

Midnight Cry Messenger

FREELY SHARED WITH THOSE WHO ARE HUNGRY FOR TRUTH — NOT TO BE SOLD

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Does God Speak to You? Pt. 3

by C. Parker Thomas

(Editor's Note: This article was originally published in the November-December 1979 issue of the Midnight Cry Messenger.)

This is the third and final part on the subject "Does God Speak To You?" In a day of religious form when God for the most part is theory to many professing Christians, it is challenging and refreshing to believe that the God of miracles and the early church is our God.

Our desire in this article is to simply provoke God's people to the realization that the days of miracles have not passed away. The cause of our spiritual dearth is apostate unbelief. Even Jesus was limited in what he could do when he went back to Nazareth because of their unbelief. Matt. 13:5b. When we begin believing in the God of the Bible then the God of the Bible will confirm his word as he did in New Testament times.

Although we personally are not very good examples of this spiritual reality we are convinced that God has, on certain occasions, confirmed his word and spoken to us. May we share some of these experiences with you?

Experiences

I could relate many experiences of my own and others in which God used his word in a most unusual way to speak in times of need. However I will confine my remarks to three examples.

Once I was disturbed, and praying, because of certain things taking place which affected the church. As I was praying, the Lord spoke to my heart and said, "Who are you trusting?"

Immediately I said, "Lord, I am trusting you."

The Lord replied, "If you are trusting me, what does that make you?"

Immediately I thought of Jeremiah 17:7 which says, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is."

As this scripture came to my mind, I said, "Why Lord, that makes me blessed. I am a blessed man."

With this revelation from God's word all anxiety left me and I experienced the peace and rest of God. Needless to say, I got up from my knees and began to rejoice in the goodness of the Lord.

Another time I was walking in the woods and praying. I was discouraged and dissatisfied with the lack of results in the church at that time. As I prayed I began to compare myself with myself in times past. I was telling the Lord about my revivals and the successes I had experienced at one time. Compared to the past I felt I was doing very little.

I was actually complaining and telling the Lord I wanted to quit if I couldn't accomplish any more than I was at the present time. Suddenly as I prayed in this manner, the Lord spoke to me using a passage of scripture I had never fully understood.

He said, "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." John 21:18.

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A Great Mystery Pt. 1

by C. Parker Thomas

(Editor's note: This article was originally published in the January-February 1976 issue of the Midnight Cry Messenger.)

"For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." Eph. 5:30-32.

Too many think that believing in the virgin birth, blood atonement, the trinity or some other doctrine is what Christianity is all about. They believe in the Biblical record of Christ come in the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth but do not understand the great mystery of Christ come in the flesh of his body, the church. They neither see nor understand this vital union.

Even as God was in Christ and the world of that day could not believe it, the world today cannot believe that Christ is come in the flesh of his body, the church. They believe he came 2000 years ago as Jesus of Nazareth. They believe he is in heaven today and will some

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Editor's Letter

Dear Saints,

Greetings once again in the wonderful name of Jesus! July is upon us with its heat and humidity. Surprise, surprise! One day the weather will be just right all the time, on the new earth, that is. I hope to see you there!

This issue contains the last part of Bro. Thomas's article, "Does God Speak to You?" How important it is to be able to distinguish God's voice from the many crying in our day, "This is the way," while others cry something entirely different. God will speak to one genuinely desiring to hear His voice. That's what He's looking for. If you are one confused by the many voices of our world then take courage and seek the Lord from your heart. He will hear and answer in His time and way and you will never be sorry.

The other main article revives another short series by Bro. Thomas first published in 1976. It deals with the great mystery referred to by Paul in Eph. 5:30-32, namely the church. I fear that most of what is called "church" in our day is a far cry from God's intention. There is all too often so much tradition, form, and human effort mixed in that Christ Himself is absent, and yet, the religious machinery grinds on, the people unaware. I'm sure glad that even in the midst of today's confusion, God still knows every one of His own. He won't lose even one of those who put their trust in Him.

The other short article on page 8 reminds us that Christ Himself is the center of everything. We do not practice a "religion" but rather enjoy the living presence and saving power of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Our June convention has come and gone. What a blessed time it was! We rejoice in God's goodness to the undeserving. Besides those from our own assemblies we had several that came from a distance including some from India. It's always a joy to renew our acquaintance and fellowship in Christ face to face. Each one who came was a blessing and added to the whole.

From the opening night we were challenged to present ourselves to Christ as a living sacrifice, willing to be changed. An unusual emphasis was that this is not just the usual individual sacrifice we so often hear about but rather a corporate thing. In the original

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To say the least, I was stunned. I knew the Lord had spoken these words to Peter. But I also knew he was saying this to me. I wasn't imagining this. Under no circumstances would I have ever applied this scripture to myself. What did it mean? As I meditated on the meaning, it became as clear as a bell.

The Lord was telling me that those things of the past that I thought were so great weren't as great as I thought they were. It was actually me girding myself and doing my own thing. He was telling me that when I grew old I would realize I had no strength of my own. I would no longer run in my own wisdom and strength. In my destitution I would stretch forth my hands to him and he would give me his strength and carry me where I couldn't and wouldn't go in myself.

