**Favor and Freedom** - Part 1

When does a follower experience freedom? When the follower becomes a friend to Jesus Christ. Do friends walk in single file or side by side? And, friends don't fear each other, they favor one another.

*“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”* Galatians 5:1 *"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in h eart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* Matthew 11:29-30

*“Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the Lord has promised on oath to your forefathers."* Deuteronomy 8:1

***“Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, walking in His ways and revering Him with praise for what He has done for you and for all He’s given you, otherwise, when you are satisfied and settled in, when you have increased and expanded – your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of slavery and led you through the desert.".* Deuteronomy 8: 6, 11, 14, 15**

*“If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God.”* Deuteronomy 8:19-20

God puts a lot of responsibility on us for preserving our own freedom after He has so graciously granted it to us through the suffering of His Son Christ Jesus. Holy fear keeps us obedient to this fair warning in Deuteronomy. But, unholy fear will destroy the kind of character and life that freedom affords through faith in God. There is no favor for the fearful! There is no freedom for the forgetful!

Where does slavery come from? The common answer would be: It comes from the wickedness of the more powerful. WRONG! It comes from your rejection of God and His rules for freedom. If you have been born – God is your Father. With God as your Father you have His favor (love). But**, freedom** is your responsibility with the help of the Holy Spirit once the Son has set you free by His work of redemption on the cross. You better get started now because this is part of what the faithful freedom fighters will be doing during the thousand-year reign of King Jesus on the earth. Freedom is the decree and delight of God upon people, so much so that He has become all this to us:

Originator of worship

Respecter of innocence

Redeemer of souls

Instiller of passion

Remover of guilt

Perfector of faith

Deliverer of death

Regarder of children

Extender of authority

Inventor of dreams

Fulfiller of purpose

Sustainer of hope

Investor of peace

Giver of wealth

Provider of strength

Restorer of joy

Repairer of integrity

Invader of captivity

Teacher of wisdom

Silencer of liars

Trainer of warriors

Motivator of leaders

Retainer of righteousness

Opener of doors

Rewarder of obedience

Awarder of honor

Employer of kingdoms

Trainer of priests

Anointer of kings

Punisher of wickedness

There are certain fears and curses that keep us in captivity. The fear and curse that comes from God won’t enslave you. The fear and curse that is from hell will enslave you. Holy fear is good. When God curses something or someone it is for a very good purpose. If you aren’t completely free from wicked fears and curses - then you’re not free. Freedom is not being free in some ways and still enslaved in another way. For most of us it takes an entire lifetime to become completely free.

*“The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.”* James 1:25

*“I will always obey your law, for ever and ever. I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts. I will speak of your statutes before kings and will not be put to shame, for I delight in your commands because I love them.”* Psalm 119:44-47

Jesus said, *“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”* John 8:31-32

**Favor and Faithfulness –** Part 2

Awe….the thousand year reign of the great King of kings upon our earth! The bloody battle of Armageddon begins His earthly reign when Jesus Christ and His army (the saints of glory) destroy the ungodly kings so that the pure life of God will literally fill the earth. But it's what comes after that I dream about. I try to imagine when those representing our great Lord and King bring the remaining nations and peoples of the earth to worship the Holy One on His Holy Hill; the Lord of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Mankind has been so long under the rule of God’s number one enemy and master of our fears and pride that man doesn’t have the smallest clue of what true freedom feels like, acts like and looks like. And, very few Christians do either. There was never anyone more free than the first couple, Adam and Eve that God formed and favored. They knew what freedom feels like, acts like and looks like. But, it didn’t take them long to misuse their free will (freedom) and turn away from the hand that formed and favored them. With their free will they invited God’s curses to the earth and into their lives. The earth no longer thrived with perfection. They foolishly invited the devil to share their rule and dominion over all the earth. And Satan is just about ready to finally and publicly show this world that he is the “god of this world,” of whom they are to worship. But, we know who has the last say:

*“…at just the right time when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. God demonstrated his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us… Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man (Adam), and death through sin, in this way death came to all men…For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, over flow to the many!…How much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness* ***reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ****.”* Romans 5 (in part)

By the way Jesus lived His life on the earth we are shown how we are to live as the children of God. I want to thank Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Jude and Peter for humbling themselves and allowing the Holy Spirit to pen the New Testament through them. By their obedience we have the exact records and knowledge of the Lord’s earthly life. We have the testimonies of those who lived with the Lord and of those who lived by faith in Jesus Christ long after He ascended into heaven.

