



THE TRIUMPH OF MERCY

By Don Rumble

—Introduction—

God intends to fill the whole earth with His glory. Since the zeal and strength of man are simply not adequate for the task, resources for this magnificent mission are extended to us in the grace and power of God. Of course, we are not worthy in ourselves to be used by Him so we stand in desperate need of His mercy.

To begin our study, we will see that God's plan is to impart to us His heart. We must come to know Him. Indeed, *this* is eternal life (Jn. 17:3). What do we possibly have to offer a world that is lost and dying? The answer is that we have the living God in our hearts. He is the solution for what ails mankind. So He comes to reveal to us His joy which is our strength. Along with that, He also manifests to us His heartfelt grief over fallen and hurting men and women. Paul was one who walked in this divine tension of God's grief and joy – and he was used to change the world of his day.

Have you ever had friends or loved ones reject the Lord and walk away from His promises for them? Paul experienced this in his relationship

with the nation of Israel. Yet he still could declare God’s sovereignty and faithfulness even though so many of his own kinsmen were misinterpreting God’s purpose.

The challenge we face today is to believe the Lord will fulfill all He has spoken. In the end, history will declare that He was found trustworthy. If we fail to trust Him as we ought, we will make the same mistake that Abraham did. He assumed that Ishmael (the result of his own efforts) was the fulfillment of God’s promise.

1

—In The Fullness of Time—

—Joy and Grief—

*I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I **have great sorrow and continual grief** in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. (Rm. 9:1 - 5)*

How is it that Paul could tell the Roman believers of his *continual heartfelt sorrow* over Israel while in another letter he admonished readers to *always rejoice* in the Lord (Phil. 4:4)?

Is it possible to have both constant anguish and ongoing joy? Somehow God seems to manage it. He simultaneously manifests His joy in many of His people while revealing His grief in others. It is amazing that He can do so and not get confused! He ministers encouragement to countless numbers of His children while at the same time bringing discipline to many others. What an awesome God we serve!

Consider the joy of the Lord. Obviously, God is not depressed; His heart is filled with elation. When He came into our lives, He brought with Him His abiding joy. As a result, we have in our hearts the delight of His dynamic and enduring presence whenever we encounter the trials of life. No matter what our circumstances are, the joy of the Lord within us is our strength to walk victoriously with Him.

However, at the same time, He will look upon the rebellion and hardheartedness of many in the world and experience great grief in His heart. Then He will allow us to share a measure of the pain He is experienc-

ing so that we may learn to pray for others with His compassion. It is a great privilege when He allows us to participate with Him in His heart for the lost.

—Paul’s Love for Israel—

Paul love for his nation was not simply an expression of a patriotic nationalism. The apostle bore in some measure, God’s heart for Israel. Whenever he considered the Jewish people and their rejection of their Messiah, he experienced ongoing grief. Yet his instruction to those he loved was to rejoice always!

Somehow Paul consistently experienced the opposite emotional poles of joy and grief, and walked in the dynamic tension of both. And he did so without becoming emotionally unbalanced. Only God could have enabled him to carry and convey such extremity of passion. And if we are to reveal the heart of God to those around us, we too must come to such a place. Is such an attainment possible? Of course, our first response is, “no”. We will never achieve the capacity to reveal the Lord to others. However, our hope is not in human strength to conform ourselves to His likeness, but in His skill to fashion us according to His own image.

Clearly, the Lord is greater than our ability to comprehend, define and express. Only He can develop in us the capability to communicate His heart to others. The transition into His likeness can be painful; we must trust Him in the process. He is the Potter; we are clay in His hands.

—They Are Not All Israel—

To Israel belonged the Law, the prophets, the promises, the temple and all the associated ceremonial worship. Yet when the Messiah came, the nation as a whole rejected Him. What about God’s promises to them nationally? Would His word now fail?

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel. (Rm. 9:6)

What did Paul mean that they were not all Israel who were of Israel? Would God now simply cast the nation of Israel aside? He had made many wonderful promises to His Old Testament people. For example:

And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail... (Deut. 28:13)

Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; he will teach

us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Is. 2:3)

God had promised an Anointed One who would lead His people into greatness and the fulfillment of all His promises. Yet when Messiah came, they rejected and crucified Him.

