

Christian MONTHLY

DEDICATED TO THE PROCLAMATION
OF THE WORD OF GOD



Psalm 119:105
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path.

September 2023

Light Shining in Darkness

Pastor Chuck Bylkas
South Range, Michigan

And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

John 1:5

THIS VERSE FROM THE PROLOGUE of the Gospel of Saint John is quite intriguing, in particular the word “comprehended.” We might take the word “comprehend” to mean “understand,” which means that John is saying that the darkness cannot understand the Light. We certainly believe this to be true. We, as sinful human beings cannot understand the Divine, unless God reveals Himself to us. God has indeed revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ. *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth... No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. (John 1:14-18)*

Even though God has made Himself known to us in the person of His Incarnate Son, we do not claim to know everything about God. We only know what God has chosen to reveal to us through His Divine Word and by the power of the Holy Spirit. There are many things about God that remain a mystery to us. Indeed, we even confess in the Athanasian Creed that we cannot fully comprehend God:

The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate.

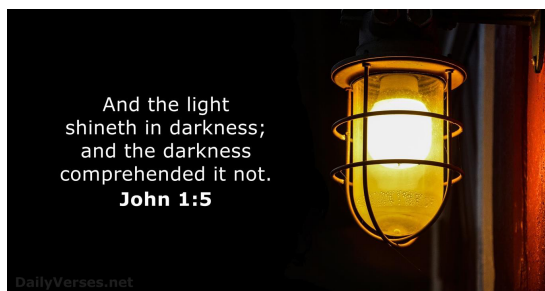
The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible.

The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal.

And yet they are not three eternal, but one eternal.

As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible.

-The Athanasian Creed



The good news is that we do not need to know everything about God. In fact, the apostles and the early Church fathers were content to allow many things to remain a mystery. The sacraments themselves were often referred to as “the mysteries.” The Apostle Paul even celebrates the greatness of Divine mystery as he writes: *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to Whom be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)*

Although some Divine matters remain a mystery only to be apprehended by faith, God has revealed everything that we need to know in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. As Christians, we worship a God who transcends our understanding. He is wiser, stronger, more merciful and more loving than we are. However, we also celebrate a God who chose to reveal Himself to us in Christ. *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)*

We rejoice and marvel at God’s great love for us, that He gave His Son Jesus to suffer, die and rise again to give us the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. The hymn writer Charles Wesley expresses the celebration of this Divine mystery in his hymn “And Can It Be, that I Should Gain?”:

‘Tis mystery all! Th’ Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?

In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine!

‘Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.

Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me!

May the Lord bless you for your support of the seminary as we continue to make Jesus Christ known through God’s Holy Word.

Yours in Christ.

The Prodigal Son/The Gracious Father

Pastor Dennis Hannu
Wolf Lake, Minnesota

And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

Luke 15:11-32

THIS IS PERHAPS ONE OF the best know parables of Jesus. There are many people who identify with the younger son of this parable, the one who is called the prodigal, as they themselves have left the father's house and returned back after some time. They have wasted their lives in sin and debauchery and have returned back into the graces of the

father. Some identify with the older son, the one who stayed at the father's house and remained a religious and upright person. Although it is easy to find ourselves identifying with one of the sons in the parable, I wonder if when we do that, we are missing the main point of this parable.

Jesus tells this parable along with the two previous ones as an answer to the complaint that was being made by the Pharisees and scribes: "This man receives sinners and eats with them." This parable illustrates for us the graciousness of our Father, it could actually be called "The Parable of the Gracious Father," as the father shows tremendous grace toward both sons as he deals with them.

Jesus is showing unto the Pharisees the nature of their God. God is the Father in this parable, who is indeed merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He shows grace unto the younger son in restoring him completely after he had turned his back on the Father and went his own way. He shows grace unto the older son by coming out to him and calling him unto Himself and

explaining clearly to him the reason for the celebration.

The problem that we often have with our Father is that He is gracious. The older son could not understand this kind of grace; surely this rebellious, wild, sinful younger son needed to suffer the consequences of his actions, but instead he is completely restored into the household.