In Jesus Christ mankind saw *reverence* due God the Father, and they saw the *release* of God’s favor upon the true worshipers of God, and the *return* of earthly dominion to its rightful owners through the indwelling Holy Spirit. In Christ, and because of His blessed Holy Spirit, we *receive* back our true identity. But why don't the children of the living God live this way?

Jesus tells us why in a parable:

*“While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: ‘A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.’ When he said this, he called out, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear.’”*

Then Jesus explained what He meant:

*“This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.”* Luke 8:4-15

Are you living the fruitful and abundant life of God's favor? Do you hunger for His written words? Do you study with conviction the testimonies and teachings of those who literally saw Jesus and lived with Jesus and were sent by Jesus into the world with His Good News? Do you thirst for His way of life? *"It is for freedom that Christ has set you free!"*

Are you free?

**Favor and Freedom** – Part 3

*“If you let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery,* ***Christ will be of no value to you at all.****”* Galatians 5:2

In the case of these born-again gentiles, Paul was referring to the Jewish covenant law of circumcision because these grafted in gentiles were being instructed to become circumcised even though they were not Jews. But, Jesus was the fulfillment of the old covenant law about circumcision so that now… *“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”* Galatians 5:6b

Is Christ of any value to you? I thought about this question and realized that for Christ to be of value to me *in my earthly life* I need to see where I am still bound and enslaved. While it is true that when I die I will be with the Lord, it is just as true that Jesus wants me to live the rest of my days on earth in “freedom.” If I am still trying to please man and if I am still trying to gain the world (the things of it and their recognition) then I am not free to live the life that God rewards. Being free is being able to say “no” to all ungodliness and “yes” to God’s righteousness and call on my life. I need the Spirit of Christ to help me with this. The Holy Spirit is the One who does God’s good will on the earth through God’s children called by His Name, the Name of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the helpmate of Jesus Christ. In the Holy Spirit we are able to experience the freedom that Jesus Christ displayed when He lived on the earth. Just like Jesus, the Holy Spirit does only what the Father wants done. The Holy Spirit speaks only what the Father wants said.

*“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The One who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.”* John 8:28-29

*“The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”* John 14:26

*“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”* John 8:31

*“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”* Galatians 5:16-26

(See Galatians 5:19-24 for a list of the acts of the sinful nature and the fruits of the Holy Spirit.)

Here are 3 questions where by the answers will reveal whether or not you have taken hold of the freedom that comes by faithfulness:

1. At the first of your day from whom do you receive approval and instruction? Does it come from your husband/wife, children, friends, boss, yourself even, or does it come from being with the Lord in His Word and in prayer?
2. Who do you cry out to in the time of need or temptation? If it’s God, do you wait on Him and then look for His generous way of meeting your need or His victorious way of escaping that temptation?
3. When it comes to your daily work whatever it is, what motivates you; do you do it as unto the Lord?

God wants His children to be HIS pillars in their society so that people will know that He is the Lord and HE IS GOOD. He has called us into His light and not that we should live for ourselves, but that we should let Him use us to set other people free - to know and worship God in truth and Spirit. Our bondages to men and demons, greed and addictions, pride and fear, and yes, even our religions, keep us from an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. He is committed to free us from everything that hinders our true identity as children of God. Worship the Lord in this beauty of holiness. Christ is your freedom and your very great Reward.

The world would define freedom as free to do what you want – whether right or wrong. But true freedom is only found in a relationship with Jesus Christ and a Spirit filled life. Slaves and captives are divested of all freedom and personal rights; owned by and wholly subject to the will of another as by capture, purchase, or birth. They own nothing and carry the heavy loads of others. A slave or captive is also one who has lost the power of resistance, or one who surrenders to any power whatsoever; such as a slave to passion, lust, ambition, religion, etc.

Not all Christians are “free.” Freed men and women free other men and women. This is the kindest and noblest thing we can do for one another. *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have the opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”* Galatians 6:9-10

Salvation in Christ and freedom for all is to be our highest goal in life. It is God’s will that all His children live in holy freedom, that is to say, not using our freedom for wickedness, but rather for godliness. Right now we see the control of wickedness all around the world, but the day is soon here when it will be on earth – as it is in Heaven.