—But Many Followed Him—

But many followed Him. Death could not hold Jesus in its grip. He arose and ascended back to the Father and began pouring out His Spirit upon all who believed in Him. Thousands of Jews were filled with God’s presence within a matter of days, and soon even many Gentiles began to turn from their sins and come into relationship with the risen Christ.

While all this was happening, Israel for the most part stood in brazen opposition. Their stance brought grief to Paul’s heart.

We tend to equate God’s people in the Old Testament with the nation of Israel. However, that is not totally accurate. In the midst of the covenant nation, there were prostitutes, thieves, Baal worshipers, those who offered their children in fire to pagan deities, etc. There were also people like Daniel, Ezekiel, David, Isaiah, Miriam and Deborah. God has always had faithful covenant people who loved Him and walked with Him. These were the true people of faith, the children of Abraham.

While all in the nation had the opportunity to walk faithfully with the Lord, many chose not to do so. Israel’s history reveals that this was true from her beginning. So that while all bore the name Israel in outward distinctiveness, not all chose to walk in the covenantal relationship with God that was the basis of the nation’s identity. The nation was founded on *relationship* (God’s call to Abraham); her fulfillment will only be realized through an intimate communion with the living God as well.

It was no different during Jesus’ earthly ministry. Many responded to Him while many others (e.g., many of the nation’s spiritual leaders) did not. Nevertheless, God’s purpose was established on the earth, and His Word to Israel did not fail. Yet many people born in the covenant nation missed what was happening even though it occurred right before their eyes.

—In Isaac—

...nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In Isaac your seed shall be called.” (Rm. 9:7)

God's promise to bless the nations was made to Abraham and to his seed. Paul made it clear that although Ishmael was Abraham's descendant, God's covenant purpose would not be fulfilled through him, but through Isaac. The hope for the future rested in the child of promise.

What does Ishmael signify for us in the Spirit? God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of a multitude. But when he considered his age and that of his wife, such increase seemed impossible. As much as they wanted to have a child, Sarah just could not conceive. Then she had a "good idea"; maybe God meant for Abraham and their servant girl Hagar to become intimately involved. The result of this union was Ishmael. In looking at his son, Abraham thought he was looking at the fulfillment of God's promise. How many years did these godly people misinterpret Ishmael's significance? Sometimes it takes years to discover that what we are involved in is not in fact God's first choice for us. Spiritually speaking, Ishmael is a type of *men* initiating what God said *He* would do.

—God's Friend—

It is important to understand that Abraham was not a false prophet; he was God's friend. He walked in intimate relationship with the Lord, accurately heard His voice and had keen insight into His purpose. He was so close to the Lord that God decided He would not destroy the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah without first discussing His plans with His friend.

The problem was not whether Abraham knew the Lord. The issue was that *he did not wait for God to do what He had promised*. Similarly, one of our most difficult tests is whether we will patiently wait for the Lord to fulfill His promises to us. While we long to see God's will successfully accomplished, what part are we to play in the process? This question has been asked before.

Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." (Jn. 6:28, 29)

We must believe in the Lord, that He is living, active and will accomplish His objectives. Only then can we move "in sync" with Him instead of working for Him in our own strength and timing.

As we surrender what we want to see happen and cooperate with Him in His work, we will then marvel as He brings His word to pass. It takes faith to wait for God; His timing always differs from our own.

—Don't Try to Hurry Him Up—

Sometimes it is necessary to speak to others in the church of their need to change. However, if our counsel comes from doubt that God is already at work in them, we will meddle in their lives rather than minister to them. How foolish to admonish others if the Lord is not already doing so. What would be the point? But if we see His involvement with them, then we can move in harmony with Him and confirm what God is already saying in their hearts. This expresses the Kingdom of God. Personal ministry is to emanate from His authority, reveal His life and culminate in His glory. The rest is but religious exercise, a counterfeit of God's Kingdom.

The Lord's promise to Abraham would be fulfilled, not in Ishmael, but in Isaac; his descendants would be established through the son of promise.

That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.
(Rm. 9:8)

The seed of Abraham would bring forth both the nation of Israel as well as her Messiah. From Him would then come blessing to all the nations of the earth. The consecrated lineage that God was bringing forth would come through Isaac, not Ishmael. The amount of time from Abraham to the birth of Christ covered many centuries. God simply was not in a rush to establish His purpose. Have you ever tried to hurry Him up? Haven't we all?

