THOUGHTS OF MARCH, 2017

This is the last of three consecutive monthly notices that readers’ names will be dropped from THOUGHTS’ mailing list if I have not received notice that you want to continue. No additional response is necessary for those who have already responded. For those who do not want to continue receiving THOUGHTS, but who want to show more class than a silent departure, you can send me an e-mail “wave off.” Thank you.

1. It has been well stated that the Lord’s strength is all we need, but that sometimes His strength is difficult to find. We need help from others. The best soldier can do his most and even die trying, but a lone soldier on the field lacks very much if the battle and the war are to be won.

My point here is that the Lord came to form a body, not only a worldwide body but local, intimate, highly functioning Holy Spiritual bodies, each having the living Christ ruling in their midst [thus rightly called the Body of Christ]. In those local bodies is found the strength of Christ, the joy of Christ; the mind of Christ; in short, the life and resources of Christ. He, the head, by the Spirit, is actively present, doing that which Christ did, and greater than He did.

It is His plan that we find Him and much of His grace in His Body. The Body of Christ is God’s intentional concept and construction and function. In significant ways, we who live and breathe and have our being in Christ are Christ – Acts 17:28. We are not Him, nor “little Christs,” but sons of God, co-heirs with Christ of God’s life and “stuff.” Thus, in that way, for me to live is Christ – Phil. 1:21. That is His plan, maintained by the Holy Spirit among those who believe Him for that impossibility.

We are not a human concept of a religious organization that has labeled itself with a high-sounding name. Although we have done that sort of thing from place to place and time to time, the Lord has dealt with such religiosity and He will continue to deal with it. We are His workmanship. He is alive among us and is working to make Himself more obvious and effective. Where and wherein we are living the crucified life, the Body of Christ is known for His life and deeds.

1. The Israelis who were prophets of Baal tried to bring life to their religious service by devotion and self-sacrifice – 1 Kings 18. It did not work. Why? They had forsaken their Living God and His ways and turned to fake-gods and their fake ways. There is no life, no revival, apart from the Lord. Seeking the Lord and His ways brings life. God’s precepts stand forever. Other gods and their precepts always fail us – our greatest failure being a continuation of our blindness and further spread of such ways and lies.

The faithful Israelis whose mission for the Lord against the town of Ai trusted the Lord for victory in a small battle – Joshua 7. It did not work. They were defeated. Why? Some had been disobedient in a previous matter, had concealed it, had not repented, so the whole body of believers were becoming spiritually sick. A few rotten apples were rotting the whole batch; the nation suffered. When one part of the body is blessed, the whole body is blessed. When one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers. God’s precepts stand forever.

What are the Lords requirements for victory/revival? “If my people …” – 2 Chron. 7:14. The Lord’s precepts stand forever. Why do we not believe Him?

1. Religiosity drains our relationship with the Lord. Don’t let that happen. We have religiosity all around us. Unless we hide in the mountains, we have to deal with religiosity, although there we will still encounter it within ourselves. It helps if we see the difference between the spiritual life and the religious life. If you have difficulty seeing the difference, look at the results of both. Jesus Christ brings peace in difficult and dangerous times, and victory over the enemy. Religion tries to help you deal with difficulty and danger, but your life is unchanged and your soul remains disturbed.
2. We are supplied with more than just a little definition of and requirement for becoming an “overcomer.” We have seen those in The Revelation chapters 2 and 3. In The Revelation 12:11 one group of believers earned their label because they were victorious over the devil by “the blood of the Lamb [forgiveness of all their sins, and empowered to sin no more] and because of the word of their testimony [they had a living testimony and were not afraid to speak of Him], and they did not love their life even when faced with death [or ‘to the death’].”

In The Revelation 20:4-6 we see other qualifications for becoming an overcomer. Those believers were beheaded because they were living testimonies to Jesus and to that which He said, so they had not worshipped the beast or taken his mark [which would have saved their and their children’s physical lives]. Overcomers’ qualifications vary according to our lives and times, of course, but all of them point to loving the Lord our God with everything we are and have, and our neighbors as ourselves [Jesus’ first and second greatest commandments].

