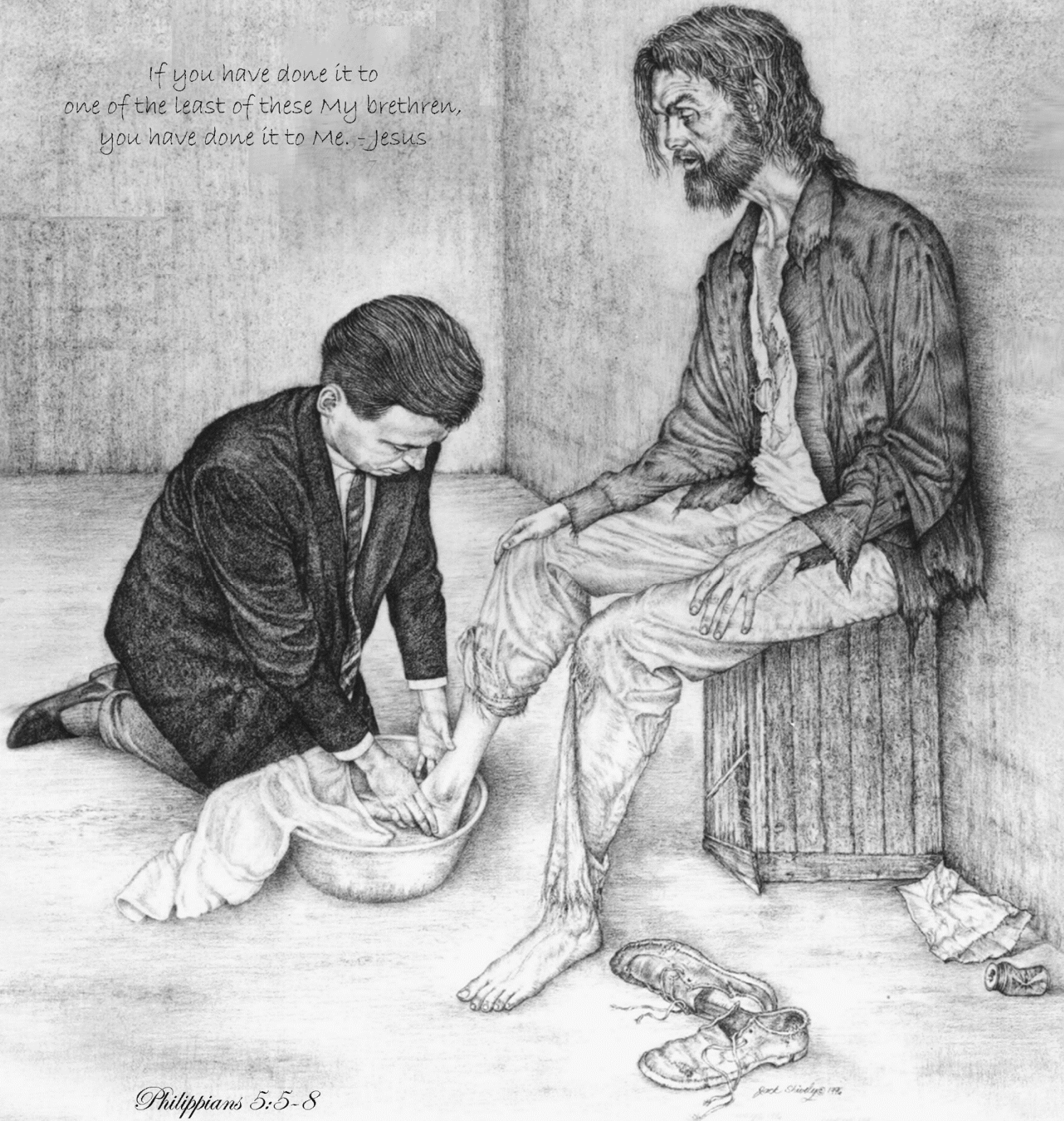


Calling the Bride

A Magazine for Disciples

If you have done it to
one of the least of these My brethren,
you have done it to Me. - Jesus



Philippians 5:5-8

Moses ~ A Model Pastor

Josephus was a Hebrew historian who also served as a priest before he became known as a recorder of history. His work is valued because he had access to writings that are no longer in existence; therefore his work offers us additional insights and shadings to the Biblical record.

Among his account of Moses' and the Israelite's trek toward the Promised Land, we are presented with a description of Moses' leadership. Though brief, Josephus' portrait offers us a model of what a leader of God's people should be. We are told by the Scriptures that Moses was - "...very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3).

Meekness is a characteristic that is highly esteemed by the Lord. The Lord dwells with those who are of a humble and contrite spirit – Isaiah 57:15.

Josephus confirms this characteristic of Moses in his description.

"But Moses refused all that honor which he saw the multitudes ready to bestow on him, and attended to nothing else but the service of God. He went no more up to Mount Sinai, but he went into the tabernacle, and brought back answers from God for what he prayed for. His habit was also that of a private man; and in all other circumstances he behaved like one of the common people, and was desirous to appear without distinguishing himself from the multitudes, but would have it known that he did nothing else but take care of them."

We glean from this account that even though Moses was extraordinarily bestowed with Divine Favor, he conducted himself as an ordinary guy and assumed the role of a servant to God's people.

This spirit of humility and servant-hood is seen in all of God's chosen apostles in the New Testament as well, with the ultimate example exemplified in Jesus, who gave Himself to suffer and die to remove the sins of the world that God so loved (John 3:16); for Jesus came not to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).

We are shown a stark contrast between the examples of leadership in Moses and Jesus, and those who were leading God's people at the time Jesus came to earth to begin His ministry. Jesus rebuked the religious leaders of His day sharply for their pride and desire for self-exaltation.

"But all their works they do for to be seen of men. They make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments (Religious status symbols at the time)...and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues. And greetings in the markets, and to be called, 'Rabbi, Rabbi,' (Matthew 23:5-7).

Jesus set God's standard before these men who professed a great knowledge of the word of God, but understood it very little. *"But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted"* (Matthew 23:11,12).