—Seeing Our Own Need—

For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son." (Rm. 9:9)

The promise was to Abram and Sarah, not Hagar. However, to the natural mind, fulfillment was impossible.

God's Kingdom is not demonstrated through what man can do for Him; it is revealed when we come to the end of our plans and strategies, and the Lord does in and through us what we are incapable of. It is not that we do nothing and sit back waiting for God to do everything. But as we walk in His daily will for our lives, we expectantly look for Him to arise in us with greater glory than we have yet seen. In fact, we simply must have more of the glory of God in our midst because of His great purpose (to fill the whole earth with His glory) and the magnitude of man's need (both of the saved and of the unsaved). When both the greatness of God's call and the depth of our need dawns on us, desperation will motivate us to a new intensity of prayer. The Lord Himself will author such intercession. Only He

can open our eyes to see as He sees, the present condition of the nations and of His church. I believe that such prayer will then birth a manifestation of God's kingdom that will shake the nations.

The key to seeing revival birthed is not to institute fasting or prayer as some sort of spiritual technique. Rather, we must cry out for His presence because we know we are absolutely undone apart from Him. The foundation of spiritual revival is that God would reveal to us our emptiness and His sufficiency. Today, He is arising in our midst with this message; we must pay close attention.

Only when it was first absolutely clear that Abraham and Sarah could not have children did God intervene so that Isaac was born. This incident reveals how He often works in our lives. He has made promises concerning our nation, our region, our personal lives, etc. We must believe in Him, even in the light of seemingly unanswered prayer. The process of realizing the fulfillment of His promises will involve a measure of pruning, stripping and plowing as He brings us through a place of desperation.

We must understand both the depth of our need and the sufficiency of God's grace. Such insight will birth in us a deeper desire for Him to graciously change us and then use us to extend His kingdom in the world. When He chooses someone for a particular task, it is not because that person is more deserving than others – God is no respecter of persons.

Still, He does make strategic choices. In chapter two we will consider when He chose Jacob over Esau. This decision was not a matter of which one would ultimately go to heaven; it was about which one would be strategically involved in God's ultimate revelation of Israel's Messiah *on earth*.

He has chosen each of us for a specific task. Mercy is at the root of His call and grace is the channel through which His power will be revealed to the nations. How we respond to Him will indicate whether we are wise or foolish, profitable or fruitless.

2

—Jacob I Have Loved—

—All The Earth Shall Be Filled—

When Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older

shall serve the younger.” As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.” (Rm. 9:10 - 13)

Some believers struggle with the thought that God loved Jacob and hated Esau. The basic problem is that they have read more into the text than what is there. Many assume that Paul is referring to the eternal destinies of these two men. However, the verse contains no reference whatever to heaven or hell. The subject at hand is *God’s purpose on the earth*.

The subjects of heaven and hell are indeed key truths in the gospel. Heaven will be a wonderful place because in His presence is fullness of joy. There we will behold Him unhindered by the weakness of our flesh. On the other hand, hell will be as horrific as heaven is glorious. However, as important as these truths are, heaven and hell are simply not the Bible’s primary focus for the believer. Obviously, when we consider the lost, our major concern *must* be their eternal destiny. But the more we *as believers* study the Scriptures, the more we find their emphasis is not heaven or hell. Rather, the Bible focuses on what is coming out of heaven into the earth.

but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. (Num. 14:21)

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. (Hab. 2:14)

What is the difference between these two verses? Habakkuk informs us that people will not only see the glory, they will clearly *recognize it as the glory*. Such perception will fill the earth!

In the New Testament Jesus told us to pray this way:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Mt. 6:9, 10)

—The City From Heaven—

Our cry is for His will to be done as thoroughly upon the earth as it is in heaven. When the apostles began to write to the fledgling New Testament churches, their letters appealed for the “fleshing out” of God’s will both in their midst as well as in their interaction with the lost. Then at the end of the New Testament, the book of Revelation concludes with a city coming from heaven into the earth. Many have said that the city portrays heaven. They refer to John’s seeing streets of gold and pearly gates and conclude that it must be heaven. But it is not.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, “Come, I

*will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me **the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.** (Rev. 21:9, 10)*

John turned to see the bride, and he saw a city coming upon the earth from heaven.