Although I had never thought of this scripture as applying to anyone other than self-willed, head-strong Peter, I could see now that it would apply to thousands of God's people who were as blind and head-strong as Peter was.

An even more unusual experience took place several years ago when I was going over to the North Carolina coast to minister to a small group of people. While over there I stayed with a man that was sick in body who didn't have much confidence in preachers, especially preachers who prayed for the sick. This man would almost explode if somebody wanted to pray for him. He seemed bitter and blamed preachers because they didn't heal people like Jesus did.

Despite all this, the man and his wife welcomed me into their home and, strange as it may seem, I had wonderful fellowship with

Greek there were many bodies but only ONE sacrifice! It is corporate! God is looking for a house, a temple, an earthly dwelling place. Together, we are called to offer Him just that.

We took advantage of being in North Carolina where our high-definition TV cameras are to record as much fresh choir music as we could so it would be available to use in our ongoing TV broadcast. Remember this opportunity for outreach. We hear from many hungry and needy souls and our hearts reach out to them that they might enjoy all that Christ paid so high a price to provide for us.

Looking forward we are anticipating God's presence and blessing in our VBS for the younger ones later in July and then a Youth Camp in South Carolina over Labor Day weekend. Remember these in your prayers that God may accomplish all He desires.

Till next time may God's rich blessings be yours.

Your brother in Christ,
Phil Enlow

them. I was very careful to avoid controversy and stay with things we could agree on.

However, at the first night's service I preached on the subject "According To Your Faith Be It Unto You." I wanted him to see he was responsible to believe God himself instead of blaming the preachers. Needless to say, things were very quiet in the car on the trip back to the house after the service that night. At the house I was very careful to avoid the touchy subject.

As I prepared for bed I noticed this man settling down in a chair in the hall. Upon inquiry he told me there was no need to go to bed as he couldn't sleep. He had some kind of a thyroid condition that was worse when he would lie down and try to sleep. In fact, he told me he hadn't been to bed in several nights.

As I went to my room I felt sort of guilty leaving the poor man out in the hall, sitting in a chair. Feeling there was nothing I could do I went to bed and tried to go to sleep. However, I found I could not relax and go to sleep for thinking about the poor man sitting outside in the chair.

After about thirty minutes a small, still voice spoke to my heart and said, "Get up and pray for him that he might go to bed and get some rest and that he might know that you are my servant and I have sent you." I said to myself, "I'm imagining things. This couldn't be the Lord. Why would he want this man to know that I am the Lord's servant?"

Feeling confident that this wasn't the Lord, I turned over and tried to relax and forget it. After a few minutes the same words came to me again and I gave the same argument again only this time I added another reason why this couldn't be the Lord. It wouldn't do to suggest prayer for this man knowing how he felt about preachers. I didn't want to get run off in the middle of the night. Once again I turned over and tried to go to sleep.

But sleep fled from me as I lay there still arguing with myself. I was actually arguing with the Lord but not aware of it. After a few more minutes those words came to me the third time, only more forcefully. This time I told the Lord I wanted to do his will if I could believe it was his will.

Suddenly I had an idea that I thought would settle this thing. I told the Lord if he could speak to me through the scriptures I would have faith to obey him. Frankly I could not think of any scripture that would apply to this situation. How wrong I was!

I got an answer from the Lord as soon as I had made this proposition. The Lord said, "When I sent the disciples out I told them to let their peace be upon the homes of those that received them." I said, "Lord, do you mean that scripture can be applied to this situation?"

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The Lord said to me, "Haven't these people opened their home and welcomed you into it? This makes them worthy. They are entitled to the benefits of this promise." Matt. 10:11-14.

Never in all of my life had I heard of this scripture being used. It had always been something strictly for the disciples during the days of Christ. Truly the Bible is a living book. It is for us today.

Neither the man nor his wife knew what was going on between the Lord and me in that room. With the revelation of this scripture I had faith to get up and call the man to the door for prayer. I simply told him I wanted to pray for him that he could go to bed and get some rest. Standing with the door ajar he humbly submitted while I prayed a short, simple prayer. I went back to bed then and was able to relax and go to sleep.

Shortly after prayer the man went to bed and fell into a deep, peaceful sleep. I was awake an hour or so after daybreak and resting quietly when I heard the man awaken in the room next to mine. Upon awakening he exclaimed to his wife, "Lord, have mercy, I have slept all night long." As his feet hit the floor, he cried out, "Brother Thomas, are you awake?" When I told him I was, he said, "Can I come in?" Of course I said "yes" and he came on into the room.

Upon reaching my bed the man fell on his knees with tears in his eyes and said to me, "Brother Thomas, there is a man of God in the house."

Some may wonder at this display of emotion which I certainly did not anticipate, nor want. But as I considered what had taken place I could see what the Lord had done.

First of all he wanted to change the man's attitude which was actually bitter. He wanted him to know that despite his attitude he did have servants in the earth that he honored. When we are overcome by a wrong attitude, even though we are technically right, we may be in a worse condition than those we condemn.