Freedom in Christ has an eternal payoff if we will stay His course as we *“await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.”* (Galatians 5:5) Freedom that increases wickedness instead of decreasing it has no good payoff. All it has in the end is eternal damnation and agonizing regret.

In these, the very last of the last days Jesus described, the Holy Spirit’s deliverance and healing ministries are on the rise because churches are filled with born again people who still captives of their fleshly lusts, the pride of the world and the ways of the devil. Imagine that! Imagine what would happen if the whole Church of Jesus Christ was free and filled to overflowing with His Holy Spirit. Wow!

New kinds of (non-traditional) ministries are on the mount in greater numbers than any generation has ever seen. These “new” ministries are so unheard of that even (legalistic) Christians have and are coming against them. But, nothing or no one can control God’s Spirit from completing what our Father God has planned. God will not even let religion control the work of His Spirit.

There is a church within the church. Within (traditional) churches, there is the overcoming church; the **true** Spirit-filled church of Jesus Christ – His beautiful Bride who truly longs for His appearing and in whom the Father finds purity. It is our responsibility, that after receiving the free gift of eternal life through the death of Jesus Christ, that we also live to the resurrected life of Jesus Christ through His Spirit until we are literally united to Him. For me to live is Christ, that is to live as Christ showed us by example and instruction. Then when I die, I gain what God has promised that is far greater.

Bondage is an accepted way of thinking and living all over the world. There is cruel physical bondage that people have no control over but to go to God, but then there is bondage that you do have control over. We do not have to live in bondage when we have the power of God through Jesus Christ our Lord to be released by the authority of His Word to us and in us, along with His Name over us.

*“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”*

I Corinthians 3:17

*“You were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”* Galatians 5:13

Jesus has given every follower of His the power and authority to go in His Name healing and declaring that His Kingdom is at hand; that Jesus has the power to forgive and save. When God touches you in any way and for any reason, His glorious kingdom has come ***to you.*** (Luke 11:20)

**Favor and Fellowship –** Part 4

*“Why so angry? Why so downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, but you must master it.”* Genesis 4:6-7

Cain, Adam’s firstborn son, sought favor from God without fellowship with God. He sought to establish his own way to God’s heart. This is how a man-made religion is invented. Religion takes away our right of relationship with the true and living God.

God favored Adam’s second son, Able, because he brought God the “right” offering. Adam and Eve understood why God killed an animal to cover their sin, but somehow that understanding didn’t come to Cain. Repentance comes before fellowship.

The required animal sacrifice was only a picture of the perfect sacrifice Jesus Christ would one day make for all. Before Jesus Christ was presented as the last sacrifice for sin the blood sacrifice of certain spotless animals was required along with repentance in order to be in favored fellowship with God. The sacrifice could not take away the guilt of sin, only repentance could. God is after repentance not blood. But, the blood in the animal sacrifice (and later with the blood of Christ) satisfied the wrath of God towards their sin.

When the people met God’s condition for fellowship the people were at peace with God and continued to be prosperous because God blessed them in every way. But, when they tried to hide their sin and refused to repent even as they sacrificed animals and brought their offerings before God – they were cursed with guilt, suffering and loss.

Fellowship with God happens inwardly by way of our submission to His laws and principles. Repentance and worship is a requirement for the privilege of fellowship with our Lord God. Repentance and righteousness brings us near God. As a parent, have you ever been hoped your son or daughter would’ve humbly come to you with a confession about something you knew about? How did you feel when that son or daughter acted like nothing was wrong at home; like there was nothing to talk to you about? The Father wants us to come to Him with confession so that He does not have to see us suffer the consequence of hiding our sin from Him. If we do the right thing we can save ourselves from a lot of needless suffering and losses.

Without repentance offered on our part there can be no forgiveness from God, and without forgiveness there is absolutely no fellowship or relationship with God, only total separation from Him. When we come to God **just as we are and confess our sins** He is faithful to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The best part of all is that God’s fellowship door is open to us. This door of privilege does not open all the way until we have become faithful in judging ourselves, confessing our faults and making right the wrong we’ve done to others. Freedom is having the right to go in and out of our Father’s presence without any fear or guilt. We have Jesus there also to defend us from the accusations of the devil.