So where exactly are we from? Jesus said we must be born *again* in order to see His kingdom (Jn. 3:3). But the word "again" (Grk. ANOTHEN) is often translated "from above" [See Jn. 3:31, 19:11; Jas. 1:17, 3:15, 3:17]. What does it mean to be born from above? It means our origin is not earthly. Jesus said of His disciples, that they were

*...not of the world, **just as I am not of the world.** (Jn. 17:16)*

We think, "Lord, I know that You are not of this world. You came from heaven." Then He simply smiles at us and says, "But now God is *your* Father too." Think of it. God is our Dad! We have been birthed from heaven. For the last two thousand years, a bridal people have been emerging from heaven. This company is also pictured for us as a city, as well as a flock, a family, a house...

This heavenly community is God's gradual fulfillment on earth of His promise that He would someday fill this planet with His glory as the waters cover the sea.

—Making Choices Without Partiality—

Romans 9 is not primarily dealing with heaven and hell, but with God establishing His purpose on the earth. Before Jacob or Esau did anything good or bad, God said that the older would serve the younger. Clearly, God made a choice. While it is true that He shows no partiality (Rm. 2:11), it is equally true that He chooses specific people for specific tasks. His hatred for Esau and love for Jacob had specifically to do with which one would serve the other. If Paul was referring to Jacob and Esau's eternal destinies, he would have to be saying that Esau would both serve Jacob on earth while they lived and from hell after they died. Obviously, such was not the case. Clearly, the older would serve the younger during their lives *on earth*.

Yet He says, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." What did He mean? The word "hated" is also found in Luke 14:26.

*If anyone comes to Me and does not **hate** his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.*

Matthew gives further clarity.

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. (Mt. 10:37)

If we would be His disciples, Jesus says that we must love Him more than we love anything else. We must not be restrained in our commitment to Him. He wants all of us, our whole heart – even that which is most precious to us – our families. This is what it means to have a single eye. We turn from everything and consecrate the whole of our being unto Him.

But what does this say about God? He had a single eye for Jacob and the genealogical line through which He would bring forth His chosen Messiah. While there were many other nations and people upon the earth, He would not be distracted. He had a “single eye”. While He knew everybody who had ever lived, every hair on every head and every bird that had ever fallen from a tree, yet He would not be sidetracked from His purpose. He was totally focused as He interacted with His servant Jacob.

We see this same intent in Jesus’ high priestly prayer.

*I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. ...I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, **that the world may believe that You sent Me.** (Jn. 17:9, 20, 21)*

Jesus’ prayer reflects a specific focus within God’s purpose. While He loved the whole world (Jn. 3:16), He focused specifically on those given to Him by the Father. What God did in them would then be instrumental in reaching the world. If we are to be involved in His agenda for the nations we must do as He did. We must turn away from all that cries for our undivided attention and wholly give ourselves to Him – to His purpose and His presence. “Jacob I loved. Esau I hated.” Such a statement reveals focus and purpose that will never be sidetracked.

Today, when Muslims and Jews in the Middle East turn to the Lord, their families do everything they can to hinder them. As these new believers persist in placing their love and loyalty to the Lord above that for their relatives, those in their society perceive them as hating their families. While in some respects their choice may seem like a lack of love, the truth is that God’s salvation has now come near. In fact, the newfound faith of these estranged disciples is the one hope for these lost loved ones to find eternal life. The love of God can now be revealed through these believers

to their lost families. It is at times like this that we are impressed with the great cost of embracing God's Kingdom.

—Show Me Your Glory—

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." (Rm. 9:14, 15)

Please note that the above scripture does not say, "And I will have wrath on whoever I choose to have wrath". Rather, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy". Paul was quoting from a conversation between the Lord and Moses (Ex. 33:19). Moses would regularly set up a "tent of meeting" in order to meet with God. The Lord would come down to the doorway of this little tent in a pillar of cloud and Moses would speak with Him as a man talks with his friend. While such an experience might seem to be the ultimate encounter one could have with God, Moses wanted more.