Secondly, the Lord wanted to teach me a lesson. He wanted me to see how wrong we are in many of our religious concepts. And he wanted me to realize that his word is just as applicable today as it was two thousand years ago. I might add that we don't have to seek the praise or approval of men, God himself will bear witness and honor us as he sees fit.

Yes, God speaks to men today. But he does not want us to be overly concerned about how, when or where this takes place. Our great concern should be to love and worship him and simply seek to do his will. He will not leave us in the dark when we need light. When there is a need we must trust him, knowing he fully understands our condition

and will do what is best for us in process of time.

Things To Guard Against

We need to be careful about telling anyone about the source of wisdom we need. Too many people love to give advice and there are always some who can conjure up just the answer they think you need. The Lord will honor you when you look to him directly. Jesus said, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." Matt. 6:6.

Genuine faith is when we look to the Lord alone for our help, not trusting in the arm of flesh, including our own. Although the Lord uses various means to answer or meet our needs he is honored when we let him make that choice. This alone is the faith that pleases God. Heb. 11:6.

Not only do we need to guard against trusting in the arm of flesh for our help but we need to be careful lest we dictate to the Lord about how he answers us. God has promised us wisdom liberally but it is his sovereign prerogative to give us that wisdom when and how he pleases. Being God he knows better than we do.

Many times the Lord will answer us without others being aware of it. When the answer comes it will minister faith to us and satisfy our inquiring heart. Whether the Lord speaks to our heart personally, sends an angel to us, gives us a dream, a vision, or speaks to us through the word, wisdom from above always brings peace and rest with it. James 3:17.

The next thing we need to guard against is moving in a state of anxiety or fear. Move in faith. Faith brings peace and rest. Wait on the Lord until you can move in faith. Satan, through unbelief, ministers fear and anxiety to us. "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." II Tim. 1:7.

Waiting on God requires time and patience. We are to "ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." James 1:6-7.

It is when we are in a state of anxiety, fear and unrest that the winds (evil spirits) of error and misdirection come against us. Hold on to God until the wind (Holy Spirit) of peace comes to your rescue. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Phil. 4:6-7.

Signs

Some do not think that God speaks to man unless it is attended by a spiritual earthquake. This is the spirit of the sign seeker. Instead of having signs following them that believe, this is a case of supposed believers following signs.

Actually this is a manifestation of unbelief. God does not answer unbelief. When religious man persists in seeking signs he may get them but not from God. Such unbelief as this attracts satanic power with lying signs and wonders.

Religious unbelief that seeks signs is responsible for so much fanaticism and emphasis of experience. Most of the people caught up in this web of satanic conspiracy have little knowledge of the word of God and are very unstable. Many of them will follow the devil if he shows them a sign. Deut. 13:1-5, Matt. 12:38-39, John 6:28-30, I Cor. 1:22-23.

From Deut. 13:1-5, Matt. 24:24 and II Thess. 2:9-12 it will be seen that God permits signs by the false prophet to prove his people. Even though God may see fit to give us a sign, we certainly shouldn't seek signs. God's people should seek their answers in faith based upon his word.

The Church

In seeking to hear from God we need to honor and respect the church which is Christ's body. It is not a building, an organization or just any group of people. The church is his habitation or earthly dwelling place. Ps. 132:13-18, Eph. 2:19-22 and Matt. 18:20.

It is by the church that God has ordained to make known the manifold wisdom of God. Eph. 3:10. To despise the church is to despise the Lord. Jesus said those that would not hear the church were to be looked upon as heathen and publicans. Matt. 18:17.

However, in considering the church we realize that much of the professing church world offers little help to those seeking God. Much of it is in spiritual darkness bound by creeds, doctrines and vain traditions. Some have been led astray by seducing spirits into doctrines of devils. I Tim. 4:1. Some, though fundamentally sound, are destitute of the life-giving Spirit.

All of this means that the seeker needs spiritual discernment. In addition to discerning the negative things in the professing church we need to be careful that we do not discount some particular church on the strength of gossip or common report. As is often the case, Satan sees to it that a church with light to help people is maligned and falsely accused.

Knowing that proud religious man is greatly influenced by reproach, Satan seeks to brand such a church as quickly as possible. As a rule the most vehement accusers of such a church

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are the organized church world around it. This is Satan's most effective means of keeping potential seekers from hearing the truth.

Ostracism and reproach heaped upon a church is often a badge of honor and indication that Christ is in the midst. One thing is for sure, Christ is outside the world system and religious respectability. "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach." Heb. 13:13.

What To Look For

In seeking a church where the Lord is in the midst and speaking to his people, we need to know what to look for. Since there are by far more churches without a true testimony of Christ in them we need to be able to recognize these churches also.

Tradition

Blind tradition was one of the reasons the Pharisees could not recognize Jesus nor receive his word. In fact they considered him a transgressor because he did not honor their cherished traditions. Matt. 15:1-9. It was because of their tradition that the word of God was made of none effect to them. Matt. 15:6.

Religious tradition is very deceptive because it is often so close to the truth. It could be truth misapplied, truth misunderstood or truth mixed with error. It is also truth devoid of life because it is not relevant to man's needs.

Tradition does not always ignore the scriptures but rather uses them the wrong way. Usually they are taken out of context, misinterpreted and misapplied to confirm a church's pet doctrines and creeds.