Repentance is not based on our words; it’s about our heart. God sees the heart. He sees what we really mean and really want. He knows how wicked our heart really is and will expose it to us in order that we humbly confess and ask Him to help us overcome wickedness.

*The Holy Spirit testifies: ‘This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.’ Then he adds: ‘Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.’ And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.”* Hebrews 10:15-17

*“Therefore, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God,* ***let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith,*** *having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.”* Hebrews 10:19-27

Those who are free to draw near to God have a sincere heart towards Him and have full assurance (the peace of God) that they’ve been forgiven and have all His favor. They are free to fellowship with God.

Fellowship: Mutual association on equal and friendly terms; communion; companionship; intimate familiarity; friendship; a mutual sharing, as of experience, activity, interest, etc.; a partnership.

Now with this definition before you would you say that you are in fellowship with your Creator, the Lord God of Heaven? Are you a friend of God?

Truth: If you do what is right by God you will earn God’s fellowship. You might have His love, but His nearness is something altogether different. David said, *“Blessed are those You choose and bring near to live in Your courts (presence). We are filled with good things of Your house.”* Psalm 65:4

If you don’t have God’s favor and fellowship you know what to do, and without delay, because God’s fury is as powerful as His favor.

**Favor and Following –** Part 5

What causes a person to follow Jesus Christ? It’s one thing to go to church and read the Bible from time to time, but it’s altogether different to walk with Jesus throughout your life. The closer we follow the Lord, the more we become who we were meant to be as we were created to be. To follow more closely is a progression of **faith moves** we are responsible for.

Don’t think that the Lord would push you away at the sight of your secret sin. That is an unholy fear and does not come from God. My sin grieves Him, but it does not make Him leave me after I have called on Him to forgive me and save me. The devil who will do everything he can to keep us separated from the love of God. Once the Lord has covered us with His blood there is absolutely nothing that can separate us from His love.

We could consider many Biblical records but I’ve chosen to look at what happened to Peter in Luke 5:4-11 as to what caused *him* to follow the Lord. Peter, a fisherman, had been out all night trying to catch fish without any success. In the morning as he and the others (James and John) were cleaning their nets Jesus called out to Peter to go back out into deep water and cast his net. Peter did, but with some resistance. He said, *“Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets….They caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.*”

Peter, now filled with the wonder of the Lord came and fell at Jesus’ knees saying, *“Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”* Jesus said to him, *“Don’t be afraid. From now on you will catch men.”* The Lord’sword caused Peter to *“leave everything behind and follow the Lord.”* The revelation of God is both word and wonder and one without the other is incomplete for our faith. What I mean by “wonder” is that it’s a God-thing. Unless something wonderful is revealed to us that only the Lord Himself could do we will not follow faithfully. He does this as many times as we need Him to. You can only go so far in your spiritual growth merely reading and studying the Bible. The day must come when the favor of God shows up unexpectedly and does something supernaturally just for you. I will guarantee you that if you have been following anyone else or listening to any other voice - you no longer will.

Now we know from Scripture that Peter, on another occasion, fearfully denied being a follower of Jesus. But, when the Lord’s prophecy (word) about his denial took place (wonder),that upon the rooster crowing just like Jesus said it would when Peter had disowned Jesus three times, Peter was never the same. Confession, which he did, was not enough for Peter. Peter needed to prove his love to the Lord. For most of us we look at confession as the “result” or repentance, but it’s not, obedience is; obedience at any cost.

No wonder the Lord prophesied that He would build His church on Peter's faith, hope and love. Peter came broken and humble falling before the Lord without intellectual hesitation or doubt that Jesus could save him out of a sea of emptiness, mistakes, disappointments, guilt and hopelessness.

Peter knew better than anyone else that following the Lord was not about doing it all right and never failing the Lord. Peter came to know the Holy Spirit just as personally and desperately as he had known the Son of God. Jesus said to his disciples, “*If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”* (Luke 11:13)

God's favor and God's love are not the same. His love is unconditional, but His favor is conditional. The favor of God in the Holy Spirit is something to be desired more than anything else.