1. For years, I have not been attracted to things, those that had attracted me before the Lord became my life, and I am here referring to good things like vacations, common social events, and times of idleness called “days off.” [I am not referring to a state of perfection in this or any other matter.] Some of that loss of attraction was immediate, some gradual, and some, I must believe, still persist. Many that persist are not bothersome and perhaps should not be entirely neglected, such as an occasional bowl of Blue Bell Home Made Vanilla ice cream or a Dallas Cowboys football game.

I think that the weening of my appreciation for things temporal has been based on my now being possessed by something bigger, better, and more life-giving than those previous attractions. I was spoiled for this world by the One who stepped into my life. I gave Him my life and He gave me His. Permission was granted by both of us – for me to live His life and for Him to live my life. Both of us have permission to live the other’s life. From the time of that agreement-contract-covenant I have been less and less attracted to things otherwise. Things outside of Him are not very exciting. It’s like I have seen and lived in the sun, so I’m not impressed with glittering cities in the dark with their puny lights. It’s like Moses would not have been impressed by fireworks after he had been with Jehovah in thick clouds, thunder, and lightning on the mountain top for 40 days.

1. There are things that the Lord has already accomplished in and for us – that we had absolutely nothing to do with. We were born again into His family like little babies are born into our families – they having had nothing to do with their being born. The Lord looked at us in His mind’s eye before creation was created, like I looked at my children when I started to think about and “look” at them during my courtship with Nancy. With the Lord it was a more clear and pure look, and one that had absolute clarity, holy purpose, and unstoppable proficiency.

As God’s hand-picked children there were some things He did all by Himself [aside from both our creative and destructive involvements], by His personal deliberateness, without possibility of taint or failure. Those things were, 1) His pre-creation choice of us, 2) His creation of each of us in our individual human bodies [no matter the perceived natural history of each one of us], 3) His placement within us of our human spirit [without which we would have been born dead physically – John 1:9; Acts 17:25], 4) His arrangement of time and situation for each of us to be born again of His Spirit [Eph. 2:8-9], 5) the immediate and permanent and “only-His” work at the moment of our rebirth [wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption – 1 Cor. 1:30-31], and 6) His customized workmanship on our souls from then onward [using every second and every finite incident to accomplish His purpose(s)].

After all of that bedrock truth, there is a place for rewards for allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us to behave like Jesus, and through us to do the works of Jesus, after we have been born again. But those two precious things are not our focus. Nor are the works He has called us to, to be our focus. They are hardly our attractions. Jesus and His accomplished works are our faith-focus and, when our vision is adequate, He is our reward. We know that our rewards are being laid up, He said so, but He is the fullness of God’s reward system. The more clearly by faith we see the accomplished works of Jesus, the more pleased is our Father and the more we, too, overcome the world.

1. Here is a question for you. Was Jesus a rabbi? He was called rabbi by His followers, by incidental contacts, and by several of the Jewish leaders, some of whom hated Him. Was that a personally given title of respect [which is my opinion], or was He a trained rabbi [which is not just a passing thought]? Some have considered that during the silent years of His life, from age 12 to 30, He might have undergone formal teaching by those in the temple who saw His brilliance – Luke 2:39-52. You settle the question for yourself.
2. Enjoy reading Ephesians 2:8-10 and 2 Timothy 1:9-10. Those words stir praise, don’t they! They point out that in our lives all was, is, and will be of the Lord. We were in His heart and His eyes were on us from eternity before He completed our creation. Now He sees us as His perfected ones, even though that is yet a future completion. His future but-now-by-faith completions of us, His presently unfinished business, are a joy to Him. That’s because they are already finished in His mind, which is reality as surely as are the past and present. He not only wills to be in relationship with us, but His deep desire is to be united with us through eternity.