Tradition glories in the revelation or blessings of yesterday, but it cannot see nor receive what God is saying today. Although religious tradition claims great faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the apostles and the prophets of old, it is unable to recognize those sent of God in its day. John 5:38-46.

Religious tradition without Christ is a spirit that killed the prophets, yet built their tombs and garnished the sepulchres of the righteous. It was this spirit in Cain that slew Abel. It was this spirit in the scribes and the Pharisees that rejected and crucified Christ. It is this spirit in religion today that despises the truth. Matt. 23:29-36.

Tradition is often a manifestation of the carnal or natural man that seeks to perpetuate the glory of today's experience. It lives in the past because it does not have the revelation of the Holy Spirit today. Being antichrist it does not seek nor honor Christ as the head of the church.

Peter's desire to build three tabernacles, supposedly in honor of Jesus, Moses and Elijah, is an example. However, it is evident from

the Father's answer to Peter that he was not interested in perpetuating today's experience however glorious it might be. His answer to Peter was, "...This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." Matt. 17:1-5.

This same principle is true today. God is not interested in our religious shrines commemorating the past. This includes experiences involving the Lord Jesus Christ, Moses and Elijah. The deader a church becomes the more statues of Jesus and the saints it builds and the more religious relics it enshrines.

Earthly Jerusalem

Idolatrous man has made religious shrines out of the supposed tomb of Jesus, the well of Samaria, Nazareth, Bethlehem, etc. This same spirit still insists on calling the natural Jew God's chosen people. Although I will be accused of blaspheming by some, God's word calls Jerusalem Sodom and Egypt. Rev. 11:8. Religious idolatry plus the opportunity for a fast buck is responsible for many of these trips to the Holy Land.

Ironically, earthly Jerusalem (city of peace) has been one of the most strife-filled, war-torn and bloodiest cities in the world. It was religious hatred in the hearts of those who revered Jerusalem that sent our Lord Jesus Christ to the cross.

Jerusalem was an earthly type that had to give way for the true heavenly Jerusalem that is from above and eternal. It is this Jerusalem that Jew and Gentile have come to since the birth of the church at Pentecost. Gal. 4:26, Heb. 12:18-24.

Our God is the great "I Am," not "has been" or "will be." He is a living God who raised Christ from the dead. By the Spirit, Christ came back and indwelt the church on the day of Pentecost. He is in our midst and speaking today to those who can hear his voice.

Religious Extremes

Churches that go to extremes, or put a strong emphasis on certain doctrines, ordinances or religious experiences may be under the influence of demons. Knowing that some people cannot be led away into obvious doctrines of devils, Satan cleverly leads some into religious extremes that accomplish the same purpose.

It is very easy to detect this condition in a church or people if you are around them very long. The religious spirit that is in them will not let them remain silent concerning their pet views. Where people have received religious spirits they feel a compulsion to share their views with others.

If a spirit has sidetracked them on the doctrine of the Godhead they will seek to minister their belief to you.

If their hang-up is sanctification, baptism, predestination, tongues evidence or otherwise, the result is the same. It is not so much the doctrine as it is the spirit ministering the

doctrine. In fact, it is possible for the doctrine to be technically right and the spirit wrong.

Of necessity, religious spirits use some truth mixed in with error or wrong emphasis to deceive the listener. It is when the emphasis magnifies a doctrine or teaching to the degree that it eclipses other doctrines of the Bible that something is wrong.

Take note of any church or ministry whose main emphasis is something other than Christ and him crucified. I Cor. 2:2. The gospel has to do with Christ, the cross and the atoning blood. Man cannot be saved without it. It is the power of God unto salvation. Rom. 1:16, I Cor. 1:18. A religious emphasis that focuses attention on something else is a deception of Satan to cause man to miss Christ.

Examples

An example of this is the strong emphasis of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit that is so popular today. This appeals to the natural man because it offers him supernatural power, spiritual reality, religious ecstasy and preeminence.

This is the basic appeal of the thousand and one charismatics that have sprung up all over the world. I'm afraid most of it is natural religious man devoid of faith seeking a sign. In reality, the Holy Spirit was not given to preach or magnify the Holy Spirit. John 16:13-14.

When the ministering spirit in an individual, a group or a church is more interested in telling people about the Holy Spirit than they are Christ, something is wrong. It is not the Holy Spirit ministering through them. The center of the ministry of the Spirit is Christ and him crucified.

This is not to say that the Holy Spirit will not minister other aspects of truth relative to the needs of God's people. This will be done as the occasion demands but the ministry of the Spirit will always come back to the emphasis that glorifies and exalts the Lord Jesus Christ.

Easy Believism

Another wrong emphasis that many are guilty of is easy believism. The desire to make it easy for seekers to become Christians and join the church is responsible for this. Like Sarah, the fear of reproach for being barren is a strong factor. Gen. 16:1-4.

Easy believism does not preach a gospel that causes the seeker to count the cost. Luke 14:28-33. This would eliminate many of their potential converts. To avoid this their message is designed to spare the flesh and get a quick easy decision. Although there is a measure of truth in easy believism much of it is devoid of the Spirit of life. It takes truth and spirit to set men free.