**Favor and Fasting –** Part 6

I can’t help believing that God highly favors those saints who pray and fast with the right purpose. Fasting has never been my strong suit. Most American Christians have a hard time with the idea of fasting and I think it’s because we’ve had so much to enjoy and we can thank God for that. But, on the other hand we should learn how to control our appetites and not let our stomachs offer their opinions when it comes to fasting.

I found out that before I can fast for others I need to fast for myself; to bring my body into submission.

I dropped my fan and one of the five blades broke off. I thought it might still serve its purpose, but it didn’t. When I turned it on it bounced all over the floor, back and forth it went because it was out of balance. The thought came to me that this is how your life will be unless you gain control of all areas of your life.

Jesus said to His disciples: *" ‘I have food to eat that you know nothing about.’ Then his disciples said to each other, ‘Could someone have brought him food?’ ‘My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.’ "* John 4:32-35

I’m amazed at how many believers don’t know what their work in Christ is and are awkwardly hanging around the few who do offering themselves to them in the most pitiful way. If you want to know what God would have you to do for Him, fasting is a good way to find out.

Why and how does prayer *with fasting* work? One without the other has some benefit, but the two together for the right purpose - reveals the wonders of God! Fasting can be done for health reasons, but when it is done because you are desperate for God in some way – you won’t be disappointed.

Jesus pointed out to the disciples that there are times when they will need to fast. After He left them, fasting along with prayer might be the only way for them to hear Him clearly. They heard Jesus just fine while Jesus was with them. I would imagine that many of the apostles who wrote down the New Testament for us did so while they fasted; fasted many things that were distracting. In making a really serious decision fasting may be the way to get the understanding you need in prayer. Fasting and prayer were apart of selecting and commissioning individuals within the churches for a mission or position.

When a nation’s churches unite in prayer and fasting more than likely you will see some huge affects from it. There is power in agreement, but for there to be agreement (the mind of Christ) we need to prepare our hearts and minds so that there can be a united agreement that God will honor and do amazing things because of their unity.

In Matthew 4:1-11 we get a good understanding of the need we have to be led by the Spirit into the desert for times of fasting with prayer. The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by Satan in three areas. But, with each temptation Jesus quoted the truth and promises of God and so the devil left Him. Then the angels ministered to Jesus as to what He needed after all that. God will do the same for us because His angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation. (Hebrew 1:14)

In Deuteronomy 8:3 **Moses** teaches the children of God about hungering for God and the life He has to give. *"He humbled you,* ***causing you to hunger*** *and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known,* ***to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.****"* They never hungered in Egypt and so they complained when they felt hunger pains in the desert.

When my hunger pains come I know it is time to call on the Lord and die to my flesh a little more. But, all to often I start to scheme up all kinds of reasons for falling back on my commitment instead of keeping the faith that getting filled with more of Him means less of me in the way, and less of me in His way is good for me as well as for the work of the Lord.

When we work and care more about what goes in our mouths than what comes out of our mouths then I’d say we have a real need to fast and pray.

Have you ever come to the place in your spiritual life where you sensed you needed to add a show of determination to your prayers? It is the Holy Spirit who is leading you for a very good purpose. God tests us to see what we are willing to give up for our prayer to be answered. If we have become one with Christ then we must also be willing to forsake the things of this world and the desires of our flesh as Jesus did.

Standing in the gap for others is a serious matter. First, we need to train ourselves to be able to go without a meal or two, or even for a day or two, and to be able to set our favorite things aside for a time - if we want God to do something that we can’t do. Praying for yourself is one thing, but when you have been given a burden for someone in prayer sometimes it will require something more from you, as it did Jesus.

Queen Esther was given a burden for her people the Jews, and she not only fasted herself, but called on all the Jews to fast with her both for her physical life and for the physical lives of her people as Haman was conspiring to kill all Jews in his day.(Esther 4:15-16) The end result of prayer and fasting and wisdom on Esther’s part was that the enemy fell into his own trap. The king, because he favored Esther for her humility and wisdom gave the Jews all the freedom they wanted. He gave them their right to assemble and worship their God, and to defend themselves and their possessions anytime they were threatened.