He prepares our hearts, eyes and ears. We hear the good news. We respond. If our eyes and ears have been prepared and we hear bad news, we reject it. When we have been prepared to see and hear the truth, we recognize the truth. There are masses of people all around us who are ready for the Truth. Our job is to expose them to Him. That exposure is without pressure, without manipulation, and does not need to have typical religious tapestry.

Let’s expose them to Him. If we will lift Him up, He will draw to Him all who are prepared by our Father. Our Father is so delighted in His Son [the eternally spiritual Son who has also become the fully human Son] that all humans who believe the impossible and incredibly good news are forever bound within the intimate and loving Trinitarian relationship. That’s part of the gospel. It means that the Godhead will never be without us [that’s good news to God] and that we will never be without the Godhead [that’s good news to us].

1. When Jacob was returning to the Promised Land with his two wives, children, servants, and many animals, he had two necessary, difficult encounters which we also have to have [on many occasions] if we are to move into the next stages of our sanctification [maturity, responsibility, success, etc.]. First, he had to settle things with the Lord, then with his brother, Esau.

His wrestling with the Lord “disabled” his walk in the flesh – his hip was dislocated physically, permanently. Jacob being weakened in his flesh, hobbling and alone, softened Esau’s heart and enabled the brothers to settle their problems, but it started with Jacob being broken before the Lord, then humbling himself before Esau. Both were necessary if Jacob was going to enter into and live in the Promised Land.

For us, the Promised Land is not that nation now called Israel. Our Promised Land is the place of proper relationship with the Lord [broken flesh] and our brothers [humility], wherein the Lord is “with us” and openly fulfills His word in our lives. Like with Jacob, our flesh has to be dealt a crippling blow before we can enter those spiritual premises.

1. Just another encouraging reminder: When the Lord [many times] says He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He is saying that He is the God of weak, fallible men [and women, and children]. He takes care to show us the humanity of those three and others whom He chose and is still choosing. We have the tendency to think that, because those three men’s names are in the Bible, they were more than they were. [Remember that our names are also written in God’s books, in heaven.] In the performance of their lives, they were as bad or worse than many of us. But they heard and trusted the Lord in several God-chosen and valuable circumstances, which influenced their behavior between circumstances. Their last circumstance for trusting the Lord was their deaths.
2. Almost all of the New Testament’s use of the word “worship” means “to kiss the hand toward,” signifying honor being given to a superior being. It signifies bowing down before, or to prostrate oneself before. So, when you are worshipping the Lord in the Spirit [from your heart], you are being very intimate with Him. He sees no problem with our being intimate with Him, in humility.
3. In Matthew 8 Jesus fed the 4,000. Then some Pharisees asked Him for a sign, which He had been giving them openly month after month. Jesus told them that hardened unbelievers would not receive a sign that they would consider adequate [my translation]. Then off He went with the disciples in a boat, with “only” one loaf of bread – v. 14. [No problem for those who had witnessed His miraculous feeding of the 5,000 and 4,000, right? He even told them to watch out for intelligent unbelief (the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod).]

Because having only one loaf of bread for 13 people was a problem to intelligent unbelievers, the 12 began to talk about it as a problem – v. 16. Jesus said, “Why are you talking like rank unbelievers!? Don’t you remember the two miracles? We had more left over when we had less to start with, and fed the more people.” How often do you see your intelligent unbelief raising its head, and what do you do about it? It is clear; the Lord will do more when we are less and have less.