Let the wisdom of servant-hood, meekness and humility be the mantle of all those who profess to be followers of Jesus. As Paul said, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Philippians 2:4) – like Moses, a leader who would have it known that he did nothing else but to take care of God's people.

The Greatest Preacher

The greatest preacher I ever heard is the wife of a pastor in New England. She is ordained, but she doesn't like to preach, she prefers working in the Sunday school with the children. But in order to maintain her ordination, she is required to preach occasionally, which she does, usually at an evening service attended by a handful of people at their small, rural church.

She is a petite, elegant looking woman, quite unassuming. She approaches the pulpit with her notes in hand and begins to read them, quietly. There is no great rolling oratory, just soft words, she sometimes hesitates, but the entire time she is talking about Jesus she cries. The tears flow automatically because she is feeling every word. Her husband told me this happens every time she ministers.

I was in awe of her.

A SERMON FOR THE CHURCH

The second and third chapters of Revelation are among the most important of all the Scriptures. Those who have been called to oversee the church must be diligent in hearing and receiving those principles that the Spirit is conveying to God's people, and be bold in proclaiming its truth to His church.

These messages to the church were designed to speak to the spiritual condition of the Lord's church through every age. The errors that infected those first century believers are infecting the church of this present age and as we descend into the prophesied apostasy we can learn from them how to avoid falling into our own personal apostasy. Only then will we reap the rewards Jesus has promised to His "overcomers."

There were more churches than these seven at that time, and I believe that these were chosen because all but two harbored elements that can lead to apostasy and it is vital that we understand what these keys are.

Some view each of these churches representing a particular church age cumulating with lukewarm Laodicea. If we behold these churches from a distance as if we are examining a painting, we can see an impressionistic portrait of the church from its inception to its spiritual decline through the ages. This interpretation can apply in general. For as we come closer, and we begin to study this painting in more detail, we come to observe that the spiritual conditions portrayed for us are also operating simultaneously throughout the church age and can also be present in individual believers today before the Lord returns. Laodicea's lukewarmness and complacency will be accompanied into tribulation with Jezebel and her followers, with

liberal Sardis and the imbalanced Ephesian's tagging along behind.

In other words, as a pastor steps up to his pulpit, he is viewing a collective embodiment of the spiritual conditions described in Revelation's portrait of the church. He is beholding God's Ephesians, Philadelphians, Laodiceans and the others sitting before him in his congregation. Thus the portrait of

**CONVICTION ITSELF IS LIKE
A GRAIN OF SAND IN AN
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IT IS THE NECESSARY
IRRITANT THAT GROWS THE
PEARL.**

the church described in Revelation's pages becomes a mirror of our own souls. I am going to be lifting up this mirror so we can see ourselves in this looking glass of words. I'm only going to ask you to do one thing – if you see yourself anywhere in this reflection – then be honest, don't look away, be willing to allow the Lord to adjust the spiritual appearance of your heart. How we respond to being convicted is an indication of spiritual maturity. If we wince at the light of a candle, then how shall we stand before the Son? Conviction itself is like a grain of sand in an oyster shell; it is the necessary irritant that grows the pearl.

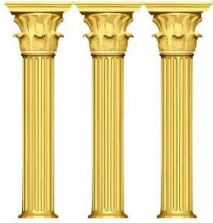


To those in leadership; our goal should be to learn how to minister to the spiritual errors the Lord is showing us and correct them, in ourselves and those that have been entrusted to our care, which is the purpose of the admonishments in these chapters. It is the responsibility of the church leadership to heed them and respond.

In Jesus' admonishments to the churches in Revelation's chapters two and three, we are shown that it is only the Philadelphians who are promised protection from the "hour of temptation" (apostasy) which in turn would logically protect her from the "hour of His Judgment" in Revelation 14:7, the tribulation. She shares the same characteristics with the church of Smyrna, the only other church that has no need to be corrected by the Lord. Both of these churches are martyrs in different ways. Some experience physical martyrdom, others like the Philadelphians are promised protection, but both churches are martyrs of the self and willing to die rather than deny Jesus. The point is, these churches are not harboring the errors of the other five churches.

I am going to give a brief overview of what each of those errors of the five churches are so we can avoid them and qualify for that Philadelphian category.

The church at Ephesus is the first church to be addressed. This church's error as we shall see, begins the slide into apostasy. To help us understand why, we need to comprehend what I call the "Three Pillar Principle."



We begin by recognizing with the Apostle Paul, that John, Peter and James were "Pillars" in the early church (Galatians 2:9). Each of these three apostles represent pillars of doctrine that must be retained in the proper balance or the church will no longer be functioning properly. The first pillar represented by John is the pure, simple Gospel.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

The second pillar illustrated by Peter, stands for holiness, the divine nature, (I Peter 1:4).

The goal God has ordained for every believer is to be conformed into the image of His Son. This means that those qualities that are in Jesus are to be developed in the believer over time by the Holy Spirit. This is what it means to be disciplined, and that is what this second pillar represents.

The third pillar is represented by

James who shows us the result of abiding in the first two pillars which is Christian service. Faith without works is a dead faith (James 2:17). We are saved by faith alone and if we are saved then that grace works in the believer, resulting in a changed life and service to our Lord. So we see that the first foundational pillar is the Gospel. The foundation of the first pillar is the atonement. When there is no atonement, we are standing upon a counterfeit gospel and an artificial pillar.

The foundation of the second pillar is John chapter fifteen. We must abide in the true vine of Messiah Jesus in order to be disciplined correctly and to bear the fruit of a holy character that only His Spirit can provide.

The foundation of the third pillar is the first two pillars and their foundations. Fruitful service can only arise properly from these first two pillars. All of these pillars must be maintained in balance or the church will ultimately wobble off on her own and be in danger of removal. This is the error of the Ephesians as we shall see.

1. The Error of the Ephesians

Jesus begins His instructions to the believers at Ephesus with encouragement, which is the best pattern to follow when we have to administer correction to someone. Praise them for the good they are doing first.

I know your works, and your labor, and your patience, and how you cannot bear them which are evil; and you have

tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and has found them liars; (verse 2).

They were very zealous in their commission to guard the holy gates of the Lord's house. Their zeal was well pleasing to the Lord. He continues praising them for what they have done for Him. –

And has born, and has patience, and for My name's sake has labored, and has not fainted (verse 3).