We, as well, have been restored into the household of God, sinners though we are, because of the gracious Father. Jesus explains in this parable that God is the gracious Father who sent His Son into this world in order to call us to Himself because we all need to be brought unto repentance. We are all sinners in need of the grace of God. This is

what the Pharisees could not understand, that Jesus receives sinners and hangs out with them in order to reveal unto them His grace and restore them unto a right relationship with the Father. When one sinner repents, the angels rejoice and there is great joy in heaven!

God's peace.



*The Return of the Prodigal Son, James Tissot
Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*

Prayer for the New School Year

Lord God, At the beginning of this new term teach us to be Your hands and feet where we are, At the beginning of this new term teach us to love as You love us, At the beginning of this new term teach us to pray for those in need, So that You are honored and glorified. Amen.

Annie Barnsdale

Love the Lord Your God

Martin Luther

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

Luke 10:25-28

NOW I THINK YOU UNDERSTAND what it is to love God with all the heart, with all the soul and with all the mind. To love God with all the heart is to love Him above all creatures; that is, although many creatures are quite lovely, as they please me and I love them, nevertheless, I am to despise and forsake all these for God's sake, whenever God my Lord desires it.

To love God with all the soul is to devote your entire bodily life to Him that you can say when the love of any creature, or any persecution threatens to overpower you: All this I will give up, before I will forsake my God; let men cast me away, murder or drown me, let what God's will is happen to me, I will gladly lose all, before I will forsake Thee, O Lord! unto Thee will I cling more than to all Thy creatures, or to anything that is not Thyself. I will risk all things together

with what I have and am that I may not forsake Thee. The soul in the Scriptures signifies the life of the body, which acts through the five senses, eating, drinking sleeping, waking, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and everything that the soul does through the body.

To love God with all our strength is to devote all our members and whatever we may be able to do through our bodies to the love of God, and sacrifice all rather than do anything contrary to His will.


To love God with all the mind is to take to nothing except that which is pleasing to God. By which is meant the self-conceit which man has that the same be directed to God and that all things be pleasing to Him.

Thus you see what the commandment

requires: "Thou shalt love God." Thou, thou wholly and fully, not thy hands, not thy lips, not thy knees. Those who do this, fulfil the commandment in the right sense. But there is not a man on earth who thus fulfils the law; yea, we all do just the opposite. Thus this law here makes us all sinners so that not the least letter of this commandment is fulfilled, even by the most holy persons in the world. For no one clings so firmly to God with all the heart, that he could forsake all things for God's sake. We have, God be praised, become so competent that we can almost not suffer the least word, yea, we will not let go of a nickel for the sake of God. ~

**WHAT
MUST
I DO TO
INHERIT
ETERNAL
LIFE ?**

Luke 10:25



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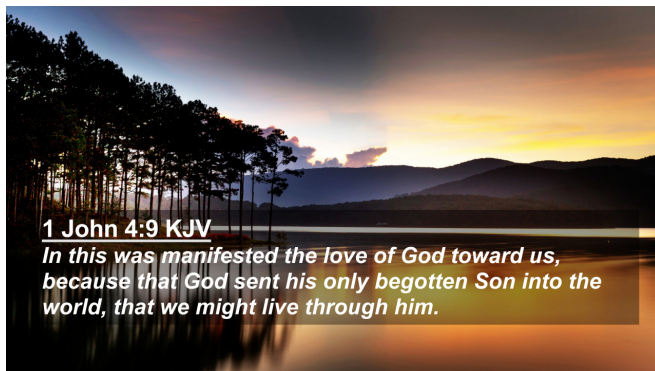
The Love of God

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

1 John 4:9-11

LOVE, WHAT AN AMAZING MATTER. The love of God passeth knowledge, Scripture says. It is so rich, so abundant, so beautiful, that we will never know the fullness of it until we are in heaven. But it was manifest

(revealed) toward us, because He sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Yes, For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. He gave Him to be the sacrifice for our sin. Behold Christ dying for us on the cross, and we will see the love of God in its purest form and brightest light. *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* It is not our love to Him that saves us, but His love to us, sending His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Propitiation means "the atoning sacrifice." And it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. So it is His blood sacrifice of Jesus that shows God's love so preciously. And they are one, so God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. Do we see what love is, what God's love is? Giving, giving, yea, giving it all, and to wretches like us. Does this thrill your very soul? Love drew salvation's plan, beloved. Does this cause a love to kindle in your heart to Him? We love Him because He first loved us. May we truly love Him. And then, when we have tasted the sweetness of His love, then let us love one another as He has loved us. This is the message in this text!