1. The flesh needs to learn a lesson from Jesus, that following Him is dangerous. Even if we only desire to live biblical, godly lives yet we will suffer persecution. To suffer, we don’t need to speak out in faith or step up in action – only live truly godly lives – 2 Tim. 3:12. The disciples got into trouble by virtue of being with Him and identified with Him – Matt. 26:31. So, the flesh has its reasons to avoid righteousness, but not good reasons. Association has its fruit. It brings either unrighteousness or righteousness, according to who we are associated with. The world tolerates a limited amount of either. Our ambient culture sets acceptable norms when the church sleeps. Abortion, homosexuality, social greed and envy, unrighteous laws, lying, etc., etc. show that we are fast asleep. We have learned how to stay out of trouble – sleep.
2. Abraham chased after and fought and defeated the army that had robbed the city of Sodom of its people and stuff, including nephew Lot and his family – Gen. 14. When He came back with the people and the spoil, Abraham encountered two pleased, prominent people. One was the king of Sodom, who offered Abraham all of the spoil but wanted the people – he wanted the souls and was willing to give Abraham all of the riches. Doesn’t that sound like the devil, who offered the same to Jesus and offers the same to us!

However, the other person, Melchizedek, brought out bread and wine [symbols of sacrificial redemption of the soul] and they had worshipful fellowship. Melchizedek blessed Abraham in the name of the Lord. Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe of the spoil, and most of the rest went back to the king of Sodom – Abraham kept none of it for himself. Abraham did not want to cloud the issue -- the Lord was Abraham’s provider. God’s response was to immediately reward Abraham with heavenly riches – Gen. 15:all.

1. Hearing about the Lord and His life and blessings is good but not as good as first-hand experience. It’s like sitting in the lecture, vs. experiencing it in the laboratory. Job teaches us of that in 42:5-6. We have little or nothing to offer if we only repeat what we have heard from others.
2. In Acts 17:28 Paul told the Athenians that in the Lord we live and move and exist [“have our being”]. To use some other writings of Paul: If Jesus was not the Christ, if He was killed and did not arise from the dead, if He rose from The dead but did not ascend into the heavens where He now sits at the right hand of God His Father, if we are not in Him at this time, and if He is not planning to come for all who believe in Him, we who believe are in an absolutely miserable and dead-end condition. But we are not. He was alive, then dead, then alive and is now seated in heaven. He is coming again, soon. Believe into Him.
3. Here is a hard question, mostly because it requires spiritual minds to think only in the natural for a few minutes. Why did LBJ’s War on Poverty fail? This month’s answer: Because the War on Poverty dealt only with individuals’ financial deficit; it did not deal with their dignity deficit. Instead, it increased the dignity deficit [along with morality deficits, resentment, etc.]. To build up dignity in someone, others need to treat you with respect and consider you worthy of respect. We feel a sense of dignity when we produce value for ourselves and others.

To feel dignified, others must need us. The War on Poverty did not do that. Instead, it treated economically deficient people as liabilities who needed managing rather than as human assets to develop. Long before now, the offer of jobs has become vastly inferior and unattractive to the counter-offer of a monthly check, food stamps, free rent, free health care, free transportation, etc. Then there is the now-embedded life of making, selling and using drugs, and other crimes as a life style and family business. All of that is demoralizing to recipients of free stuff.

1. More questions; these for pondering. Where is the church in a declining Europe and EU? Why is it silent? Is it not really silent, but only weakly speaking? Is there a hidden spiritual revival in the UK’s Brexit movement? Revival/renewal means simply going back to normal again. The church needs to be normal – God’s normal.

Comparatively, the church in America has started to step up and speak up. The traditional religious voices that had been going along with our moral and political downhill slide for a couple of generations had become mostly silent, at least when compared to the louder, more clear and effective voices that came to the forefront in 2016. They now have the ear of some of our current political leaders.

May the Lord grant us grace for repentance and for Holy Spiritual renewal in the USA, UK [including there in Scotland], and the EU. And there are already some [if we will believe it!!] signs of genuine spiritual revival in Russia. Let’s not get stuck in the mud of the past like did the saints of Acts 9:13-14, 26, risking kingdom and personal loss by not recognizing God’s work in former reprobates. Could Vladimir Putin be on the Lord’s list for salvation? We might be of some help with some loving prayers and faithful actions.

