

HE MAKES ALL THINGS NEW

VOLUMES 27 & 28

MARCH & APRIL, 2024

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Recently, while reading the first chapter of Romans, I was particularly drawn to verse 11. Paul writes to the Romans these words, *For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established* (KJV). Paul had a reason, a goal, a purpose for writing to these Romans.

He had never been in Rome when he wrote these words. He had no personal relationships with the believers there. He had never looked them in the face, but his heart went out towards them, and he was not ashamed to show it. *I long to see you* - in the original language, the word *long* is *epipotheo*. It describes a strong desire, an intense craving for possession, a great affection for, a deep desire, an earnest yearning for something. It expresses a very intense amount of yearning. It's also in the present tense indicating Paul continually longed to see the believers in Rome. What Paul is saying in essence is that "my heart aches to see you." The idea is that one wants something so bad it makes your heart hurt on the inside. Have you ever wanted something so badly it made your heart hurt when you thought about it? Paul is saying, "I want to see you so badly that it makes my heart hurt when I think about it." Paul's service and ministry was truly from the heart. The people to whom he was writing were in his heart.

Mary and I often comment on how amazing it is that God can put people in our hearts. I've often stated it this way - like a surgeon doing heart surgery, God opens our heart up, places someone inside it and sews it back up, tells you to love them, to care for them, and then enables you to do so. Although we have never met most of you, we've never seen you face to face and we may not have a personal relationship with you, Mary and I want you to know today, dear reader, all of you, and in a special way, our incarcerated readers, are in our hearts. God has placed you there!

This past Saturday Mary and I attended the launching of a new ministry by a formerly incarcerated man who I had done time with. There were several formerly incarcerated people in attendance. I was asked to speak at this event and Mary gave a brief testimony. I was really touched as I watched my wife and listened as she shared how God had placed the incarcerated community in her heart. I am so thankful for my wife, friend, and co-laborer, who shares the same passion I have, loves the same people I love, and serves alongside of me in this ministry and is a vital part of getting this newsletter out.

One writer said this, "unless it be in my heart, and comes from my heart, I can do you no good. No man ever touched another with the sweet constraining forces that lie in Christ's Gospel unless the heart of the writer

or speaker goes out to grapple the hearts of the readers or hearers. And no audience ever reads or listens with any profit to a man when they come in the spirit of criticism, or of cold admiration, or of stolid indifference." Those two words, "stolid indifference" really grip me. Stolid-not easily stirred or moved, unemotional, dry, or dull. Indifference- a lack of interest or concern, coldness, insensitivity, detachment, or unimportance. O may God help us that our hearts are on fire and that our hearts are really in what we do by way of our service to the Lord.

John MacArthur writes, "People serve the Lord for many reasons. There are some people who serve the Lord because of legalism; they're afraid not to. They serve the Lord because they think that's what He requires if you're to get into the kingdom. There are people within the framework of Christianity who serve the Lord strictly because they feel bound to do that or else God may pop their balloon, make life miserable for them. There are people who serve the Lord for prestige's sake. They want to make a reputation. They want to be highly esteemed. They want to lord it over men. They want to seek a chief seat. There are some people who serve the Lord because they want to be thought righteous. They want to be thought of as holy, as godly, as religious. There are some people who serve the Lord because of peer pressure. Everybody else is doing it and they've got to get on the bandwagon, or they won't be accepted in the group. There are some people who serve the Lord because they've been forced to do it by somebody else, maybe their parents perhaps even, who have intimidated them in years past and they're still bound by that intimidation. You may serve so people will think you're spiritual. You may do it sometimes so you can have that leadership that you've always wanted. You can serve the Lord for many reasons, out of your own ego, out of fear, out of legalism, out of intimidation. But none of those is true spiritual service because all of that is external. It's all functionary. It's all going through the motions, cranking it out. I might add there are some people who serve the Lord, believe it or not, out of money. They do it for filthy lucre's sake. Jesus, nowadays, is a commodity that sells, in case you haven't noticed. But all of these show an external kind of service. We could call it serving in the flesh, for external reasons." Paul's motive for service was pure; it came from deep within him. He had a purpose for writing them.

Listen to what he says, *I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established*. Paul makes it clear that it is of no selfish desire that he is writing to them. He is not seeking to get something out of them or from them. Paul knew that he had something which he could give to these people,

some spiritual gift. He wanted to see them built up, strengthened, encouraged, firmly fixed, and stable. Like Paul, we are thankful that we are instruments, that we are vessels, that God can use to assist in the building up of your spiritual life. We desire to see you have a vibrant personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

I like how this writer put it, “Paul wanted to give them a firmer grasp and fuller possession of Jesus Christ, His love and power, which would secure a deepening and strengthening of their whole Christian life. He was quite sure he had this to give, and that he could impart it. Paul thought of himself, not as the original giver, but simply as a channel through which was communicated what God had given. So, on the one hand, the Christian teacher is bound to rise to the height of the consciousness of his lofty vocation as having in possession a gift that he can bestow; on the other hand, he is bound ever to remember the limitations within which that is true—viz- that the gift is not his, but God’s, and that the Spirit of the Lord is the true Giver of all the graces which may blossom when His word, ministered by human agents, is received into human hearts.”