*"For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor. In every province and in every city, wherever the edict of the king went, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them."* Esther 8:16-17

King Jehoshaphat fasted and prayed in 2 Chronicles 20:2-23 because a vast army was coming against God's people. He proclaimed a fast for all Judah. Then the Spirit of God came upon one man, Jahaziel, to speak this word to them: *‘Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's...You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you...Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged...the LORD will be with you."* All those invading Judah were defeated.

In Daniel chapter 9 Daniel turns to the Lord God on behalf of Israel with confession, fasting, and humble pleading for the Lord’s *favor* to return to His people. They had refused the message of God’s prophets when He sent them to warn them of where their rebellion would lead them. God’s sanctuary had become a desolate place because God’s Spirit was not dwelling with them anymore. How many Christian homes has God said this about? How many churches? What about a nation like America? Did God hear Daniel’s prayer? Listen to this:

*"While I was still in prayer Gabriel (the angel) came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, ‘Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed.’ "* (Daniel 9:20-23) Does God honor the man or woman who gets desperate with Him? I think so. When we sacrifice (give up or over) something for the good of God’s people or to be nearer to God and to hear His voice more clearly - it proves our true citizenship in the Kingdom of God. It reveals true love.

Fasting means that you are temporarily giving up some thing you need in order to gain some thing better. Some might say this is not right and that it is bribing God. Based on the true definition of a bribe I would think not. Bribe: a scrap of bread; a price, gift, reward, or favor bestowed or promised to induce one to commit a wrong or illegal act, to do something against his wishes.

Fasting in prayer deepens our relationship with Christ. When Christ prayed He didn’t pray the *wishy washy doubtful* prayers most believers pray today, or the *it’s all about me* prayers. He kept to the will of the Father for us. (Thank you Lord.) When we temporarily lay aside some thing we depend on for our livelihood or for our enjoyment we show God that we mean business with our prayer. Jesus meant business. Jesus momentarily laid aside all of Heaven to come down to live 33 years here and in the end to suffer our punishment for sin on the cross of shame and death. Jesus taught us the benefits of fasting in prayer. He physically proved that we can overcome the pull of the world, the cravings of the flesh and the devil’s every temptation against our life and destiny in Christ Jesus.

Why do so many believers in Jesus Christ live powerless? There comes the day when you can no longer depend on yourself, your husband, your wife, your family, your church, your doctor, your psychologist or your government. You need God and God alone to come through in this particular thing. It is my belief that this is when fasting with prayer is more than necessary.

*"Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold* ***fast*** *to him and take your oaths in his name. He is your praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders."* Deuteronomy 10:20-21

**Favor and Finishing –** Part 7

Freedom is realized in your life when your first awakening thoughts are for prayer and praise to God; when the *daily altar* precedes your *daily activities*; when worship fills your work; when faith overcomes your every fear; when **His** will becomes your only weight. Are you free? Freedom is our responsibility **to keep**.

Christ sets us free from the guilt and cost of our sinful lifestyles when we repent and turn away from it to the “new” and “abundant” life He offers us. With His body He has healed us from a sinful lifestyle and with His blood we are delivered from the *second death*, but with His strong hand He leads us into freedom. While it is His grace that drew near to us to save and deliver us, we must draw near to Him to work out what we have received in the Holy Spirit. Do you want to experience deliverance in every area of your life? Just how valuable is liberty to you?

*“Blessed is the man (woman and child) who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood (finished) the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”* James 1:12

*“… the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have* ***longed for his appearance****.”* II Timothy 4:6-8

Do you really think that you have gained anything of real value if you are still in bondage to the world, or to the flesh and to the devil? Faith can die.The faith you had when you believed that Jesus died for your sins must be kept alive day after day as you walk with Him. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. What value is Jesus Christ to you if He is not King of your life as well as your Savior?

King Jesus was tempted and tested in all three areas of His earthly life and overcame each trial to prove to us that in Him we can do all things. Jesus is not in the grave having been sacrificed for the sin of the world. He is on His Throne. He sets slave and sinner free from the empty, stinking, lifeless and powerless prisons. Bible knowledge, good works, and growing up in a Christian home are not evidence that you have been set free. You need the “key.”