Paul Coponen; Chassell, Michigan

Submitted by Ralph and Barbara Somero; New Ipswich, New Hampshire

The Little Pot of Oil That Paid a Debt

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children far and near,

Hello to each of you. I hope that wherever you are or may go, that you feel God's protection over you each day. He cares for you just as He did for this mother and her two children in the account I want to share with you. You will find this in *2 Kings 4:1-7*.

There was a certain woman whose husband had died, and she was left to raise their two sons. I'm sure she was careful in paying her debts in whatever way she could, but this one time as the Bible tells us, she was unable to make her payment. The man to whom she owed money became impatient and would wait no longer, and told her she had better pay or else he would take her sons from her and they would be slaves for him.

This mother was so saddened to hear this because her sons were her life now that her husband was gone, and they were very precious to her. She had to find help. She went to her father-in-law, the prophet Elisha, and poured out her troubles to him.

And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil. (2 Kings 4:2)

All the woman has is some oil. I would have to say her pantry was very empty, and she kept very little in her house that had any worth. Her boys were worth more than things. Elisha realizes this oil is something of value, and everyone needs oil. He sees that this woman could sell it and make some money. But you may wonder: how she could make enough money to pay her debt with one pot of oil?

Elisha then tells the woman to go to all the neighbors around and borrow as many jugs and jars as she can. Then they were to go into their house, close the door, and pour oil from the pot into every vessel they had brought home. She and her sons do as Elisha had said. I can just imagine what this mother and her sons were thinking as they carried the jars home. "How is this pot of oil going to fill all these jugs?" I can imagine how the neighbors wondered, too, at this strange request. But apparently they were willing to provide the jars.

She and her sons went and found all the jars they could. This took faith. They went into their house, and shut the door behind them, and started to fill the jars as Elisha had instructed. She poured and poured, and her sons kept bringing her jugs until they were ALL full. Yes, they were ALL full of the oil! And what was left in the woman's oil pot? More oil! The little pot never stopped giving oil because God kept it full. Can you imagine what the mother and her boys were feeling as they saw their one pot of oil just keep pouring way beyond its capacity?

Verse 7: Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest. Elisha meant she could use the leftover money to provide for herself and her sons.

I can well imagine how happy this mother was to be able to keep her sons. Think of how wonderful it was to sell the oil, and the joy it brought the mother and her boys! They were not going to be separated after all. This was truly a miracle done for her sake. God up in heaven heard her

concern and knew how much she loved her sons, and sent prophet Elisha to help. Elisha was obedient to God's voice, and God worked through him. God can work through each of us, too, if only we are obedient and listen to His voice. We can hear His voice by reading the Bible and praying to do as the Bible says.

I'm also sure that the two sons were very scared thinking they would have to leave the mother they loved so much. Wouldn't you kids be scared thinking about someone taking you away from your parents, because they couldn't pay a debt? I would be, for sure.

The sons did all they could to help their mother, and you can see that they loved her very much. God put faith in their hearts to do all that Elisha asked of them, not questioning his words.

This family was very blessed through this miracle, and I believe they loved God and believed in Him before this all came about. This mother and her sons would never forget what was done for them.

This story ends very happily, and it reminds us more and more to put our whole faith and trust in God and Jesus, because God is ever ready to help those who love Him.



I pray for you young children that you will always want to be followers of our great God and pray for God's leading to do what is right and make right that which you have done wrong. God WILL bless you.

GOD MADE EACH OF HIS CHILDREN, AND HE LOVES EACH OF THEM SO MUCH THAT HE SENT HIS ONLY SON TO DIE, SO WE MIGHT HAVE LIFE ETERNAL.

God's peace.