General Booth, founder of the Salvation Army made this statement, “some people’s passion is money, and some people’s passion is fame, but my passion has been men.”

Our passion is people. Mary and I long to see God do amazing things in your life. We desire to see each one of you walk out or live out your faith in the full potential of all that God has in store for you.

What is the passion of your life? What are you living for? What are you eager to do? Are we just twiddling our thumbs and wasting our life on things that don’t really matter? Or, have we gotten excited about the most important thing in the world—sharing Jesus Christ with those who don’t know him? Are you involved in sharing God’s love? Two things will last forever—the Word of God and people. Everything else fades away. What are you doing this week that will last forever?

Howard Isom

MUTUAL ENCOURAGEMENT

Paul says in Romans 1:12, ...*that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me* (KJV). In the article above, I wrote about Paul’s desire to encourage those he was writing to. Paul shares in this verse his desire to not only encourage, but to also be encouraged by the mutual faith that he and his readers share.

It’s a joy to write and try to encourage others. But it’s equally a joy when our readers write us and want to share what God is showing them and their desire to encourage others. We are pleased to include a few articles by some of our incarcerated readers in this newsletter. I pray they will be a blessing and speak to your hearts as they have ours.

Howard Isom

BE SOMEONE’S BARNABAS

Saul of Tarsus, better known today as Paul, arguably the greatest evangelist in history, had a rough life. He went from being an absolute menace to all professing followers of the “WAY”, by dragging them out of their homes, imprisoning them, and practically signing their death warrants, to being imprisoned and persecuted himself, when he turned to follow Jesus.

After Paul’s conversion, one of the first obstacles he had to overcome was his past. He had a reputation around the known world as being a ruthless opponent of the “WAY”, known now as Christianity. Like all of us incarcerated, he had a record. Even if he, being an accessory to the torture and murder of innocents was never officially “criminal”, his record was still known among the groups of the innocents. Thus, when he first attempted to join the disciples in Jerusalem, he was met with fear, resistance, and likely a few cold shoulders.

But Paul had a friend named Barnabas. Barnabas proved true to his name as a “son of consolation” by befriending Paul and assuring the disciples that Paul was indeed a changed man. (Acts 9:27-28)

Paul called himself the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15) and if we’re being honest, we’ve probably felt that way about ourselves at times. I know I have. Paul had a reputation, like all of us do with our records. But Paul had been redeemed, transformed, and was no longer under any condemnation from God. (Romans 8:1) This is equally true for any of us who have genuinely repented of our sinful past and have accepted the righteousness of Jesus Christ for our salvation. But still, Paul needed a Barnabas, and God provided him with one. Barnabas, a relatively obscure disciple, as compared to Paul, was very instrumental in validating the legitimacy of Paul and getting him started on his journey.

We are all at different stages of our Christian walk and we all have a messy past. We may not always see eye to eye, but we should make a point to spiritually walk hand in hand with our Christian brothers and sisters. Paul was tremendously benefitted by having Barnabas by his side and, likewise, we benefit from the teachings that Paul would later write.

Who can you be a Barnabas to today? Who is just beginning their Christian journey that could benefit from your brotherly acceptance and discipleship? Be someone’s Barnabas. You never know how much God may use your simple act of fellowship to eternally impact the lives of many others.

Franklin, Currently Incarcerated

THE GOD WHO SUFFERS – ISAIAH 53

It’s easy to sentimentalize the Incarnation; the God-Man as a baby – Wonderful Counselor; Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6). But Isaiah’s prophetic words describe a greater understanding of Christ’s incarnate life: Jesus was born to suffer and die.

Instead of being accepted, He was rejected (vs3); instead of exalted King, He was tortured and murdered (vs 5, 9). This is not only a human tragedy, but also a mysterious part of the Divine plan. Christ's voluntary suffering reveals His willingness to be High Priest and sacrificial Lamb. God suffered as a human being, sharing the most painful and dark aspects of the human experience. He knows what it's like to be brutalized and humiliated; and oppressed and abandoned. Jesus identifies in our worst forms of suffering. For some, the holidays can be painful or lonely. Yet Jesus makes it strangely comforting. He identifies with us!

Isaiah also makes it clear the story doesn't end with suffering and death. It's through His affliction that He achieves His greatest victory (vs.11). God's righteous Servant establishes justice and redemption for the nations. Jesus shares in our suffering so that we can share in His resurrection. His wounds redeemed our own and become the very source of our healing.

Jesus came down from heaven to the very depth of human shame and suffering for us. When we meet Him in our own suffering, sin, and shame, we can be confident that He will not leave us there - for by His wounds we are healed.