This church has grasped the fact that every believer has been called to serve the Lord in some capacity. However, their zeal had become imbalanced. –

Nevertheless I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love (verse 4).

What was the first love of the church? In order to understand we must continue to verse five. –

Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come to you quickly, and will remove your candlestick out of this place, unless you repent (verse 5).

The church is being commanded to "do the first works." The first works, or the first love of the

church were the first two pillars. The early church zealously preached the Gospel; Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead. We are saved by grace alone. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, all need repentance. Believers were disciplined according to the words of our Lord and His apostles. Many years had passed since the Holy Spirit ignited the church at Pentecost. The Ephesians had become zealous spiritual policemen. They were neglecting the first two pillars to rid the church of apostates, not realizing that when the first two pillars are not balanced with service, the church has deviated from her purpose. When a church is no longer making the Gospel and discipling her priority, then she will ultimately be removed, because unless the church is producing reproducers, adding new believers and discipling them, then the church will die out.

The Ephesians had read Paul's letter to them and had zealously held onto his instructions to; – Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them (Ephesians 5:11). They were great reprovers, but they needed to “remember from where they had fallen.” They had to be reminded that they too were at one time sinners in need of the Lord's grace; to remember how it felt when they knew they were forgiven and to impart that same message of forgiveness to everyone, including those they thought needed to be reprovved. An imbalanced message will produce condemnation and not converts, empty pews, closed doors, and a self-righteous, loveless,

religious spirit in those who are doing the reprovving.

In summery; the church begins her descent into apostasy when she fails to make sharing the gospel and discipling (reproducing reproducers) her first priority. These are the “works” (Rev. 2:5) that the Ephesians neglected. The “first love” (Rev. 2:4) of the first century church was reaching people with the gospel and discipling believers into the image of Christ.

For a church to remain healthy this first century model must not be abandoned or neglected. The gospel must be first.

2. The Error of Pergamos

The church must maintain sound doctrine as it was established by Jesus and His apostles. The church at Pergamos symbolically began to marry “foreign wives;” she was allowing herself to be influenced by doctrines that were not supported by the apostles. God's word must be taken as the final word above man's philosophies, opinions, and doctrines.

To remain healthy a church must cleave to the pure simplicity of the scriptures and not abandon the authority of the first century apostles who alone were handpicked by God to establish the doctrines of the church.

“We (the first century apostles) are of God: he that knows God hears us; he that is not of God hears not us. Hereby we know the spirit of truth

and the spirit of error” (John 4:6).

3. The Error of Thyatira

The move away from the pure authority of God's word, breeds a spirit of compromise like worms on stale bread. The spirit of Jezebel that pollutes this church represents moral compromise with the world. Repentance from sin is not preached and God's moral

standards are diminished. The world's acceptance of sexual immorality is emulated.

I know Christians who are compromised in this area and like those at Thyatira, they are promised great tribulation unless they repent. The spirit of Jezebel does not preach repentance and the scriptural fact that there are consequences for sin. Her mantra is “God does not punish” which is not supported by the scriptures. Because this church has negated God's word by permitting the doctrines of men to override the final authority of the scriptures, Jezebel's followers, who have been promised by this lying spirit that they will all go in a pre-tribulation rapture, are going to be in for a rude awakening.

In order for a church to remain healthy and not fall into apostasy, holiness and separation from the world must be embraced. A healthy church recognizes the value of the Lord's correction, and the benefits of holiness. This church rejects the spirit of compromise with the world and strives to live a separate holy life as we are exhorted to do by the apostles and the entire counsel of God's word.

4. The Error of Sardis

This church is a further development of the same liberal spirit that infects Thyatira. Because she has allowed the doctrines of men to override God's pure, simple truth, this church is risking her salvation because she is abandoning the basics of the Christian faith. She no longer believes that the cross, or faith in the atonement is necessary for salvation, embracing the lie that all religions are valid. Thus this church is denying Jesus, the only other error that can cost a believer his salvation apart from perpetual unforgiveness (Matthew 10:33, 6:14,15). Therefore she is warned that unless she repents her name will be blotted out of the book of life (Rev. 3:5).

A healthy church recognizes that Jesus is the only way to the Father (John 14:6) and cleaves to the cross for her spiritual safety.

5. The Error of Laodicea

While this church has retained a fundamental knowledge of the Lord, she has become complacent and self-centered. Her desire for comfort has replaced the desire to save the lost. She has no zeal for the things of the Lord. All of the errors of the previous four churches are operational to some degree in this church, which represents the culmination of the latter day apostasy.

A healthy church remains zealous for the things of God, makes sharing the gospel and discipling her first priority, cleaves to the authority of the Holy Scriptures, preaches repentance, refuses to compromise with the world, values and practices

holiness, retains a healthy reverence for the Lord and is aware that obedience to His word is important. This church would rather die than deny that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and the only way to heaven.

I have just described the characteristics of the Philadelphian remnant who has kept God's word and will be rewarded for her faithfulness as the Lord has promised her. To those who remain trapped in the errors of the churches of the Ephesians, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea, I will say to you the one word the Jezebel spirit does not want you to hear, "Repent" in this space of time before the hour of God's judgment begins.

"A sermon for the church" is adapted and condensed from "Understanding the Book of Revelation: Hope for the Times we are Living Now," by H. Deborah Shively.

The Obedience of Worms

An acquaintance of mine related this story to me about one of the officers he served with in the Navy.

He said his friend was a Christian who had failed miserably. I wasn't told exactly what sin it was that the man had committed, but it was serious. It drove him to his knees in repentance before God.

In agony the man wailed, "God, I am a worm!"

And in the profound moment of silence after that confession, the man heard the Still Small Voice of the Lord say,

"No you are not a worm.
The worms obey Me."

A Lively Hope

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. – I Peter 1:3

The Apostle Peter begins this verse with praise, "Blessed be" – praise be to God for His abundant mercy and the "lively hope" given to us because of the glorious resurrection of Jesus, our Messiah, from the dead.

The word in the Greek for lively is *zao* (dzah-o) which means, "To live, breathe, be among the living, not lifeless, not dead." In other words, *zao* is the exact opposite of that which is lifeless or dead.

