is to reduce our flesh that a spiritual creation might arise. Paul declares that those who present themselves as a "living sacrifice" are offering to God true worship. As the smoke of the freewill offering ascended, it was as a fragrant aroma in the nostrils of God. So too do our lives become a sweet savor unto Yahweh when we freely yield them, and accept those fiery trials prepared for us.

I have often read invitations on church signs that said something like, "Come join us for worship." Yet, what these churches are offering is an invitation to come and sing songs along with a praise band or choir. They may live things up by having banners for people to wave, or dancers to accompany the songs being sung. Are these same ones yielding their lives to go wherever Christ would lead them? Have these ones found that afflicted path that leads to life, or are they pursuing prosperity, ease, comfort and those things that the soul of man desires?

There is much play acting that takes place in the churches today. Week after week Christians gather to proclaim their love of God, but their lives reveal that they love themselves more. The heart of man is prone to self-deception.

Matthew 15:7-8

"Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me."

The word hypocrite means "play actor." It is de-

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rived from a theatrical term in the Greek language. Tragically, the church has adopted a pattern of showing up on Sundays to play a part in a group drama. All those gathered together appear to be great worshipers of Yahweh and His Son. Yet the truth is “proven” by what they do outside the doors of the church. Have they accepted the call to Christian discipleship? Are they yielding their lives to follow Christ? Are they bearing their cross? Are they content with suffering, reproaches, persecution, rejection, loss and sorrow? Has the church embraced the “first things” that John wrote about in the book of Revelation?

In this hour the Spirit of Christ is inviting many to embrace a radically different life than they would choose for themselves. As Yahweh did with His friend Abraham, He is directing His people to a sacrificial life where they must lay all they love, including their own lives, on the altar. Christ said:

Luke 14:26-27

“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”

Do you want to worship God? Accept the invitation of Christ to be His disciple. Prove your faith by surrendering your life to Him. That which Yahweh esteems is costly. Christ would urge all who would be His disciples to “count the cost.” If you will count the cost of being a disciple of Christ, and accept it, Yahweh will truly be honored, and in that final day it will result in praise and glory and honor that far surpasses every pain and sacrifice.

May you be blessed with peace and understanding in these days!

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PARABLES PRECEPT— Is That in the Bible?

Did Christ proclaim the gospel message to those who died in the flood of Noah?



Here is another curious fact found in the Bible. We are told that after Christ was crucified He went and proclaimed the gospel message to those who

had died in earlier ages.

I Peter 4:6

For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.

In particular, it is mentioned that Christ preached to those who perished in the flood of Noah.

I Peter 3:19-20

He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison,

who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark...

In the previous newsletter we looked at the practice of the early church to baptize one another for the dead. Perhaps there is a relationship to that unusual practice and what Peter is declaring here.

It is given to the sons of God to search out truth. No matter how much I learn about the Bible, I find that there are far more mysteries that remain.