Without the word and the anointing man has to resort to psychological or natural means to gain converts. But the converts are children of the flesh like Ishmael and not chil-

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dren of promise like Isaac. Gal. 4:22-31.

It is said that D. L. Moody, although anointed of the Lord, was the forerunner of easy believism. He was a master at getting decisions. A follow-up of his converts showed that eighty percent (80%) of them fell away after awhile.

Charles G. Finney, a man mightily anointed by the Holy Spirit preached an uncompromising gospel that demanded repentance. He did not try to get decisions but depended on the Holy Spirit through the word to convict men of their sins. A follow-up of his converts revealed just the opposite result from Mr. Moody's. Eighty percent (80%) of Mr. Finney's converts continued on with the Lord with only twenty percent (20%) falling away.

Basically, this is what is wrong with modern evangelism. A follow-up of Billy Graham's campaigns in several places revealed a shocking lack of results. Although thousands of professions of faith were reported they could not find a single convert in many of the churches that participated.

An anointing alone with a meager or insufficient knowledge of truth is not enough to bring men to Christ. The messenger of the Lord must have a spiritual insight into the word that enables him to employ such truth as is relevant to the need.

An example of what we mean is found in the ministry of Apollos. Acts 18:24-28, 19:1-7. Before being instructed in the way of God more perfectly by Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos was said to be an eloquent man, mighty in the scriptures and fervent in the Spirit.

Although he spoke and taught diligently the things of the Lord he was unable to bring men into spiritual reality. Knowing only the baptism of John he could not minister apostolic baptism. This is why Paul further instructed the twelve converts of Apollos and rebaptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus. Acts 19:1-7.

If the mighty ministry of Apollos was limited in what it could do because of a lack of spiritual knowledge, what about the modern preacher today. It is my conviction that when we get back to apostolic revelation and methods we will get apostolic results.

What We Can Expect

Although I do not know of any church moving in apostolic power and revelation today I believe God is working with a remnant church. The work of restoration spoken of by the prophet (Joel 2:25-32) is under way.

The outpouring of the Spirit promised by Joel had a near and far fulfillment. Pentecost was the former rain. The signs in the heavens and earth with the sun turned into darkness and the moon into blood did not take place as quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost. Acts

2:16-21. These signs will follow the outpouring of the latter rain and precede the coming of Christ.

Jesus himself spoke of these signs preceding his coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Matt. 24:27-31. At this coming he will gather together his elect from the four winds (Matt. 24:31) and take vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. II Thess. 2:7-10.

From the scripture above it is obvious that two things will happen at the second coming of Christ. The wicked will be punished with everlasting destruction and Jesus will be glorified in his saints.

This teaching does not give the wicked a false hope of another chance during a so-called millennial reign of a thousand years. Paul's teaching is in harmony with Jesus' teaching on the subject. As it was in the days of Noah so shall it be at the coming of the son of man.

What happened to the wicked when God sent the flood upon the earth? Matt. 24:37-39. What happened to the wicked left in Sodom when the Lord took Lot out? Luke 17:28-30. In both cases the wicked were destroyed. Peter likewise teaches the destruction of all things at the coming of Christ. II Peter 3:1-15. Jesus' parables that have to do with his coming teach exactly the same thing, hope and deliverance for the righteous and destruction for the wicked. Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43 and 47-50.

Even as God spoke to Noah giving him instructions to build the ark in preparation for the flood the Lord is speaking to his remnant church today. The revelation today is to prepare the church for the end of this age and the coming of Christ.

It is going to take a restored church to stand against the increasing power of darkness and the flood tide of iniquity that is rising in the earth. Isa. 59:19, 60:1-2. This restored church, like the ark, will be a refuge of safety and a means of deliverance for God's people. Isa. 4:5-6.

This is relevant truth that we need to be prepared for the end of this age. This is the truth that the church and the ministry must have to help God's people. This is why it is so important that the seeker of God finds a church that the Lord is using to help his people.

In conclusion, let me say that there is so much wrong with the church world today it would be impossible for this writer to put his finger on everything. If I could, you wouldn't need to seek God for divine wisdom in your search for a church with the testimony of Christ. The Lord wants you to personally seek him. Matt. 7:7-11. When you honor the Lord in your dependence upon him he will honor you. "In all thy way acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Pro. 3:6.

When you are led to such a church you will know it. There will be a spiritual liberty among the people. II Cor. 3:17. They will appreciate and honor the word of God. Compared to most churches a spirit of welcome and love will be manifest among the people. Although such a church will have a balance of relevant truth it will be Christ centered.

The spiritual atmosphere of the services will be conducive to worship and praise. You will be edified, cleansed and strengthened in the inner man. Such a church will minister life to you in the form of faith, hope and charity. I Cor. 13:13.

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day come back to this earth again. But they cannot believe that he is literally present now, in his body, the church. They can't conceive of God dwelling in human flesh.

Many Aspects

There are many aspects of truth relative to Christ and his church that caused Paul to call it a "great mystery." We must come to a knowledge of this truth if we are to manifest the life of Christ in the earth. Failure to see such truth strips the church of her power and glory in the earth.