The King James translators chose the word "lively" as the English equivalent for the Greek *zao*. Some translations use the word "living" instead. However, that which is living can be alive, yet motionless, or inactive. The word "lively" suggests something that is alive, yet has movement, and is active.

We try to imagine the exhilarating joy that Peter and the other apostles experienced when they witnessed their resurrected Lord for the first time and realized that death had been vanquished. Their hope was indeed lively and invigorating, as is our hope in Jesus today. It is a twirling, dancing, pirouetting, skipping, leaping, celebrating, joyful, exuberant hope that cannot remain motionless or inactive. This hope propels us into the streets to share the Good News with others, joyfully compelling them to join in the dance and partake of the celebration of the gift of eternal life that frees us from the bondage and fear of death.

Our hope is indeed lively and was never designed to be contained within the walls of a church building.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the dancing feet of those who publish peace and share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others!

HARRIET TUBMAN – *A Bride of Christ*

Harriet Tubman (1822-1913) was an African American abolitionist. Many people are not aware of the fact that Harriet Tubman was also a devout Christian who had a very supernatural, first century walk with the Lord. She was totally guided by the Holy Spirit. According to her biographer Sarah H. Bradford, who knew her personally, Harriet could hear the Still Small Voice of the Lord and He also spoke to her in dreams and visions.

Her close, personal relationship with the Lord accounted for her remarkable success in leading many slaves out of the south and into freedom. For example, she astonished people by her ability to always being able to find food for them on their long, arduous journeys northward. She was merely following the leading of the Lord. Her biographer recounts that Harriet would not make a move unless she heard from God. On one occasion, however, Harriet was determined to participate in a military operation that would have resulted in her death or capture. The Lord intervened, Harriet became ill and was prevented from making the journey

God was totally in charge of Harriet's life, because she wanted Him to be, setting an example for us all.

We can examine those incidents of Harriet's life found in Bradford's record, "Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman," and we will come away seeing Harriet as a shining example of what the Bride of Christ should be.

Harriet emulated her Lord through her selflessness. As Jesus unselfishly gave Himself for others, Harriet did the same, risking her life over and over again to rescue those trapped in slavery.

Aside from her efforts to free her people, she tended to wounded soldiers during the Civil War. She was often found on the battlefield where soldiers were falling around her on every side. She was fearless in the face of death, confident that the Lord was not going to take her home until her appointed time. Her trust in the Lord was implicit.

She was devoted to serving God her entire life and willing to do whatever He asked of her. We too, should put others first as Harriet did and be willing to follow the Lord wherever He leads us. As we yield ourselves to the Lord and emulate the selflessness of Jesus in our daily lives we will stand out in a selfish society and glorify God.

We are to trust Him and be fearless in the face of tribulation, knowing that because we have put our trust in Jesus, no matter what happens, our souls are safe in His hands.

As Harriet led her people to freedom, so we are called to share the Gospel and save as many souls as we can from the bondages of sin and death.

There are many like Harriet who have served God in this way. To me, she stands out as an example of humility and self-sacrifice that all followers of Jesus should strive to emulate.

Looking at Harriet's life, we see what it means to be a sincere follower of Christ. Jesus said that in order to be His disciple, we must carry His cross (Luke 14:27). The cross is the symbol of what it means to give up one's self for another.

Harriet Tubman was a humble woman who endured great afflictions, and made history just by doing what the word of God says His people should do, and be what the Lord calls us all to be, reflections of His love.

Harriet's life illustrates for us what it means to be a disciple of Jesus; and that is what it means to be the bride of Christ.

Songwriter

*You are a songwriter for Me,
Saith the Lord.*

*Every time you serve in My name,
Every act of love you perform,
You add a musical note to the score
You are writing in the heavenlies.*

*And someday when I have
Assembled all My musicians,
There shall be a grand concert
Of the songs that have been written
By words, deeds and actions in
Service to My name.*

*Some will have written symphonies,
Others, a simple folk melody just as
lovely. But everywhere in My
Kingdom there shall be rejoicing
As I sing for you the songs
Your lives have written for Me.*

*He will joy over you with singing.
Zephaniah 3:17*

What if the Apostle John really had “tarried” until Jesus came?

I remember our conversation almost as if it had taken place yesterday - instead of ages. Jesus had

wandered off into an isolated spot to pray and I had followed Him. We sat together without speaking for quite a while. So many things were going through my mind. He had told us that He was about to be arrested and killed. At the time we didn't understand why. I loved Him dearly. He had become my closest friend. I couldn't bear the thought of losing Him. Finally, I broke the silence.

“Isn't there some other way?”

“I have asked that question myself,” He answered. “There is none.”

He had told us that He would rise again from the dead and come back in glory. I struggled to believe this. I had seen Him do so many miracles, why did I doubt? I had a whisper of a thought. It crept into my mind at that moment and I didn't know if I should speak it. It was so preposterous, and yet, this thought, I knew was born out of my innermost longing to see all of this through to the end. I tried to picture His glorious return. I desired to see the end of history, the culmination, the final fulfillment of the end of days. I wanted to see how the world would react when it finally beheld the Truth descending. I wanted to know what the world would be like then.

I thought I would mention it as a philosophical thought just to see how He would respond to it. Before I had a chance to assemble my words into the first sentence, He turned to me and said,

“You must be prepared to endure a great weariness.”

I did not understand what He meant. Then some of the others found us, Peter asked a question and my thought remained hovering in the wind.

Shortly afterward we followed Him to Jerusalem, then things progressed very quickly.

Jesus said to him, “If I will that he tarries till I come, what is that to you?” - John 21:22

MAN OF THE AGES

He was arrested. There was a trial of sorts and He was condemned. They beat Him brutally.

The Romans, you see, considered it an act of mercy. If He bled heavily before He was crucified it would hasten His death. A strange mercy, isn't it?

I watched as the soldiers nailed Him to a cross. I still remember the agony I felt in my soul as I watched Him die. Everything He had spoken to us about eternity was forgotten at that moment. Whatever faith we possessed was impaled with Him, carried to a tomb and forgotten.