And he said, "Please, show me Your glory." (Ex. 33:18)

Personally, I think I might have settled for a cloud appearing in my prayer closet! But there is indeed more! Moses experienced God's presence, but he wanted to see His glory. The glory and the presence of God are not identical. The Lord said,

*"I will make all My **goodness** pass before you, and I will proclaim the **name** of the Lord before you. I will be **gracious** to whom I will be gracious, and I will have **compassion** on whom I will have compassion." (Ex.33:19)*

God's glory has to do with the revelation of His goodness in the display of His mercy as He makes known His wonderful Name. The nature, character and heart of God is revealed as He demonstrates His glory. That is why Jesus of Nazareth is the clearest expression of the glory of God ever manifest upon the earth. God's eternal nature and holiness was revealed 2000 years ago in the man Christ Jesus. Simply stated, this One was the Lord of eternity put into human terms.

In chapter 3 we will consider the glory and power of God. His glory transforms His people from the inside out. His power confronts whoever and whatever stands in His way as He makes His name known among men and nations. In Moses' day Pharaoh tried to stand up against the God of Israel. He soon discovered just how foolish it was to resist Him.

3

—Seeing His Glory And Power

—My Own Experience—

The word “glory” comes from a root word meaning “heavy”, or “weight”. There have been times in prayer when my experience of the Lord’s presence seemed like a physical weight. It was neither oppressive nor condemning. In fact, I knew that He was revealing Himself to me in a special way.

I remember the first time I attended meetings in what has become known as “the Toronto blessing”. I immediately experienced the sensation of the weight of God’s glory in the room. I felt physically weak; the whole environment was permeated with the weight of God. It was as if the entire congregation could have just as easily lay down on the floor before the Lord as continue with their meeting. In fact, I was not sure why they did not do so. However, they began to sing choruses and to celebrate before the Lord. Then someone brought a short Bible teaching. After this, they cleared the chairs to the sides of the room and began praying for people. I thought to myself, “So what should I do? I know, I’ll catch people who fall down.” After a short time of catching falling bodies, someone asked me if I would like to be prayed for. When I received prayer (and this is just my own personal testimony, not an indication of what others did or should have experienced), I perceived no difference in my experience of the Lord from when I initially entered the room. I thought to myself even for the rest of that week, “what is the point of all this?” A few months later I returned to attend more meetings with a few friends of mine. One of them experienced great joy and laughter and said she felt as though she had been born again all over again. She found a renewed depth of joy and intimacy in her relationship with the Lord. While I was blessed for her, I still was not sure what God’s purpose was for those meetings. It actually took me about six months to catch a glimpse (at least for my life) of what He was doing.

What happened was this. I began to come across an increasing number of people who had been touched by God’s glory. They had discovered a new dimension of interaction with Him as they stood in His presence. What they experienced was a physical weight of His glory and they often could not stay on their feet. Many were affected with different physical manifestations. Some laughed with joy while others wept earnestly. Some cried aloud as they had open visions that brought conviction of sin. Others were literally healed of depression and received newfound faith to run the race even more diligently than when they were first saved.

Consistently, what I found was that after their encounter (for some people it was the very first day, for others it was months later), these believers began to talk about dimensions of God's goodness they had never seen before. Some spoke about experiencing for the first time a heart of love for the nation of Korea. For others, it was a love for Israel. Some found a strong desire to give themselves to intercessory prayer. Again and again, I found people talking about a new love for God's people, for the lost, for the Scriptures, for new consistency in their prayer lives, etc.

—Revealing His Goodness—

It seemed as though God had proclaimed his goodness and made it pass before these precious believers as they were in His presence. Then when they got up off the floor, they began talking about some fresh newly received insight into His heart. One friend of mine who had suffered much rejection in his childhood actually felt the Lord put His arms around him. As he stood there in the embrace of God, he fully expected to see Jesus when he opened his eyes. However, when he looked, he saw nobody there but the brother praying for him. It so stunned him that he fell backwards onto the floor. When he got up, he immediately began to speak about God's personal love for him in a way he had never seen before.

God's glory is revealed when He passes by and unfolds some aspect of His goodness. Since we could not handle the full revelation of His nature, He gives a glimpse of one aspect of His heart to one individual while to another He allows an insight from a totally different perspective. As we all then begin to share our insights with each other (the Bible calls this body ministry), facets of God's nature that we had not understood before start coming into greater clarity.