A mystery, in the ordinary sense of the word, means something unexplained, unknown or kept secret. However the origin of the word (mysterion, Gr.) had to do with a religious secret that could only be known or understood by those initiated into it. It is used 27 times in the New Testament and invariably has reference to spiritual things, or things that can only be discerned with the help of God's Spirit.

Notice that Christ (Eph. 3:4), the kingdom of God (Mk. 4:11), the gospel (Eph. 6:19), the faith (I Tim. 3:9), and Babylon (Rev. 17:5), among other things are called mysteries. All things pertaining to the invisible realm or the realm of spirit (good or evil) are mysteries. Mysteries must be revealed by God himself. Daniel 2:22. I Cor. 2:11. No one, however brilliant or wise, can understand these mysteries. I Cor. 2:14.

Significantly, this mystery of Christ and his church was unique in that it was a "great mystery." It was something that went beyond the ordinary in the realm of mysteries. The scope of this great mystery was something vitally important that we need to understand.

We cannot expect the unbelieving world to understand this great mystery, but the truth is, this blight of unbelief also greatly affects the church. How can we have faith to do great things when we do not really believe that God is with us?

An understanding of the many aspects of

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this “great mystery” will enable us to enter the realm of faith and power experienced by the early church. It takes the keys of truth to unlock the various aspects of this great mystery and to ultimately release the life of Christ through his body, the church. Daniel 11:32 says, “...But the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.”

A Union

Because of the nature of the union of man and woman in marriage, it is used as a type of the union of Christ and his body, the church. In the marriage union, man and woman forsake all others, including mother and father, to become one with each other. Taking precedence over all other relationships, the marriage union should be so complete that the two thus joined become one flesh.

Although marriage is a union of man and woman for life, it is an earthly relationship and therefore temporal. Matt. 22:30. Christ and the church is the union of God and man for eternity. Although it takes place on earth and involves our bodies and minds, it is spiritual, heavenly and eternal. I Cor. 6:17 says, “But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.”

Separation

Simultaneously with the union of God and man there comes a separation of man from those things that alienate him from God. This consists principally of having his own way, being his own lord in his own environment. The purpose of the gospel is to separate him from all this by showing him something far better than earthly treasures. Heb. 11:24-27.

There is a practical aspect to this separation that we need to see also. As long as we are a part of any society — national, racial, political, or religious — we listen to the voice of that society and reflect its belief and character. This is why the call of God involves separation from country, kindred and our father’s house. Gen. 12:1. God cannot speak to us as long as we are listening to the voice of our environment.

The purpose of the call of Abraham by Jehovah was to have a people separated from the mainstream of humanity unto himself. God wanted a people with whom he could make his covenant, people with whom he could share his eternal glory, a people to whom he could reveal himself and who would represent him in the earth. Through this separated people he would also reveal himself to others. This separation included Abraham’s country, kindred and his father’s house.

Coming over into the New Testament, we can see that the principle of separation still accompanies the call of God. “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye

separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” II Cor. 6:17-18.

A New Relationship

The call of God that separates us from the world of natural men joins us to the family of God through the new birth. Jn. 1:12-13, 3:1-16. This spiritual union that makes us one flesh with God’s family is part of the great mystery that transcends all earthly relationships.

When told that his mother and brothers desired to speak with him, Jesus answered and said, “...who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren.” Matt. 12:47-49. See also Matt. 10:34-38.

Surely it is significant that Jesus made a point of emphasizing his spiritual relationship with his disciples above that of his flesh and blood family. Ordinarily, such tender ties are not to be compared with any other relationship. To many, the most important thing on earth is their immediate family; this is their life.

Such devotion is good within certain limits. Beyond those limits, it becomes a form of idolatry that keeps men from God and works evil for all involved. This is because so very few have the grace of God to deny their own flesh and blood. Many children are spoiled and made unfit for life by over-solicitous parents who actually hinder them from developing and becoming responsible, self-reliant adults.

When God called Abraham from his country, kindred and his father’s house it was because he wanted to form a family of his own whose vision went beyond the confines of Abraham’s own selfish interests. As long as Abraham’s vision was limited to the problems, needs and desires of his own flesh and blood he could never really be interested in God, or God’s family and kingdom. This was true in Abraham’s day, in Christ’s day and it is still true today.

The natural man’s love for his own (Jn. 15:19) is a very poor type of God’s love for his eternal family. As Isaiah the prophet expressed it, God’s love is a love that never forgets nor forsakes its own. Isaiah 49:15-16 says, “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.” This also demonstrates why Jesus emphasized his relationship with his disciples over that of his natural mother and brethren. His vision went beyond carnal earthly relationship that is often vain and temporal. Like Abraham, he, too, was

looking for that city where man’s relationship with God and his brother would be glorious and eternal. He understood that all earthly relationship ends at the grave but spiritual relationship continues on into eternity.

A New Fellowship

This new relationship also results in a new fellowship with God, the Father; his Son, Jesus Christ; and members of Christ’s body. I Jn. 1:3. Called a mystery by Paul in Eph. 3:9, truly it is a mystery to the world who cannot see nor understand such fellowship. Unbelievers feel ill at ease and out of place in the presence of true Christian fellowship; it can only be understood and appreciated by those who are a part of it.