Then faith was suddenly, unexpectedly revived. I remember staring with Peter into an empty tomb. We struggled to believe. When we finally saw Him alive for the first time after we had watched Him die so horribly we thought we were beholding an apparition. But a ghost can't be touched. I threw my arms around His neck and cried.

He appeared to us several times. During one of those occasions He prophesied to Peter of the death he was to die to glorify God. Then Peter pointed to me and asked, “What about this man?”

Jesus answered, “If I will that he tarries until I come, what is that to you?”

The other disciples immediately assumed that I was not going to suffer a physical death. I was quick to dispel any such notion. Jesus was merely saying to Peter that whatever concerned me wasn't really any of his business. At least that's what I thought at the time.

Then the years began their progression. I lived through the early persecutions. They did try to kill me. I was thrown into a vat of boiling oil and I was supernaturally lifted out unscathed. My adversaries were terrified. It was one of the most triumphant moments of my life.

They didn't know what to do with me. I was eventually sentenced to Patmos, a prison island.

They assumed I would die there. I didn't.

During the year I was in that place, I received many prophetic revelations. I know now that my time on Patmos was for that purpose. The isolation I experienced there, the time alone in intimate communion with God, was necessary to sharpen my spiritual eyes and ears so I could see and hear into the heavenly realm. At the time, I thought the visions I was receiving were the answers to my unspoken request. I was shown many things that were to happen in the future, including the Lord's return, although many of the events I was shown were beyond my understanding. Prophecy, you see, really can't be understood completely until it is fulfilled. Most often we are given shadows. I believe that it is more important to understand the principle behind what is being shown to us, the teaching. This will serve us through any generation.

Anyway, I survived my year in quiet solitude, yet I was never alone. The Divine Presence had never left me. During this time, the church continued to endure severe persecution. I was eventually transported back to the mainland. It was during this transition that I regained my freedom. Somehow in the political shuffle I was dislodged. I have no doubt that Divine Intervention was employed on my behalf. I had been misplaced and the predators who knew of my existence became distracted long enough for me to dissolve back into the populace.

I retired to a small house and continued to teach and disciple many. Years passed. Many things

had changed - except me. I had not aged one day. All of the other original disciples had been martyred. I was left alive and I was grateful. I was very happy to continue working on behalf of the Gospel. It was still too early for me to comprehend the full scope of what was happening to me. You see I still did not fully realize that I had been given the answer to a question I had never asked. It was merely a thought left hovering in the wind long enough for the Son of God to notice and read. - "You must be prepared to endure a great weariness."

To this day, the words He spoke still ring their prophetic reality into my soul.

It was eventually circulated among the churches that I had died at an extremely old age. This was an assumption. I had merely packed my bags and left on a journey from which I did not return. I had to leave before anyone discovered my secret. It had taken me quite a long time before I discovered it myself.

He *had* willed that I would tarry until He came.

In the beginning, I thought I would not have to wait to see His return that much longer. He had said He would come quickly. But I had forgotten that to the Lord, one thousand years were as one day.

I watched the days go by, year after year, after endless year.

One thing I always wondered about. Why did He freeze my face in this particular format? He waited until I was in my sixties before the aging process stopped for me. I was left with graying hair - a thinning silver forest, and just enough wrinkles to give my face some character I suppose. I

assumed that He wanted me to look as wise as I sometimes spoke. I would have preferred a more youthful appearance, considering that I was going to have to live with it for so long. So I sigh and submit, not my will, but Thine be done.

So now you have been made privy to my secret. You must be wondering, "How incredible! This man is two thousand years old!" And I never bought a dime's worth of insurance. How could I explain to them why I wasn't going to need it?

I watched history pass before me like a cloud. If I had written it all down, it would have been the world's largest history book. No one would have had the time to read it except me. So I didn't bother.

Have any of you ever wondered why so many years passed before the Gospels were actually written? I think I know. Our accounts were not burdened by a lot of unnecessary details. They were sifted by time, leaving us the things that were the most important; the messages and events that were all we really needed to know.

So it is with my long life. As I sit here remembering, I look back over the landscape of my past, I see only the mountains, the peaks that are to remain most noticeable. For these are the things that we really need to remember, children.

I *have* endured a great weariness.

There were times I cried out in agony begging to die. I have witnessed more bloodshed, pain and suffering than any human being on the face of this earth. And to my greatest grief, I have

seen that much of it was inflicted in the name of “religion”.

At times when I have been at my weakest spiritually, I have cried out to the Lord, “Why? Why does it have to be this way?” And on one of those occasions I heard His Still Small Voice whisper -

“Are you more righteous than I?”

Then He graciously led me back to the time when I stood beside Him at the door of Lazarus’ tomb. I watched Him weep as if His heart was breaking.

It was then that I realized that He suffers with us. There is not one agony endured in this life that He does not feel Himself. He was willing from the beginning of creation to share our self-inflicted wounds and bare them on His cross. His powerful voice shouts our names and His life resurrects our lives out of the ashes of this world’s misery. Thus we can endure because there is hope, little children. Thus I endured.

Considering that question “Why” - I have held it in my hands and studied it many times. It glimmered in my grasp like a jewel. And in its facets I realized that this world exists for you, dear brethren. Out of all the chaos and pain, this creation has birthed God’s chosen. God has been panning for gold throughout the ages. He has been sifting for His remnant like a prospector sifts sand through his sieve to discover the real treasure. He has made this earth to be your womb and heaven is your destination. You are His reward as much as He is yours.

This sifting process is what I have witnessed, and I have at last, come to understand it. The world

belongs to the devil and his cruelty, but you belong to God.

I am talking to you, His chosen few, you who have hid yourselves in Christ.

The antichrist has many faces and by now I have seen them all, though there may be at least a few more before this war is over.

For the most part, he dresses well, mostly in religious garb. He is comfortable in a pulpit proclaiming himself as god, eager to strip Christ of His deity. He does this subtly at first, by shifting the emphasis of his teaching away from the simple purity of God’s word to his own humanistic interpretations. He is a master of the art of tickling ears. And those who want their ears tickled are eager to follow him.