1. Do you think that today’s church, wherever it is located, is thinking how it can get along with the world, or thinking how to turn the world upside down? Is there any wind in its sails?
2. How about your sails?
3. Could Adam have told us about sin before he sinned? Or, before he sinned, could he only have been able to tell us about the information he received from the Lord about not eating that fruit? Now, because I am justified [just-if-I’d never sinned], I am [before the Lord] just if I’d never sinned. That’s better than His only forgiving me, because being only forgiven allows for my sin being remembered [although without penalty]. Justification removes the remembrance of having sinned. That’s a WOW! act of God, which puts us in exactly the same place as was Adam before he sinned.

After he sinned, Adam did not have Jesus’ redeeming blood to restore him, as have we. For us, one of the effects of walking in the Spirit is that we have no knowledge of present sin in our lives. [I wobble in and out of that.] That’s justification. Read Romans chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8. We are offered a totally clean and clear conscience before God, and can rely on it as we walk like Jesus.

1. A. H. asks about the reaction of a disciple when his/her mentor shows imperfection – sins, weakens, falters. I would start my answer by saying that from the beginning of their relationship the mentor should help the disciple know of his mentor’s imperfections and show forth his righteous response to conviction and forgiven-ness, for the sake of the disciple. The mentor does not teach sinless perfection but does show and teach righteousness, repentance, holiness, sanctification, justification, salvation, forgiveness, restoration, etc., and displays the need, reception, and use of all of them. If that is the walk together of mentor and disciple, the results of Mark 9:42 and Luke 17:1-2 will be avoided.

If that is not the walk of the mentor and disciple, there are several other godly courses. Separation is an extreme course, employed too soon and too often. Patience and “leaving room for the Lord to work” is another. The most fruitful [I think] in my own experience was my disciples banding together in love, counsel and action, and persisting with an abundance of grace until I had adequately repented and been restored. That life-saving action saved and redeemed everything in my life that was worth saving and redeeming.

1. Didn’t Jesus say that life [heaven?] is at the end of the path for those who enter the small gate and walk the narrow path? That statement, if accurate, is due some serious consideration by us churched people. He also said that destruction [hell?] is at the end of the wide gate and wide path – Matt. 7:13-14. He said many go that route. Is He talking about two different ways that the church approaches and lives the Gospel, or one way the church accepts and lives the Gospel and another way that unbelievers reject it? Selah.
2. This Thought is worth all the others this month. Prayer is the distinct act of returning to the Lord, in silence or spoken, that which He has given to us. Prayer is therefore a tool which we return to Him when our task is completed, and get again when called upon to join Him in another creative project. All else is simply “saying a prayer,” a common aspect of religion.
3. The annual World Happiness Report has been published. The top ten are Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Switzerland, Finland, Holland, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and Sweden. The Nordics and the United Kingdom took most of the top awards. Israel held steady in eleventh place.

Israel is the only nation at or near the top of the Happiness list that is in a state of continual war, sustaining rocket attacks, shootings and knifings on almost a daily basis. Yet, Israel has a healthy balance of prosperity, health, satisfaction with government, personal freedom, a high degree of trust in its society, and low inequality. It sits alone in that part of the world as an example of democracy, and reaches out around the world to be a blessing to other nations and subgroups.

America ranked nineteenth. We ranked third in 2007.

1. Are you ready for some apparently secular Thoughts, but which are actually very spiritual? Yes, it is true that we are headed for a global government but eventually it will be with Jesus Christ as its king.

You have noticed that when the Lord is preparing us for new things we tend to sense what is happening, jump ahead of His schedule, and do our [supposed] part in our flesh. That’s the work of the deceiver who cannot stop the Lord’s work but can mimic it and get us to start too early [or too late], which produces failure whether or not it initially looks like a failure. Examples: 1) Solving poverty is impossible until Jesus’ kingdom comes on earth, yet the impoverished should be helped now. Helping them does help them in certain ways but some impoverished neighborhoods and cultures are crippled for generations through wrong types of help. 2) International cooperation is very helpful because major consolidations of nations helps many local and world problems, but the Lord and the devil both want global governance. Until the perfect Governor comes, mega-nation governance leads to all sorts of trouble.