The word "theology" means the study of God. Most people think it refers to the study of books about God. Certainly, reading godly writings can be one part of theological study. However, experiential intimacy with the Lord must be the key ingredient in our pursuit of knowing Him. How we need to spend time with Him, yielding to Him as He opens His heart to us.

As Moses stood before the cloud in the tent of meeting, he asked, "Lord, may I see your glory?" God's response was significant. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. And I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." If in recent months, you have gained further insight into God's heart, all you can say is, "God had mercy on whom He chose to have mercy". Sometimes I encounter believers who have entered a new dimension of intercession or a new commitment to evangelism. I have seen

some then express a wrong attitude toward others who are not responding like they are. “How come you’re not praying (worshiping, witnessing, etc.) like we are?” My response is this: “You’ve missed the point! God had mercy on you! You don’t see something of His heart because of great spiritual stature. It is His mercy! That’s all you can boast in.” The more we see God the more humble we will become.

Paul’s theme in Romans 9 is not about who will go to heaven or hell. God’s eternal wrath is not the subject at hand. It is about the God who came, had mercy, interacted with men and gave them insight into His heart.

—It Is Not Of Him Who Will Or Runs—

So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. (Rm.9:16)

The above verse reveals the heart of the matter. Someone thinks, “I’m going to be a prophet to the nations. I have decided what my ministry will be. I will fast and pray until I become an internationally recognized prophet. I will prophesy words that will change the course of history and nations.” So he fasts and prays extensively and all he gets is frustrated and skinny. Why? Apprehending God and His purpose for our lives is not a matter of simply deciding what we want to do for God and then running after it. How could God’s Kingdom be truly His if it was based on our sovereignty?

Have you come some distance in God? Have you gained some insight into His heart? He has had mercy on you.

Our heart cry is for revival. However, there is a tendency to think that if we fast and pray, God will be required to send it. But the Kingdom of God is not about what we can make happen. It is about God’s mercy. The truth is, we urgently need Him to show us the desperate condition of our hearts, our nation, the Church, etc. And we need Him to arise in our lives and reveal to us His awesome glory. At the same time, we need to see how small, petty, selfish and spiritually cold we are. Out of such a growing awareness will arise from our hearts a cry for Him to come in mercy and change us. Such is the beginnings of revival.

This process is already starting to happen across the church in America. But we must remember that we cannot make Him hurry His work. He has more zeal for His house than we can imagine. As a result, He is arising in a new wave of outpoured mercy. Be thankful, and be assured of this. What is coming will forever change the status quo!

—That He Might Reveal His Power—

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “Even for this same purpose I have raised you up, that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be declared in all the earth.” (Rm. 9:17)

God wanted His name proclaimed in all the earth. Romans Chapter 9 is not primarily about eternal destinies; it is about *God’s purpose on the earth*.

While Pharaoh probably did not fully understand it, God had raised him up so His power could be revealed. If you are interested in seeing what the Lord’s power looks like, consider Pharaoh. God sent upon the Egyptians hail, plagues, gnats and frogs. He turned their water into blood. He sent the death angel among them and then He wrecked their whole army in the Red Sea.

God not only wanted to unveil His power, He wanted His name declared in all the earth. Needless to say, word of what He did to Pharaoh was quickly spread abroad. The kings in the Middle East were suddenly very afraid. Balak, king of Moab tried to hire Balaam to curse the Israelites. The Gibeonites disguised themselves and made a pact with Joshua so that he would later be prevented from destroying them. Indeed, the fear of Israel’s God spread very quickly. Even today, God’s name is proclaimed in all the earth, because of what He did to Pharaoh.

God knows how to “make an impression” when He wants to – He can be quite dramatic! Most times though, He is very subtle and many do not even recognize what He is doing. But every once in a while, according to His own sovereign purpose, He will arise in great power and the earth will experience events like the Welsh revival, the great reformation or the great awakenings. While we would like Him to express Himself in extraordinary demonstrations of power all the time, He has chosen not to do so.

Much has been made of the fact that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. What the Scripture in Exodus 7 and 8 actually teaches is that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Then in Exodus 9 and 10, God responded and hardened his heart. Here is a question. Do you think Moses ever hardened his heart? Have you ever hardened yours? What happened? Did He not continue to have mercy on you?