I have met him on numerous occasions and he has never been able to conceal himself before me. I have always been allowed to see the serpent wrapped around his being. And I have experienced his hatred. He despises those who walk humbly with their God. He knows that the disbelief he injects into his victims has no effect upon God’s remnant. So he has no other option but to seek for our destruction. He can try to do this in a multitude of ways. The demons he employs always carry with them a black suitcase filled with lusts, love of the world, the lust of the eyes, the flesh and the pride of life. When this suitcase is opened in our presence, God is watching to see how hard we resist. The sifting begins and we struggle to stand. We cry out, “Abba, Father!”

I heard Jesus cry this in Gethsemane. I had been dozing.

His voice awakened me. He was in agony. I wanted to get up and comfort him, but I didn’t. I was a young man then, and at the time I didn’t know how. And somehow I knew this was something that had to be done between just Him and His Father.

He sweat blood in prayer to gain the strength to do what He didn’t want to do. Little did I know that I would sweat blood for Him in prayer, time and time again, to keep from doing what I *wanted* to do.

So the antichrist comes with his own bag of temptations, this bag of his labeled, “Compromise.” The religious jargon he speaks sounds so good to those who are not willing to shed a little blood. They are more than willing to travel the easy road he promises. I have said that those who belong to God practice righteousness. The one who practices sin is of the devil. One who belongs to God may become wounded in battle and through repentance be healed - but he is still in the battle. Those who belong to God cannot deliberately, continually, willfully practice sin - because they love Him.

Although the world around them may be sifting they are the gold that will stand.

As I look across the landscape now, I see only one mountain that is outstanding. It is glorious to behold in its simplicity. It is a barren mountain except for one cluster of trees growing upon its summit. The trees are all evergreens, growing together, unified in purpose. From the distance I can see that they are forming a cross. And in this remnant forest the trees are

sheltering the poor, the needy, the neglected, the handicapped, the lonely, the suffering, the abused of mankind - all who are humble enough to seek shelter beneath their branches.

I have never seen such a beautiful mountain. It is all I choose to remember from all the years I have witnessed.

There is a knock on my door. Someone has just informed me that our service is about to begin and I must be going. I am a pastor now in a small country church somewhere in the United States. I'm not going to tell you exactly where. You'd think with all of my experience I would have a large church, possibly a television show,

written hundreds of books. (Actually, there is only One Book I've contributed to, and I must say I am very pleased with its circulation). No, that was not God's will for me. It was His will for me to be faithful with a little, for in His eyes it is so much.

I do want to encourage you, children. Our precious Lord is coming soon. And as promised, I shall see that day. How do I know after all this time that His coming is imminent? My dear ones, for the first time in two thousand years I am beginning to age! Isn't that wonderful? My hairline is rapidly receding. I'm gaining new wrinkles almost every day! It's been so difficult for me to contain

my joy in all of this. My brethren are beginning to think I'm a little strange - senile maybe? I do have to practice some restraint, but there are times when I'll look into a mirror and just burst out laughing!

So, I will leave you now with this - out of two thousand years of observing history and religion, there is only one mountain in the landscape, children. I've said it before, and I'll say it again, and again and again...

Love one another.

Sincerely, in our Lord,
John, the apostle

BURNT OUT IN THE BOAT

O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because you have brought no bread?

Matthew 16:8

You have been working diligently for a long time. Five thousand people covered the hills before you and you have watched five loaves of bread and a few scrimpy fish multiply through your fingers as you followed your Master's direction to feed His sheep.

Now the work is done. Everyone has been fed abundantly and you are exhausted.

You are back in the boat on your way to another assignment; and now you are the one who is hungry.

You look at your hands, they are empty but for a few crumbs. In your service to others you have neglected your needs. Now you don't have enough to get you through. You think of the multitudes you poured yourself out to serve. They had all they could use and more. You are burnt out in the boat, back to square one.

But you are in the boat with your Boss, the One who can restore and provide by a mere word.

And He is smiling at you.

Enjoy the feeling of knowing that you did your job well. Now you are in a position of solitude and intimacy with your Lord and you have His complete attention. He knows your thoughts and your needs. He begins to joke with you.

"Remember how many baskets of left over bread we filled after we fed five thousand people with just five loaves?" The God who can make a mountain from one grain of sand is contemplating what He is going to do with the crumbs that are clinging to your fingers.

Oh ye of little faith, why aren't you laughing too?

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they will mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Isaiah 40:31

WHY JESUS HAS TO BE THE MESSIAH

While the Israelites were still enduring their captivity in Babylon, the prophet Daniel, who like other prophets had received visions from the Lord of future events, was now visited by an angel who showed him the future concerning the Messiah and the second temple. This prophecy is called, "The Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks." This prophecy is also about the redemption from sin.

Seventy weeks are determined upon your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy (Daniel 9:24).

God's plan of redemption for the human race was foreshadowed in Eden when He made a sacrifice to cover His naked children, (Genesis 3:21) and cumulates with the arrival of the prophesied Messiah. Thus that vision is to be "sealed up," finished or concluded when the Messiah makes "reconciliation for iniquity" (Daniel 9:24).

In this chapter we are shown that Daniel had been reading the prophet Jeremiah and he discovered that Jeremiah had foretold that the captivity would last seventy years. We can imagine Daniel's

exhilaration when he realized that their seventy year sentence had reached its conclusion. This knowledge propelled Daniel into a heartfelt and earnest prayer of repentance for his sins and the sins of his people. In response to that prayer, Daniel was visited by an angel who revealed the secrets of the future to this one who was to God "greatly beloved."

Daniel is told that Jerusalem, which had been destroyed would be rebuilt along with the temple. The city would be destroyed again, but before that the Messiah, the anointed one would be killed, "cut off." (Daniel 9:26).

Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, in troublous times (verse 25).

We have already been shown that this prophecy was fulfilled. The Jews were permitted to return to Jerusalem and build the second temple.

And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for Himself:... (Some Hebrew translations read 'and will be no more').

The messiah would be killed, and then - ... *and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined (verse 26).*

So far we have been shown that Jerusalem would be rebuilt, then the Messiah would come after the, "seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks," be killed, and the city will be destroyed once again. The prophet Daniel has clearly been shown that the promised Messiah would come before the destruction of Jerusalem and the second temple. The prophecy of the destruction of the second temple was fulfilled in 70AD, forty years after Jesus also prophesied of its destruction because "they did not know the time of their visitation;" they did not recognize that Messiah had come (Luke 19:44).