The following is a list of the current problems of global governance, meant to help us avoid movements that start while the Spirit is preparing humanity for Christ’s global governance .

* Global centralization and regulation erodes and eliminates national and local sovereignty over goods, services, capital, and people movements.
* It establishes an entirely secular order over education, health care, economic development, and justice. Local adjustments are not permitted.
* Their secular experts are hostile to religion and traditional culture.
* Appointed experts replace locally elected officials so that global agendas can be moved forward without the resistance of local authorities.
* Humans are population statistics, and animals are as important as humans.
* They regard the traditional family and religious beliefs as threats to environmental integrity.
* They are materialists, so they deny the transcendent spiritual nature of human beings.
* They are relativists who reject the concept of objective moral truth, natural law, and religion.
* They regard power and control as the mechanisms by which they can make the world perfect in their image.
* Therefore, they are centralists who have little regard for the rights of individuals or subsidiary bodies or local agencies of mutual aid and support, or churches, or any local group that wants to preserve its distinctive way of life.
* They not only are opponents of religious liberty but also of freedom of conscience.

So, let’s not fall for man-made supposed utopias as we are responding to the Lord by helping our presently fallen world. Don’t lose sight of the Master’s plan and His timing. Jesus and His global centralization are coming.

1. What has the Lord given you to judge the spiritual health of a body of believers? It’s different than judging the spiritual health of an individual believer. For a body of serious believers, my evaluation of their spiritual health is the degree, position, and focus of Christ among them. Are they moving toward Him as a unit/body? Are they like-minded; do they have a high level of accord; are they able to come to one mind, and quickly?

That’s Philippians 2:1-4 – “Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

1. Parents are blessed when they see their children [of any age] growing in healthy maturity, saying and doing things they were taught, then developing healthy mature things beyond those learned at home. The kids had learned first to follow their parents’ teachings then, from that foundation, began developing additional life-practices. It is a joy and relief to see them build on the firm foundation that their parents had laid in their lives.

It’s the same when spiritual mentors see their bairn taking future lessons and leadership from the Lord. First, they had followed their earthly parent/tutor, then began following their heavenly One. It’s especially good if the Lord does not have to wreck some of our wrongly built life-structure before He rebuilds correctly. Teachers are reminded that they are held to a higher standard than their students.

1. It is a very faithful and righteous person who lives by the truth -- especially the truth of having been crucified with Christ, of having no right to self, who identifies with Christ in His death, who knows that Satan’s hold has been broken, and who [while still a human person] now lives in this body by faith in Jesus – Gal. 2:20. For that person it is experientially true that the old man is dead and all non-God things have passed away. He/she is a new person. The crippling things of the past are gone. That person is not being rehabilitated; he/she is new, born again. All of his/her passions and desires [meaning fears, hate, unforgiveness, lust, anxieties, hurts, and the like] have passed away.

That is a big spiritual bite, but it is true. According to our faith and circumstances it is now effective for everyone who will believe the truth.

1. You have a Christian sister in Corpus Christi who is glowing in the Spirit. Her very difficult life has turned around and is showing God’s grace all over her. The known reason for her soul and multiple life-situation changes is that with great pain and then little faith she died to her own will and truly turned things over to the Lord. That also required much of others, such as counsel, love, encouragement, prayer, and time. Then, ALL of her life changed, including her long-time family adversarial relationships, finances, and living situation.

James described her situation in Chapters 3 and 4, and concentrated his words in 4:6-7 by saying: “If you want greater grace [and I tell you that otherwise God will continue to oppose your strongest efforts] then humble yourself before Him and others. Submit yourself to Him; totally capitulate, don’t just curtsy! Then try resisting the devil and he will flee from you.” You notice that the quote is a paraphrase and has a Texas sound to it.