Scriptural Hope

Andrew Mickelsen
February 1968 CM

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Romans 15:13

MAN BY NATURE IS PRONE to despondence and often cherishes gloomy and hopeless forebodings. He is unable to resolve his own difficulties, and, disappointed with efforts to improve society, he can easily become skeptic and hopeless because all man's efforts seem to be in vain. The Holy Spirit was given to banish such gloom and hopelessness from our minds and to inspire us to cheerfulness and hopefulness, knowing that all things are possible with God.

This is the difference between the true believer and the unbeliever. The true believer, speaking in general, is a man of hopes; the unbeliever is the man who is hopeless. This was the condition of the world when Jesus appeared on the scene. Men were dissatisfied, suspicious and disgusted with the corruption around them. They were without any faith that could sustain and cherish a lofty hope for mankind. They could not comprehend that any power could be introduced into the world capable of even attempting, far less achieving, the regeneration of mankind—of raising the uncivilized and redeeming those who were civilized and cultured but corrupt, cynical and selfish. This seems to be the same still today, which proves that human nature does not change.

In contrast to this, a child of God is a man of hope in this world. The followers of Christ appeared, each one with a hope that death could not tear from him; neither could disappointments quench it. The Holy Spirit was given to reveal to them the God of hope. Man's dejection and despair arise from his lack of faith in God, and nothing but a biblical, living faith in God can bring him a change of heart and mind. Let the truth be recognized that a living hope must begin in God. Fix your hopes, as many do, upon human beings, upon human institutions, upon human plans, and their failure will involve you in cruel disappointment. But if for you the Lord liveth and reigneth, if He is your God, the God of your salvation who has redeemed you with His blood, then there is a sound basis for your hope—a basis that no power on earth and no power from hell can overturn or even shake. This was the power that sustained the apostles when persecution befell them. They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name (Acts 5:41).

It was our Lord Jesus Christ who brought hope and every other blessing to this benighted and unhappy world. That Jesus cherished hope is well known. His parables regarding

the progress of His kingdom, His assurance that when He is lifted up He will draw all men unto Himself, His prediction of His reign and His return to take His own unto Himself—all show unwavering confidence and calm expectation regarding the future.

In like manner the children of God, who have that glorious, lively hope that there is better in store for them if they are faithful to the end, should have this unwavering confidence and joyous expectation of the future, for when it is founded upon the Word and promises of God and his personal experience of salvation by grace in the forgiveness of sins, he will not come to shame: for *hope maketh not*

ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. (Romans 5:5)

Thus the true Christian's hope extends beyond this life. The apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15:19: *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.* The resurrection of our Lord Jesus from the dead has brought to the child of God a living hope of an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, that fadeth not away (1 Peter 1:3-4). And this hope that we have is an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast and which entereth into that within the veil (Hebrews 6:19). By the power of the Holy Spirit this hope is awakened and sustained. His glorious influence counteracts the earthly and depressing powers by which we are all beset, and makes the promises of our Savior effective and helpful to us so that we are led to abound in hope.

This is what our text reveals, and it is true that the true believer does not receive only joy and peace by faith but also abundant hope. The heart which knows nothing of the cheerful gladness

that living faith imparts to the present life can know nothing of the glowing anticipation and lively hope that inspires for the future. If we were to judge the future by what we now see, our outlook would be dim and forlorn because the eyes of faith are dim. Therefore, the apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 13:12: *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.*

Hope that is worthy of the name reaches beyond ourselves; it must include others, or it is not a living, God-given hope. Living hope cannot limit salvation within the narrow bonds of me and my people. Living faith and hope is emphatically unselfish. It wants to include all people—every nation, color and tongue—because living faith and hope comes from God, and God wants all men to be saved. This faith and hope is not in vain. It shall materialize if our faith and hope is God-instilled.



ROMANS 15:13 KJV

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.



We shall behold this glorious scene that the apostle John saw, as he wrote: *After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands. (Revelation 7:9)*

Those, therefore, who come under its sway and share the spirit of living faith and hope are constrained to take a wide, expansive view. It is not enough to have a good hope of our own salvation. If the mind of Christ is in us, we shall desire to reach out as far as it is possible, regardless of objections or obstacles. Enlightened and large-hearted children of God are more interested in the spread of living Christianity than anything else on earth. It is their hope and prayer that the holy heaven may penetrate and vitalize the whole mass of mankind, that the tree of life may grow and spread until all nations shall sit with delight beneath its shadow.