In chapter three of Malachi's prophecy, God says through the prophet, "Behold, I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me: and the Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom you delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the LORD (YHWH) of hosts (Malachi 3:1).

When the prophecy of Malachi was given, the Jews had been allowed to return to Palestine and

the temple had been rebuilt. The prophecy states that the Lord will come to His temple and He is the messenger of the covenant. "He shall come, saith the LORD of hosts." That's God talking about the Messiah, the Lord, coming to the temple. It would have been the understanding of the people at that time that Messiah was coming to that new temple, which He did before it was destroyed, according to Daniel 9:25,26.

The first part of the verse is referring to John the Baptist the messenger/prophet who would prepare the way before the Lord, who is the messenger of the covenant. That covenant would be the prophesied New Everlasting Covenant (Jeremiah 32:40, Isaiah 55:3).

The wording used here in the Hebrew for Lord can also be used to designate God, but in the scriptures God is not referred to as a messenger, that term is reserved for prophets. So here we have a prophet designated by the word messenger, who can also be referred to as God, according to the usage of the word in Hebrew, being sent by God (YHWH). No one fulfills the description better than Jesus, the Messiah.

There are some who claim that Daniel's verses 25 and 26 are referring to two "anointed ones" because of the wording in some Hebrew translations. *—...until the time of an anointed prince (verse 25)...an anointed one shall be cut off (verse 26).*

The word "anointed" is pronounced as "messiah" in these scriptures and is used for both. While the word "anointed" is used in association with many individuals in the scriptures, there is only one prophesied messiah that is to be the

long awaited redeemer of Israel. That redeemer is to be a "priest after the order of Melchisedec" (Psalm 110:4), who was a king and also a priest.

In Daniel 9:25 and 26, we see these same two characteristics associated with one "Messiah." He is a prince and an anointed one, a description that is also used for priests.

Daniel's prophecy has been perfectly fulfilled. Even if the Jews did not recognize Jesus as the messiah at that time, they still acknowledged that He did miracles. The Jewish historian Josephus also recorded that Jesus did miracles, which certainly would qualify Him as being anointed. So we see in Daniel's prophecy the anointed one killed before the destruction of the city, and the "prince that is to come" emerges from the people who destroyed the city in 70 AD (verse 26).

We have to understand at this point, the element of duality in this prophecy in regards to the city's invasion and destruction. It will happen again. Jesus' prophecy in Matthew twenty-four is clearly speaking about another attack on Jerusalem in the generation before He returns, and this correlates to Zechariah's prophecy (Zechariah 14:1,2).

Today the Jews have returned and are returning to the nation of Israel. They are currently awaiting a "prince that is to come," who they believe will be their long awaited messiah. But Daniel's prophecies do not reveal a benevolent deliverer, but quite the opposite. Another piece to the puzzle is added in Daniel's chapter eleven.

This chapter is in two parts. The

first part from verses twenty-one through thirty-one describes the advent of Antiochus Epiphanes, an evil ruler who was dedicated to destroying the Jew's religion. Antiochus was eventually defeated by the Maccabees which is foreshadowed in verses thirty-two through thirty-five of Daniel's prophecy. These verses serve as a bridge that transitions us to the picture of the final prince that is to come, the antichrist, (Daniel 11:36-45) of whom Antiochus is a foreshadow. We can see that this villain will be operating through the great tribulation of the latter days, also prophesied by Jesus which is known as the time of Jacob's trouble (Matthew 24:21, Daniel 12:1). In Daniel's prophecy we see that this time continues until the very end and all history cumulates at the last judgment at the feet of the Ancient of Days, God Himself.

Then we have to ask, where is the Jew's vision of them ruling the world from Jerusalem with their messiah in prophecy? When are those prophecies of a warless world fulfilled?

So far we have seen that the Messiah who was killed before the destruction of the second temple was Jesus, who prophesied that He would return as "lightning" (Matthew 24:27). It is here we need to examine Zechariah's prophecy which was deposited through his pen by the Lord to complete the picture of the vision of the future initiated through Daniel.

We see in verses one and two of Zechariah's message, that Israel is enduring yet another brutal captivity. This correlates to the time of Jacob's trouble which is the tribulation. This judgment was

prophesied by Ezekiel. God would bring Israel's enemies upon them (Ezekiel 38:16,) and this captivity would continue until the Lord's return as we are shown in Zechariah's prophecy.

We see in Zechariah that it is God who descends upon the Mount of Olives, the place from which Jesus also prophesied of this event in His Olivet discourse (Matthew 24:3).

When Jesus returns He destroys the world's oppressors including the antichrist and the beast of Revelation, which is the last world empire. He then begins His rule from Jerusalem (Rev. 19). The prophecies of the time frame of His rule vary in the accounts in the Apocrypha in II Esdras and the Book of Revelation. Esdras is told by an angel that this time will encompass four hundred years. In Revelation it is one thousand years. In either case this time is far longer than a mere man can live.

Because Jesus is God manifest in human flesh (I Timothy 3:16), Jesus' reign of peace will last far longer than a man's average lifetime. This is one reason why Jesus had to come twice, once to be the last sacrifice for the sins of the people fulfilling all the foreshadows of the temple services and the prophecies in the

Old Testament. After His resurrection from the dead He ascended and received His resurrected body which would enable Him to live forever and reign on earth for such a long time.

This same Jesus who is the image of God (Colossians 1:15) who dined with Abraham, (Genesis 18) will be the finale of all the Jew's expectations and they will finally be able to "Look upon Me (God the Father) whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him (Jesus the Messiah) as one mourns for his only son" (Zechariah 12:10).

When all the prophecies concerning the messiah in the scriptures are taken into consideration, they only paint one portrait, no matter how many attempts are made to circumvent them. Jesus has to be the messiah because there is no other benevolent anointed one appearing anywhere in scripture after the destruction of the temple in 70AD. The antichrist, the evil prince that is to come is the false messiah that will deceive the Jews and all those who reject Jesus. One of the ancient Hebrew manuscripts describes this "prince that is to come" arriving upon "the wings of horrors."