There are many things that serve as a basis for fellowship in the world. These all vary according to the taste, culture and environmental training of the person. But when we come to Christ there is one thing which we all have in common that transcends all others: the reality of the living Christ who bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

Regardless of our culture or geographical state, the love of God that dwells in us will bring us to the fellowship of the saints. I Jn. 5:1 says, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.”

Many Members

Another aspect of this great mystery is that membership in this body is open to every one who believes the gospel. Rom. 1:16, 10:12-13. From the entrance of sin into the world to this day, the human race has been split and divided into many divisions. Not only has man been alienated from God, but he has also been alienated from his fellow man, separated into many hostile camps. Christ, who is our peace, has broken down these walls of enmity and made us one through the cross.

The Bible still says, “For God so loved the World...” This love crosses all religious, social, economic and national barriers. When the church is moving in the power of the Holy Spirit, it crosses all barriers of prejudice and preaches the gospel to every creature. He that would have God’s power and blessings upon him must be free to move in God’s love.

I Cor. 12:13 says, “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” At the coming of Christ, the principal wall of division was between Jew and Gentile. Thinking himself to be chosen of God, the natural Jew was blind to spiritual reality. Thinking themselves to be honored of God, the Jews despised the Gentile and rejected their Messiah. As natural descendants of

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Abraham, they had no claim on God or his covenant. Matt. 3:9.

Two Seeds

From Abraham there came forth two seeds, one natural and one spiritual. Gal. 4:22-23. Ishmael was the natural seed and Isaac was the spiritual seed. Rom. 9:7.

Unable to bear the reproach of being childless, Sarah gave her Egyptian maid, Hagar, to Abraham that she might have children by her. The result was Ishmael, a product of the flesh, a type of human effort or works. This is also a type of human religious effort in the professing church today — the results of which will never inherit the kingdom of God.

Isaac was supernaturally brought forth, according to God's promise to Abraham. In fact, God purposely made Sarah barren and waited until Abraham was impotent to give them Isaac. He wanted them to know beyond any shadow of doubt that this son of promise, the true heir, was not a product of the law of nature. He also wanted them to know that the strength of his covenant was not dependent on human resources.

The true Jew, or seed of Abraham, was never the natural seed of Abraham any more than the natural seed of the Gentile is a Christian today. The true seed always has been and always will be spiritual. It is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free. As Paul says in Gal. 3:29, "And if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Advantage of Jew

It is true that until the coming of Christ and Israel's rejection of him as their Messiah, the Jew had a definite advantage over the Gentiles; this was because the oracles of God were committed to them. The word "oracle" means "utterance of God." They were favored in that they had God's truth in the earth. Rom. 3:1-2, 9:4-5.

Until the coming of Christ, Gentile nations had no prophets and were destitute of the truth. This is why Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, "Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews." John 4:22.

However, there were individuals from among the Gentile nations that joined Israel and partook of the same covenant God made with Abraham. Examples are Rahab, the harlot, and Ruth, the Moabitess. Joshua 6:25, Hebrews 11:31 and Ruth 1:16. I might also add that the righteous line of seed that started with Adam in the garden continued through such individuals as Rahab and Ruth, showing us that Gentiles could partake of God's righteousness as well as the Jew.

God's purpose to have a family of his own

with whom he could share his eternal glory did not start with Abraham. This was in the mind of God before the foundation of the world. Eph. 1:3-5. The elective process of redemption began with God's provision of slain animal skins to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness in the garden of Eden. Gen. 3:21.

A Remnant

Abraham and the nation Israel were simply part of the unfolding elective process in which God sovereignly purposed to choose from among all nations a people for his glory. Gen. 22:18. Rev. 7:9, 21:24. Actually Abraham fathered many nations (Gen. 17:4-5) in addition to natural Israel, which was not the true Israel of God.

True Israel was a very small remnant within the confines of the nation as a whole. Rom. 9:6-7, 9:27. Although God watched over and protected natural Israel, this protection was really for the sake of the true elect remnant. Were it not for this remnant, God would have destroyed the whole nation as he did Sodom and Gomorrah. Isaiah 1:9.

May I hasten to add that it is still this very small remnant in the earth today that keeps God's wrath from destroying the world. As Israel the nation was favored and blessed because of the righteous remnant within, God has, in like manner, blessed and favored some of the Gentile nations because of the righteous remnant within them.

The fact that the righteous seed has always been a very small remnant in the earth is a revelation of no small magnitude. It is a truth that is born out in the Old and New Testaments. I Kings 19:14-18. Rom. 11:1-5, 9:27-29. It will be noticed in Rom. 9:29, where Paul is quoting from Isaiah 1:9, that it was necessary for God, by a sovereign act of election, to preserve a very small remnant of people. Otherwise, they would have all been destroyed by fire and brimstone as Sodom and Gomorrah were. In Elijah's day, the number that God sovereignly spared out of all Israel was seven thousand.

Perhaps the greatest example of this tiny righteous remnant is the eight persons whom God delivered from death by the flood, through the ark. The earth was in such an apostate condition until only eight people believed God and fled to the ark for safety.