Taught by the Spirit of truth, they rely upon the faithful words of Jesus: *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:33)* Error may seem to prevail, and we may tremble for the truth. Superstition and legalism may encroach upon the simplicity of the Gospel making us ask: are the old rituals and traditions to revive? Lukewarmness may steal over Christians and may paralyze the activities of the church of Christ. Yet the true Christian is not daunted by these signs of

the times, distressing though they be. He may join in the triumphant chant of the psalmist of old: *Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. (Psalm 46:2-4, 7)*

Though wars, cruelty, slavery, vice, ignorance and brutality are still scourging the human race, Christ's followers do not yield to fear. They remember the words and promises of their dear Lord: the gates of hell will not prevail against His church (Matthew 16:18). Its dead branches will be lopped off, and its living branches may be pruned so that life may be more vigorous and fruit more abundant, but it shall not be destroyed. The gold may be cast into the furnace and the dross consumed, but the precious metal shall only be refined and purified so that it will shine with brighter luster and be made fit for the Master's use.

O, that this may be a season of lively hope for all the children of God who are awaiting the coming of their Lord and Savior in power and glory! He is surely coming, for His promise will be fulfilled. So lift up your heads! Your salvation is nigh at hand. Amen.

Thy Kingdom Come

Pastor Nicholas Kandoll
New York Mills, Minnesota

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them.

Matthew 13:31-34

Consider how a tree grows. The mustard seed was the smallest of seeds but, when given time and nourishment, it grows into a tree. Jesus likens His kingdom to this. Just as a tree grows little by little so does God's kingdom.

In his Small Catechism on his explanation of the Lord's Prayer, Martin Luther says this regarding the second petition, Thy kingdom come: "The Kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayer, of itself; but we pray in this petition that it may come unto us also."

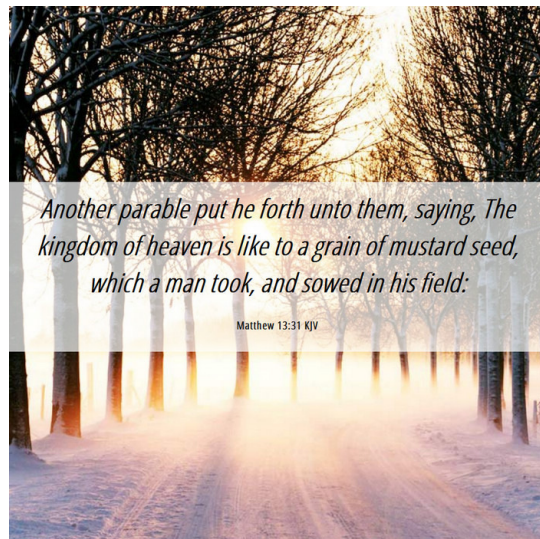
When Jesus speaks of His kingdom, we often think of a place, but the word in Greek more accurately reflects that which a king does. Another way we could think of it is "the reign of God." This is apt especially when we consider the reference to the mustard tree, in which birds are able to shelter.

Jesus gives us more insight into how His reign works. It's like yeast. A little bit of it in a whole lump of flour causes the whole thing to rise. On the day of Pentecost the church consisted of virtually that small group of men waiting in the upper room. That day through the working of the Spirit, three thousand souls were saved, and God's kingdom began to spread throughout the world like yeast.

This spread eventually reached our forefathers in Finland. People who were worshiping pagan gods, repented and believed the Gospel. Through the powerful working of God's Word, you and I have been given refuge.

Where God's Word is preached, there is the kingdom of God. There is the reign and rule of Christ. There is the cross, where we poor birds can lodge in its shadow and take refuge from this world of sin and death.

God's peace.



Holding On Tight

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

WHILE CROSSING A BUSY, dangerous street with a small child, the parent will take the child's hand, saying, "Hold on tight!" But the parent doesn't depend on the child to hold on; the parent is the one who is "holding on tight." We know that the child may not be aware of the danger, may become distracted, may not feel that staying close to the parent's side is important in this circumstance.