Aaron, Currently Incarcerated

THANKFULNESS

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God." (Philippians 4:6)

Parents love to see their kids happy. Similarly, our Father in Heaven wants us to actively be thankful for His blessings. Jesus took 7 loaves of bread and a few fish and gave thanks, broke them, gave them to His disciples, and the disciples gave to the multitude. Then He took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them.

Thankfulness can be a conscious habit and is one of the most beneficial character traits that an individual can possess. Thankful people are positive lights in a troubled world. God blesses the nation and people who are thankful and express gratitude for His many gifts. "Be thankful to him and bless his name" (Psalm 100:4).

There are days like today that I don't feel very thankful. I mean, so much has gone against me recently that I just feel down and out. But when I review the long list of blessings that God has blessed me with, I know there are countless things to be thankful for.

Years ago, I never thought a college education was possible for me. It was so far out of reach that it might as well be seen as a miracle. Yet, while in prison, of all places, I've earned 3 college degrees &

may soon have an opportunity to earn a PhD. Praise God!

Never in my life have I ever desired to teach. My communication skills were trash, and everyone misinterpreted what I said: yet, I've been blessed with the opportunity to share God's word with others.

Thank You Jesus!!

One of the most beneficial attributes a person can exercise is thankfulness. Most often, when we give a sincere thank you to someone, they respond with gratitude. How can we develop a more thankful and positive attitude?

Keeping a daily journal doesn't sound very appealing to most people but hear me out first. Our society is so fast paced that we often overlook the simple things in life. A journal can help you to sort through the mental clutter and to remember your miracles. Recognizing the good in our lives gives us more reasons to praise and to thank God, especially on those not so good days.

Matthew 20:25-28 and Luke 10:27 describe how Christ encourages us to be willing to serve and to live lives showing love toward our neighbors. How can we better serve others? Sometimes the most valuable service is just being there for someone when they are struggling - emotionally or physically.

Natural disasters are great opportunities for people to use their talents and spiritual gifts to ease the burden of those who are suffering. Volunteering at shelters, handing out food, or rebuilding houses are just a couple of examples.

Verbally expressing thankfulness and gratitude to others will often have a positive effect on their lives, as well as your own. God purposely made thankfulness a key component of outflowing love. Simply telling your parents, children, and spouse that you're thankful for them can make their day and help in strengthening your relationship too.

Travis, Currently Incarcerated

GIANTS

Recently a friend I met at the gym where I go brought up a subject and scripture that intrigued me...Genesis 6:4a *There were giants on the earth in those days.* As usual for me that made me think about other mentions of giants in the Bible. In Numbers the Bible refers to descendants of Anak. Deuteronomy speaks of Og, King of Bashan whose bed was of iron and measured nine cubits in its' length and four cubits in width, equaling 13 ½ feet

by 6 feet. That is what I would refer to as a King Size bed. No pun intended. Joshua also refers to the kingdom of Og.

In 1 Samuel 17:23-55 we read the story of David and Goliath. No man of Israel dared to face this Giant for fear of what, in their mind, would happen. David was willing to fight Goliath, but he met obstacles in his quest. His own brother scolded him for just being there to watch the battle. Saul said to him that it was not possible because *“thou art but a youth.”* David convinced Saul to let him go forth because of his proclamation, *“The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of a lion, and out of the paw of a bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.”* Then Saul armed David with his armor. But David said, *“I cannot go with these, for I have not proved them.”* David took what he knew would help him, that being five smooth stones, his sling, and staff. When he came before Goliath, the giant derided David and said he would *“give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beast of the field.”* David told Goliath he had come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts. *“This day the Lord will deliver thee in my hand. I will smite thee and take thy head from thee; and I will give thy carcasses---to the fowl of the air and to the wild beast of the earth.”* Here is a very important part of the scripture we need to see and place in our heart and mind. *And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord’s.* David defeated Goliath and this gave the Israelites and Judah courage to pursue the Philistines.

This brings us to WHO and WHAT are the giants we are facing in our lives? No one is immune to facing battles such as; Do we have disagreements with others? Do we have conflict within our own self? Is there someone in our life that brings fear, anger, or distrust? Is there a problem we want resolved, but only in our own way? Are others asking us to compromise our beliefs? We should ask ourselves right now what and who are the giants in my life.

Pray to the Almighty God and ask Him to show you what and who is troubling your life and show you through scripture, prayer, a Christian friend how He can help. Pray that God will give you peace about the problem and lead you by the Holy Spirit to be drawn closer to Him and his Son Jesus Christ. Do not try to do it through your power..but let God.

As in the story with David, God will *Saveth thee, for the battle is the Lords.* Allow Him, allow Jesus,

allow the Holy Spirit to fight your battles for you. My prayer for you is that you will seek God in all areas of your life. My Pastor recently gave a statement during a message on David and Goliath that spoke to me, *“Focus on the size of your God and not the size of your giant.”*

Second Corinthians tells us, ⁸ *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;* ⁹ *Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;* 2 Corinthians 4:8-9

In Christ’s Name, Mike Campbell

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