The Holy Spirit in us provides us with everything we need to live the liberated life so much that we will have an overflow that is for others. We are not set free so we can live for ourselves. This is not what freedom is, even though we are free to do so. We are required to finish what was started in us for the glory of our Father and for the sake of His kingdom. There has been given us a new reason for living that we are to share with the world. And, if we refuse to share this truth, or that we are afraid to, then we are the worst of sinners.

*“Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant…”* II Corinthians 3:4-6

*“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. Since, then we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.”* II Corinthians 5:10-11

*“Now brethren, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, IF you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.”* I Corinthians 15:1-2

If the Lord God favors you He will lead and empower you to finish so that you will receive the reward of your faith, hope and love. It is out of my own personal observance that He cares more about this than we do. Somewhere along the way of our salvation we lose the “keys” that keep us where we need (and want) to be in order to finish what the Lord has given us to do as well as to be able to enjoy life as we do the works of the Father.

When you finish with His favor you will see the (*hoped for*, *longed for*, *worked for*, and who you *sacrificed and suffered for*) beautiful face of Jesus. I’ve heard Christians say that they have seen His face, and maybe a few have, but even after the Lord’s disciples had literally lived with Him they still didn’t recognize Him after His death when He reappeared to them. They recognized His voice first. It was His words that awakened their souls again – to keep going and finish what He had started in them. Oh how we need to hear His voice! His voice is far more important than any visual of Him, at least for now. Besides, the Lord warned us about looking for Him in person. He will appear but when He does every eye will see Him, not just you.

Paul wrote: *“****Now*** *we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror;* ***then*** *we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know* ***fully****, even as I am fully known.”* (I Corinthians 13:12)

There are steps of faith that we must take to receive the reward of our faith. He will reward those who earnestly seek Him (Hebrews 11:6) and keep in step with His Holy Spirit as live for our Lord.

Jesus prayed for us before He went to the cross. *“I have given them the glory* (the favored Holy Spirit of grace and gifts) *that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to* ***see my glory****, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”* John 17:22-24

Do you want to see Him and His glory? Then let Him finish what He started in you. Stand firm in **all the will of God**, mature and fully assured. See to it that you do the work you have received from the Lord so that your faithful eagerness in doing it can be matched by the rewarded completion of it.

*“But we have this treasure (Holy Spirit – the favor of God) in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us….We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the* ***life of Jesus*** *may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that His life may be revealed in our mortal body….Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are* ***achieving for us an eternal glory*** *that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes**on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporal, but what is unseen is eternal.”* I Corinthians 4:7-18 ( in part )

**The Father’s Full House –** Part 8

There are three powerful forces: the flesh, the world and the devil that are constant and if not daily conquered can stop us from receiving the best life there is, both now and forever.

Jesus taught the disciples to pray and one part of that prayer was, “….*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”* (Matthew 6:13)

If we continually give in to these three temptations: the flesh, the world, and the devil – we shall also continually miss the grace and power we need to conquer all three enemies. Many have fallen from their height of love with the Lord Jesus because they gave in to one and let it control them. Once they loved the Lord and were eager to walk with Him the rest of their lives. They started with high hope, but somewhere along the way they lost sight of the One they love.

These three forces have their only power by us giving in to them. When the temptation is too strong God will make a way of escape – IF – we go to Him. And, we can forfeit the delivering grace that could be ours if first of all we do not alert ourselves to the fact that we have these enemies, and then by rejecting God’s way that would help us escape temptation. To follow Jesus to the Father's Home means there will be a battle to fight all the way. You will not be seated with Christ Jesus through ways and philosophies of your own. Beware of false teachers and their doctrines. Test your faith and doctrine to the Word of God. The Holy Spirit is the One who guides you in to all truth and wisdom from God, so test the spirits too.

In the Lord’s parables of the *“lost sheep, lost coin, and prodigal son”* (Luke 15) we learn that those who belong to God can become *lost* to Him. The *“lost”* are lost because they do not know what they need to know, but could so easily know – about Jesus Christ. Or, they have walked away from their purpose in Christ to be friends with the world and to gain that which is temporal. Some are drawn away by false shepherds and teachers speaking as if they had the authority to speak and teach. Some have been enticed by the world and are not willing to give up sinning.