In the next chapter, we will look at how the Lord will even reveal His mercy in the lives of those who harden their hearts. His mercy can triumph over judgment even in such cases. What He wants to do is to raise up vessels of mercy upon whom He will manifest His glory.

4

—Vessels Of Mercy—

—A Personal Testimony—

I was born into a Christian home and born again at the age of 4. For as far back as I can remember, God was in my life. I remember the presence of the Lord with me as a little child. I also remember the conviction of the Holy Spirit when I would not share my toys with my friends. God would deal with my heart over such issues and was very real to me. When I spent too much time with some activity and neglected Him, He would draw me back to Himself. Over the years, I would occasionally drift from Him and then return. But there came a time in high school when I said, “You know, I’m going to check out the world. There is too much that I’m missing. I want what’s out there”. So I turned and I began to walk away.

When God began to woo me and draw me back to Himself, I hardened my heart and said, “No”. When I made this choice, I began to run even harder in the wrong direction. The Lord kept drawing me back, but there finally came a point when He said, “Okay, go ahead”.

When God gives people over to do what is improper, that is not the same as giving up on them. We probably all know people who were given over to a perverted lifestyle. They sowed into licentiousness and reaped into their own persons the due penalty of their error (Rm. 1:27). In other words, they harvested destruction. And when they realized the devastation they were reaping, they cried out to God. And in wrath, He remembered mercy and they were born into His kingdom. Then when we laid hands and prayed for their healing, some still died of AIDS. The reason is because God’s mercy does not necessarily nullify the consequences of our sowing.

When I hardened my heart, God turned me over to reap from my choices (cf. Luke 15:11 - 13). As a result, I began to experience a measure of destruction in my life. Paranoia and fear became recurring elements in my thought life.

My number one desire was to be a successful rock musician and gain riches and fame. At the same time, I was dating a girl. She noticed something different about my family and began to ask me about it. I began to share with her about God, heaven, hell, forgiveness of sins, Calvary, etc. Her response was, “Wow! I want to follow Jesus”. I thought, “Wait a minute, what have I done?” I said, “Well, no. First the band gets rich and famous and then I’ll follow God on my terms”. Her attitude was, “Well, I think I want to follow God whether you do or not.”

As we sat there in my car (this was 1971), it began to dawn on me that a certain period of my life was coming to an end. It occurred to me that my life was not going well; the vision I'd had for musical success was not working. At the same time, as I grappled with conviction of sin as well as the still present desire to continue playing in my rock group, I realized that I was unable to come back to God!

I knew what was needed. All I had to do was repent and ask the Lord to forgive me of my sins. Right? But as much as I tried, I could not find my way back to the Lord. Consider the following scripture.

*For **it is impossible** for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift...if they fall away, **to renew them again to repentance...** (Heb. 6:4 - 6)*

The above verse in one translation of the Bible reads (incorrectly, I believe) that it is impossible for those who have fallen away *to be brought back to repentance*. But if that statement is true, then even God cannot do it. Thankfully, that is just not true. God *can* bring back to Himself those who have wandered. I am living proof. The above verse was written to *men*. The writer was saying, "Brethren, there is no possible way you can bring back to God one who has strayed. It is humanly impossible to renew people to repentance. In fact, I could not even bring myself to repentance. That is why it is so presumptuous for people to think they can live any way they want, and then come back to God whenever they feel like it – as if salvation was in their own hands.

The truth is, salvation is a gift from God. We should never presume upon His mercy. Personally, I am so glad that in wrath, He remembered mercy.

I knew the fear of dying and of being on a path toward hell. As I sat in my car struggling with my own conscience and trying to find the Lord's forgiveness, suddenly the power of God came into the car and He enabled me to return to Him. As one who had rebelled once said,

Salvation is of the Lord. (Jonah 2:9)

At that point, I led my girlfriend to the Lord, and we "walked on air" for weeks. It was so good to be back in relationship with God and to have His life manifest in me. Just the fact that I knew I was not bound for hell was very liberating.

—The Wisdom Of Saying "Yes" To God—

I had become a vessel for dishonor. I had become a testimony of the foolishness of saying "no" to God. But in wrath, He remembered mercy.

And as a result, I became a testimony (in some measure) of the wisdom of saying “yes” to God.