As we journey through life, we are often unaware of the dangers that encompass us. We may not see the fiery darts of the devil, or the temptations that arise on every side from the world and our own sinful flesh. We may become distracted by the cares of this life, even those good things that God has ordained for us to do, such as serving in our vocations of spouse, parent, child. When the road is smooth and we see no trouble on the horizon, we may feel that staying close, close, close to the heavenly Parent's side is not really that important.



And when trials arise, and fear grips our hearts, we often think that we must "hold on tight" to our heavenly Parent. We may feel that by our own "holding on tight" we will endure the temptation, the pain, the illness, the death. We may even feel that God has forsaken us in our need, that He either isn't aware, or doesn't care, that we are in dire distress.

But is this really the case? In our times of trial, who is holding on to whom?

Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. (Isaiah 41:10-14)

Jesus said, in *John 12:27-29*: *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one.*

Our Father in heaven is "holding on tight" to us, and our Lord Christ is "holding on tight!" Clasped tightly in the grip of the Father and the Son, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we can rest assured that we are cared for, that the Lord God knows our distress, feels our pain and fear, and will be with us. He give us a peace that passes understanding in the midst of the trials of life. A beautiful hymn based on the Scripture tells us of this Firm Foundation under our feet and upon Whom we rest. It was first published in John Rippon's *A Collection of Hymns*, attributed to K, possibly Richard Keen.

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

"Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.

"When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake."

Though we can sometimes feel alone and forsaken of God, He is with us, even in the darkest night of the soul. ~

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Seeing Clearly

Pastor Jason Salmi
Vancouver, Washington

WITHOUT CORRECTIVE LENSES, the world looks blurry. Now I wear glasses, and without them things don't appear in as sharp detail as when I have them on, but I'm not referring to those kinds of lenses. Every single person is born into this world with impaired vision.

When God created Adam and Eve, they saw things as they truly were. They saw the goodness of God's creation, as well as His image in each other and themselves. More than that, they saw God as He is. But there came a dark day when their vision went out of focus. Knowing God's goodness, and having heard His command that of all the things which He had created for them, only one thing was withheld, they nevertheless listened to another voice... believed another vision of reality. The Tempter told them that, rather than dying when they partook of that which was forbidden, they would "see things as they really are." *For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. (Genesis 3:5)*

The Tempter had given them a half-truth, which is often the most believable form of a lie. They had already known "good." All they gained in this ill-conceived bargain was the knowledge of "evil." And with the knowledge of evil, their vision became blurry. They no longer saw God as He truly is, nor did they see each other, or even themselves as they really were. Now everything good would be tainted by that knowledge of evil. In his letter to the Galatian churches, Paul gives something of a primer in the fruit of this new vision of the world: *Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like... (Galatians 5:19-21a)*

But all the way back in the Garden of Eden God promised to send the correction to this distorted view of Himself and us. And He sent Jesus. Jesus is the Son of God who came into the world to take sin away by taking it upon Himself. And with our sins paid for on the cross, we can see clearly. We can look to Christ and see God's loving-kindness and goodness. And we can look at ourselves and others and once more clearly see the image of God in which we are all created. Wearing our corrective lenses (the Word of God which testifies of Jesus), we can see clearly to love God and love our neighbor, which is what He created us to do.

May God bless and keep all of you until that Day when our eyes of faith are replaced by sight. ~

Simon the Fisherman Became Peter the Apostle

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Acts 10:34-43

In the life and ministry of Simon Peter we see how God made an outstanding witness to His truth from most unlikely material. Who would have thought of the rugged, impetuous, profane fisherman Simon ever becoming the eloquent spiritual preacher, whose burning words would be used to the conversion of thousands of souls? But God works with what He brings, not simply with what He finds. Simon the fisherman, regenerated, becomes Peter the apostle, to whose sermons and letters the whole world owes a debt that it can never repay... Like his brother apostle, Paul, he delighted in the true grace of God, which knows no national or racial boundaries. Hence his messages are a delight of believers from among the nations, whom he once despised, as well as among those of Jewry, who have found in the Lord Jesus the promised Messiah.

H.A. Ironside