If we repent and call on Jesus, He will loose the strongholds that have formed because we have continually given in to temptation. God is a forgiving God and will deliver us from evil. His mercy is new every morning, but you have to seek Him for it. The Spirit of grace and wisdom helps us return to the Lord; to that high place of love and trust where we first entered into covenant with God through the blood of His Son - Jesus Christ.

Jesus taught in another parable about the Master’s *“great banquet”* that He has planned for those who love Him and obey Him. (Luke 14:16-18) Every human being has had this invitation but not very many have understood its true meaning and only because they have not taken any time to consider the unconditional love behind it and the value it would have to them – eternally.

Most new believers fall away eventually because they have not rooted themselves in the power and wisdom of our Lord’s love. Testing of our faith means adjustments, discomfort and even suffering, but it’s all part of the privilege we have in sharing our Lord’s inheritance, banquet and kingdom.

*“A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses.”* Luke 14:16-23

Those who were ***the******first*** to be invited all made excuses and so ***others*** were invited to come and partake of the Master’s great banquet. Jesus revealed three common excuses: field, fortune and family.

One had bought a field and wanted to go see it instead of coming to the banquet. The second had just bought five yoke of oxen and was on his way to try them out. The third man had just gotten married and could not break away to come. Do you think these three individuals would’ve come had they known what was really being offered here; who this banquet was for? Today is not any different than the day Jesus was in when He spoke of the temptations that are common to man and why they turn away from God’s truth and invitation.

What can you expect if you choose to decline this invitation? When Jesus started His ministry He first had to preach to His own brothers (the Jews). He warned them of what would happen in rejecting Him as their Savior; of rejecting His invitation. But, they refused Him anyway. So Jesus and His faithful twelve headed out into the streets to invite the gentiles, that they might be included in the heavenly gift. Therefore, the first will be last and the last will be first. When Jesus returns they will see the One they crucified and rejected, and they will repent.

*“Go out to the roads and country and make them come in so that my house may be full. I tell you, not one of those men (the first) who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.”* Luke 14:23-24

The Lord is calling out still, ***“Come, for everything is now ready.”***

What will you gain in the end if you lose your soul's reward for faithfulness? How will the temporal things that have no eternal life in them bring you true happiness: the joy of heaven? Can that person you are bound to raise you up to eternal life on that great day?

This world, as we know it, will not remain the same, and the **end of all things** (as we have been accustomed to) is closer than we realize. Our great King is coming with His everlasting Kingdom. For, as it is in heaven it shall soon be on this earth because the earth is our Father’s footstool and everything belongs to Him.

So why has He waited so long in bringing it all to a head? There's a certain number our Father is waiting for number for “r.s.v.p.'ers” and their number is known only to the Father. When they have all responded, the door of invitation will be shut.

You can’t live for this world and live in Christ’s Kingdom. You must make a choice. You can’t sit at the table of idolaters and expect to sit at the Master’s banqueting table. You can’t feast on the wicked things of this world and expect to enjoy the Father's heavenly delights.

“*Oh come all ye* ***faithful****, come in exaltation. Come all ye* ***citizens of heaven above****! Come and* ***behold Him****, born the king of angels. Oh come let us* ***adore Him****. Oh Come Let Us Adore Him! OH COME LET US ADORE HIM –* ***CHRIST… THE LORD!****”*

There is no other invitation to wait for. There is no other King to worship. There is no other time to respond than now. In the beginning God said: *“My Spirit will not contend with man forever….”* (Genesis 6:2-3) You can think that things will go on the way they always have, but the truth of the message is: ***“Today is the day for salvation. Come now, everything is ready.”***

Jesus Christ is coming sooner than you think. Times and dates belong to the Father who has set the day and time of this great banquet of His. Are you ready? The wedding is about to begin!

This is the time to respond and leave anything or anyone behind to do so. If they won’t come with you, then you must leave them behind and go on with your Savior and Lord. You must turn away from those things that will hold you up and make you late; too late.

The Holy Spirit is speaking afresh today to awaken love and the Spirit-filled life in us that prepares us for the wedding of the Lamb with his Bride. Who do you think the "Bride" is if not the embodiment of the Holy Spirit in God’s people. Surely, there is nothing about our ‘flesh’ that Christ longs to be united to. It is the Holy-Spirit filled Bride that He longs to be united to, and with us to celebrate all that is yet to come.