Resisting the devil before we submit to the Lord doesn’t work, so the faithful can be caught wondering why their resisting of the devil does not work for them. It is delightful to see the devil running away from her since she humbled herself before the Lord.

1. Exactly like the Lord’s promises and His creation reveal His nature, the things we like about Him reveal our nature. For example, if we find ourselves more in the habit of thanking Him for His grace and generosity, instead of praising Him for His wonderful self, that is a clue that we should get closer to Him and get to know Him better. Knowing Him better brings forth praises from us and is Him-centered. Always thanking Him for His work toward and for us shows that we are self-centered; thankful, but self-centered.
2. Matthew [24:37] and Luke [17:26] wrote that Jesus said at His return the world would have likeness to the “days of Noah.” There are many such similarities at this time. It appears that the main similarity the Lord was speaking of was that the world would not be expecting Him. But there are other or additional possibilities, such as: 1) The genes of humanity were polluted in Noah’s day, and again after the flood, which was caused by fallen angels mating with human women, which produced giants. The Lord brought the flood in order to cleanse humanity of that gene pollution.

Scripture says that Noah came from a clean lineage in his generations, which was one reason the Lord chose him to live through the flood. After the flood, when the gene contamination recurred, the Lord told His people to eradicate the giants. Relating the contamination of our present human gene pool to Noah’s day, there are many [poorly reported] scientific experiments going on that are altering our human gene pool, some relating to replacing some of our genes and replacing them with animal genes. The thought is that such will be improvements in the way God made humans – strength, speed, resistance against diseases, etc. The same is going on in animal and plant science.

2) A second likeness was that there was gross evil in the world. People had no love for the Lord, no respect for the order of things He had instituted, and they produced their own gods.

3) They sacrificed their children in deference to their personal lives and luxury, which compares to the abortions and poor parenting of today. Humanity will be living for itself, for “me,” and not for God and our neighbors.

1. Leadership can be recognized when someone hears the Lord, obeys Him, then takes responsibility for those who line up to follow.
2. N. K. makes two solid points from his study of January’s THOUGHTS, and I will share them with you. First, that the righteous are not protected from suffering; that we are not guaranteed prosperity in this part of life [our present life on earth], that justice always comes during our lifetime [meaning our life beginning with our present natural birth into humanity and into our unending eternal life in heaven], and that God’s revelation of reality shows that His justice transcends the brief time and experience of this earth-life.

The second has to do with knowing partially. I will paraphrase it, going in and out of quoting him, without using quotes. It is: The notion of knowledge is very crucial in the history of salvation. It started in the Garden of Eden when man had not yet sinned. Genesis 3:5: “For God KNOWS that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened; you will be like God, KNOWING good from evil.” The devil used and uses knowledge to entice. Entire knowledge is a preserve of God Himself, but many a time we humans are never content with our creatureliness. We try but we will never go beyond who we are – created beings. We know partially, so we should be contented in knowing all we need to know to live happily in this life. The big payoff will come when we will KNOW the Lord as He knows us. That motivated Paul to want to KNOW Christ and the power of His resurrection. Once we know that, we will know what there is to know. Anything beyond is pride, which breeds all sorts of vices. End of my paraphrase of N. K.’s points.

Righteousness exalts nations, scientists, theologians, farmers, and anyone who pursues Him/it. Knowledge puffs up.

1. Jonah was in Israel. The Lord sent him on a ministry trip to Nineveh, which was 550 miles northeast and was the center of the evil Assyrian Empire. He went to the port of Joppa and got on a boat going to Tarshish, which was 2,500 miles west. That was not only in the opposite direction, but about as far away from the Lord’s purpose for him as was possible. Why was this man of God doing such a thing?! Part of the answer was that he was afraid for his life, knowing that Nineveh was a very evil city. Another thing is that he knew that the Lord was gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. So why risk his life for those unworthy heathen, when he could get some of God’s grace while being disobedient? We don’t think that way consciously when we sin, but that bit of rationalization lurks within us as believers and servants.