Coming over into the New Testament, we find it is still a very small remnant of people that had a heart for God and could recognize Jesus as their Messiah. The national rejection of Christ was almost total, and John considered it such by saying, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." John 1:11.

Jesus, himself, confirmed this principle of a small remnant of believers by saying, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Matt. 7:13-14.

The disciples themselves understood the Lord to teach this when they asked him, "... Lord are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Luke 13:23-24.

Please note that the reason people are not going to get in is not because they don't try. Undoubtedly, most of the religious effort put forth by mankind from the Garden of Eden to this day has failed to gain him an entrance into the kingdom of God. Like Cain, many have tried and have not been able. Jesus said, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Matt. 7:22-23.

The reason that Jesus warned us to beware of false prophets in Matthew 7:15 is because he knew they would religiously deceive most of mankind about the kingdom of God. Matt. 24:5.

Like Sarah, in order to gain converts, the church world, beginning with Constantine, has resorted to carnal methods. Instead of preaching the Word of God and depending on the Holy Ghost, the church has used proof-text salvation, evangelistic psychology and good works to gain their converts.

When Rome married the church, Constantine marched the soldiers by the thousands down into the water and had them baptized, supposedly converting them to Christianity. Rome isn't the only one that has been guilty of making church members out of the unconverted.

Perhaps the greatest hindrance to the work of the church in our generation is the belief that great numbers, beautiful buildings and great religious works are the important things. (Is. 66:1-2). The church itself operates on the same premise as does the business world: so many contacts produces a certain number of converts. Instead of being a living organism manifesting the life of Christ, the church has become a vast organization geared to the methods and dictates of our modern business world.

Although it is rich and outwardly impressive to the world, its converts, like Hagar and Ishmael, are spiritually destitute! Christened when they are born, baptized when they are eight and confirmed at twelve, most of them go through life having never experienced the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. Once in a great while, one of them will be apprehended by the Lord and brought to the new birth through contact with God's people. Though

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outwardly these sheep are numbered with the desolate group that has no head (Christ), inwardly they are one with Sarah and Isaac who are destined by God to inherit the promises. Gal. 4:22-31.

However, in spite of the futile efforts of the religious world in bringing forth far more Ishmaels than Isaacs, God is fulfilling his purpose through election. Elijah complained to God that Israel had thrown down his altars, forsaken his covenant and killed his prophets. In his despair, Elijah felt that he alone was left in the earth to champion the cause of Jehovah. The Lord's answer to his overwrought prophet was that he had reserved seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to Baal. I Kings 19:10-18. Romans 11:1-10.

Israel's failure to apprehend the true righteousness of God, which is by faith, did in no wise hinder the plan of God to save his elect remnant. This remnant, foreknown of God from the foundation of the world, inherited the same promises as Isaac. These "children of promise" have never been cast away and never will be. Rom. 11:1-2.

Another marvelous thing about this remnant is that they are the true elect of God, and, in process of time, they will hear his voice. John 8:47, 10:26-27. The true church of Jesus Christ has a perfect evangelistic program. It is not dependent on advertising schemes designed to draw a crowd. Neither does it major on signs and wonders, nor does it exalt human personalities. It is dependent on the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to work in men's hearts. And rather than produce Ishmaelites it will, if necessary, wait twenty-five years until God sends the son of promise, Isaac.

Although we are privileged to be a part of the great election process in the work of saving this remnant, God will not fail. Our weakness, our instability and human failure will not thwart the plan of our great sovereign God. Everything is moving according to God's prophetic timetable. With strictest determinism, unwavering skill, and with irresistible authority, God is drawing us to the climax of the ages when our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will come with power and great glory to claim his remnant church.

In the meantime, let's send the message, loud and clear. There is some lost sheep somewhere that will hear. One day, and it may not be long, the last lost sheep will hear his voice and join the heavenly throng.

Visit Midnight Cry Ministries on the web:

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Christ Himself the Content of Christian Faith

by Major Ian Thomas

There is something, which makes Christianity more than a religion, more than an ethic, and more than the idle dream of the sentimental idealist. It is this something, which makes it relevant to each one of us right now as a contemporary experience. It is the fact that Christ Himself is the very life content of the Christian faith. It is He who makes it "tick." "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it" (I Thessalonians 5:24). The One who calls you is the One who does that to which He calls you. "For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). He is Himself the very dynamic of all His demands.

Christ did not die simply that you might be saved from a bad conscience, or even to remove the stain of past failure, but to "clear the decks" for divine action. You have been told that Christ died to save you. This is gloriously true in a very limited, though vital sense. In Romans 5:10 we read, "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." The Lord Jesus Christ therefore ministers to you in two distinct ways - He reconciles you to God by His death, and He saves you by His life.

This, however, is but the beginning of the story, "for if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, (now an accomplished fact,) we shall be saved (as a continuing process) by His life" (Romans 5:10). The glorious fact of the matter is this — no sooner has God reconciled to Himself the man who has responded to His call, than He re-imparts to him, as a forgiven sinner, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and this restoration to him of the Holy Spirit constitutes what the Bible calls regeneration, or new birth. Titus 3:5 and 6, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour."

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