The Jews will never rule the world from Jerusalem with their "messiah," except for possibly a brief interlude of deception before the antichrist demands to be worshipped in the place of God (II Thessalonians 2:3,4), the "abomination of desolation" (Matthew 24:15, Daniel 9:27).

While the Jew's dream of world domination will never be fulfilled as they have imagined, the repentant survivors of the time of Jacob's trouble, will be privileged to serve under the Anointed One that was killed, resurrected and supernaturally returns to be the true King as He always was and is, the Messiah Jesus. *From the book, "Why Jesus has to be the Messiah: Understanding the New Covenant and the Hebrew Roots of Christianity" by H. D. Shively*

THE DEITY OF JESUS

He is the Lion of Judah who has prevailed. Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

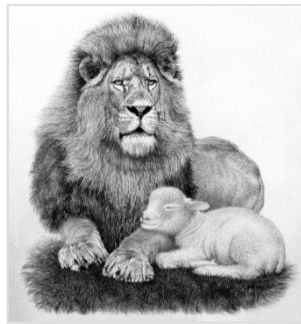
(Revelation 5:5,6)

Behold the Man, Jesus Christ; image of the Invisible God, (Colossians 1: 15) God manifest in human flesh, Immanuel, God with us. (Isaiah 7:14)

In Him all the fullness of Deity dwells (Colossians 1:19), and in Him we are complete. We can do all things through the Lion's strength, His gentleness has made us great.

In His perfect love we are blessed, In His perfect peace we rest.

For God so Loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life. - John 3:16



Covenant *I have made a covenant with you, saith the Lord; a covenant of love and mercy. Be faithful to Me, My bride; for I am a faithful husband and I will always be there for you in times of need. Job refused to deny Me through his suffering. I desire the same devotion from you. The ground of this world that you are standing upon will shift, it will always be unstable until I come for you and restore the earth with My presence. Will you fall away from Me if you suffer, or can you praise Me through it, knowing that I am waiting for you on the other side of the fire storm?* *Inspired by I Peter 4:12,13 from "The Still Small Voice" by H.D. Shively*

Safe Trees to Sleep In

Therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

II Timothy 2:3

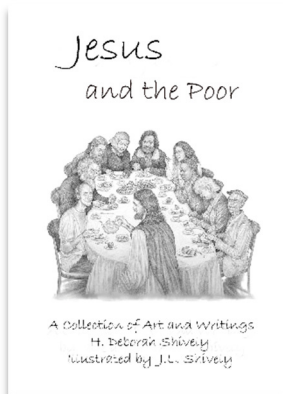
The pastor from Asia explained that he ministered in an area where Muslims were predominant and he had to sleep away from people where it was safe or the Muslims would kill him. If he stayed with the people he was ministering to then they'd be in danger of being killed by the Muslims so he slept in the trees. One night he woke up to find that a large python had wrapped itself around him and was squeezing him to death. He cried out to Jesus and he was able to miraculously free himself from the snake.

"So please pray for safe trees for me to sleep in."

Suddenly confronted with the reality of a whole other realm of service, one of the other pastors mumbled numbly, "I need a five star hotel with room service."

We get so spoiled sometimes here in the United States, don't we? We forget that we have been admonished to endure hardness for the Gospel's sake, and we must not forget that there are those who endure great tribulations while following the call to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Lord, when it gets hard, help us not to complain and help us to remember to pray for those who need safe trees to sleep in.



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A pastor I know related this story to me. He was at a pastor's conference when the speaker invited everyone in the audience to pray for one another. Two well-dressed pastors from an affluent church in the south approached a visiting pastor from Asia.

"What would you like us to pray for?" the pastors asked.

"Please pray that I will have safe trees to sleep in."

His request startled the pastors. "Why do you sleep in trees?"



Teapots

*I always thought that there is something spiritual about a teapot.
When I think of Christian service, I see teapots, vessels of the
Lord, waiting to be filled with steaming comfort,
Ready to be poured out into the cup of someone's need.
Jesus holds the handle firmly after the filling, lifts it up and
Tips a spout that is determinedly focused on its purpose.
The pot humbly bows, filling cup after cup in a tea service
That will continue until our Lord returns.*

*A teapot is a servant, greatly needed, for there are so many
Empty cups waiting to be filled with the love our Lord has brewed.
These servants come in all shapes and sizes, equal in their design,
None is more important than the other.*

*Whether silver or ceramic, they shine in their
Master's hand; polished to perfection, His image is reflected.*

*I see collections of these teapots adorning the pews,
Poised and ready, then lining up with the cups at the altar
To serve with prayers.*

I see teapots at the pulpits and in the Sunday schools.

I see them almost everywhere.

*I know that there will be tea parties in Heaven, because the
prodigals have all come home;*

*Abundant celebrations with cups overflowing and
Teapots crowned with gold.*

*But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering
upon the sacrifice and service of your faith,
I rejoice and share my joy with you all.*

Philippians 2:17

Revival

The people stood in the church and prayed, "Lord, send us revival."
Then a rushing, mighty wind blew through the sanctuary and the
People raised their hands and clapped and sang; but the revival was
Not in the wind.

Then the people sat and prayed again, "Lord, send us revival." And
Suddenly the church began to shake, the walls vibrated, the stained
Glass windows rattled and the church was shaken to its very foundation
Until the people trembled. But the revival was not in the shaking.

So the people got down on their knees and they cried to The Lord,
"Please, send us revival!" And they confessed their sins upon the altars
Of their hearts, they wept with broken contrite spirits and
They interceded for their brethren. Then a fire swept through the church
And raced up and down the pews igniting every heart. And in the
Flame The Still Small Voice was heard saying, "Go, My people, Go."

Then the people stood and left the building their hands had made.
They looked out upon the ruin before them. And they obeyed. They
Went to heal the broken hearts and set the captives free. They visited
The sick and made homes for the homeless. They fed the hungry,
Comforted the lonely and preached the gospel to the poor.
Then there was Revival.

If you've done it to
the least of these
you've done it to me
JESUS