While we are thinking about that area of the world, Operation World recently released a list of the countries with the fastest growing churches. They are, No. 1, Iran; No. 2, Afghanistan; No. 3, Gambia; No. 6, Algeria; No. 7, Somalia; No. 9, Kuwait; No. 10, Tajikistan. That means that 7 of the top 10 are Muslim nations. Seven of the top ten nations with the fastest growing churches are Muslim! There are several reasons for that, such as the Muslims being fed-up with their religion, only partly because of ISIS. They are hearing about and from the God of love and grace who is working powerfully in the Muslim world. Every day thousands are coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

Back to the first paragraph in this Thought. What comes to mind when you think of the Lord sending you to one of those countries to share Life? Right; your headless body. We can call that the Jonah Syndrome. But what is your quick second thought? Right again; “Lord, here I am. Send me.” We can call that the Isaiah Response. Eventually, with that second thought, Jonah went to Nineveh, which is right outside the present-day Iraqi city of Mosul.

1. You have heard me say that I have compassion for pastors because of the challenges they continually face as heads of their organized congregation. They want visitors and new members to stay engaged, not to drift away in a few months or years. Often, they cannot mold members into what is currently needed for their church. They want to form family/community in the congregation, but don’t have the “glue.” They want to grow their church but don’t seem able to draw people. They are “on the spot” because they either accept or have had pressed on them the responsibility for keeping up church income.

Not all pastors have those mis-focuses but these and more are severe temptations to any pastor, especially as life and people and money dwindle. But can you imagine Peter wondering on the day after Pentecost after 3,000 people had been saved, “Now what am I going to do to keep these people engaged?” No! everyone had heard Jesus Christ preached. They were suddenly aware of their sins. They saw that they needed Jesus and that no one else could help them. They were in the company of others who knew the same, and they recognized that some of the others were equipped to help them receive more of Jesus. Their hearts were alive in faith and eager for more, because they now had the heart of Jesus.

Community was automatic among those who wanted the way of Christ. Peter did not need to develop some plan. He remembered that Jesus had told them if they would lift Him up He would draw all people to Him, and that He would build His church. Peter did not try to get the people into the church; he preached Jesus of the Scriptures, Jesus crucified and raised up, putting an end to the agony of death; Jesus exalted to the right hand of God, pouring out His Spirit; and Jesus their Life, Lord and Messiah.

The pastors who don’t preach Jesus according to that central pattern are trying to be the builders of their churches. That will not work, even if some manage to increase members, activity, and money. May the Lord convict, humble, encourage, and strengthen those called to be pastors of His sheep.

1. My, how things have changed in post-Christian societies, some for the good and some for not so good. I am thinking of changes in health care in the United States. Not long ago, when I was already a young physician, doctors had one or perhaps a few medical and technical assistants of various sorts and one non-medical office person. Eight years ago [that’s half a century later], more than half of all “healthcare workers” were administrators [non-medically trained, office-type staff]. Now [2016], for every physician there are nine administrators.

We have a gorilla squeezing an orange. As the orange is squeezed dry, the answer seems to be, “We need more gorillas.”

1. Jesus is the Alpha from whom all things in God are moved into creation, and Jesus is the Omega unto whom all things of God’s creation find their purpose, their meaning, and their reason for being. Everything begins in Christ, and everything ends in Christ. All things that are “something” originate from Him and have positive results eternally; all things that are “nothing” come from the world, the flesh, and/or the devil and have negative results eternally. He is THE beginning as well as THE end.

For us, the centerpiece of His creation, real spiritual growth occurs when we realize that God has only one goal for us, and that is the full, mature, complete, and experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ. To the extent that we discard “things” and become focused wholly on Christ, to that extent we will make progress in our souls, in our congregations, and in God’s kingdom.

When we are all about Jesus, our life together in Him will flow out into the desert. See Revelation 1:8, best in the KJV.

1. Dying to self is not painful; it’s the resisting that causes misery.

 That’s 40 for now. Keep your peace.