Pharaoh became a testimony of the foolishness of saying “no” to God while Moses became a confirmation of the wisdom of saying “yes” to Him. But did Pharaoh wind up in hell when he died? We think we know the answer to this question and there is a good chance that we are right. But we really do not know. Here is why.

When God parted the Red Sea and brought Israel through, Egypt followed after them. Then in the morning watch – (a several hour period from 2 a.m. till dawn), God sent confusion among the Egyptians. Their wheels started falling off their chariots causing them to turn into one another so that they could not go anywhere. They experienced mass confusion for a period of several hours. Then they began to say among themselves,

Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians. (Ex. 14:25)

At this point, something began to dawn upon them. God had said to Moses that He would harden Pharaoh’s heart so that the Egyptians would know that He is the Lord (Ex. 14:4). Therein lies the mercy of God.

We simply do not know how many Egyptians shook their fists and said “Ra is the true God!” as the waters of the Red Sea came crashing down upon them. We also do not know how many humbled their hearts and said, “The God of Israel is the true God. Oh God, forgive us for our arrogance and pride and for how we have opposed You. Look what You’ve done to our nation and to our king. We humble ourselves before You. Have mercy!” – as the waters crashed down upon them. Would not God have had mercy on these men? Remember, God has far more mercy than we have either understood or manifested to others.

Consider the thief on the cross. He was raised in Israel and probably had some understanding of the Law and the Prophets. It is quite likely that he had heard about Jesus of Nazareth and yet it seems he had consistently rejected the wisdom of God. As a result, he became a testimony of the foolishness of saying “no” to Him and thereby reaped destruction. Yet, while he was hanging on a cross, he turned to Jesus and said, “Remember me when you come into your Kingdom”. At this point, God showed mercy and promised him paradise.

A man who was a testimony to the foolishness of saying “no” to God, who had become a vessel for dishonor, yet gained heaven because of God’s mercy. Is that not amazing? You can be either a vessel for honor or

for dishonor. If you are born again and filled with the Holy Spirit, God has called you to be a vessel of honor, a testimony of the wisdom of saying “yes” to God.

—That He Might Make Known His Glory—

Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?” But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?” Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? (Rm. 9:18 – 22)

God endured the vessels who were headed for destruction. When the Egyptians opposed Him, He endured them (it doesn’t say He enjoyed this process). Ultimately, He brought His wrath upon them and they reaped destruction. He put up with their rebellion for one reason.

...that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. (Rm. 9:23, 24)

God endures the vessels of dishonor and of wrath that are presently heading toward destruction, even in our own nation, because He wants to reveal the riches of His glory upon the vessels of His mercy. While some believers consistently emphasize the wrath that is to come, I tell you that glory is coming upon God’s vessels of mercy.

Indeed, there is wrath upon our land. However, our God is One who in wrath, remembers mercy! Herein lies our hope.

Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. (Is. 60:1 – 3)

The brightness of the rising of this dynamic glory of God will be upon His vessels of mercy. Some believers who have prophesied wrath have not understood God’s mercy. As a result, while their words have carried a measure of accuracy, they lacked insight into the heart of God.

Jonah was accurate and incomplete. He was correct that Nineveh was headed for destruction. But when God had mercy, Jonah got angry. He simply did not comprehend God's heart for the lost.

—Conclusion—

The glory of God is coming to our land. We cannot make it happen or hurry it up. But we can align ourselves with Him. We can consistently yield to Him and present ourselves before Him. Then we can speak to others as one who would wash their feet.

Some are called into a greater ministry of intercession – they have received new insight into the heart of the Chief Intercessor. If that is you, don't look down on others who are not interceding as you are. But receive what you have seen and be thankful for His mercy. (Others may be discovering more of His love for evangelism, prophetic ministry, practical serving, etc.) May we experience more and more of His glory as He reveals to us the intent of His heart, both for us as well as for the world.

God will fill the earth with His glory. The resources of heaven are already being marshaled toward this awesome objective. He will make strategic choices among His people just as when He chose Jacob over Esau. Remember, mercy is at the root of His call and grace is the channel through which His power will be revealed to the nations. How we respond to Him will indicate whether we are wise or foolish, profitable or fruitless. Are you ready for what is coming? One cannot be neutral; there is either the foolishness of "no" or the wisdom of "yes". Amen.

All Scripture quotes are from the NKJV

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