THOUGHTS OF JULY, 2012

1. There are many definite, rock-solid, infallible things in our Christian life. Don’t forget this one: “The best is yet ahead.” No matter how good or how bad your life has been, is and will be, the best is yet ahead. If you are one of the Lord’s seasoned veterans, one in whom He has invested years of afflictions, troubles, trials of life, overcoming experiences and proofs of His faithfulness – you are needed here at least for a brief time longer before the payoff. This generation needs to see a sufferer who rejoices and maintains peacefulness in any affliction that comes his way. Strangers and your beloveds are watching you. No matter how many earth years you still have coming, your time is short. Then comes the best.

2. As you have noticed, we are surrounded with blah, unbelief and evil. That greatly simplifies our lives and facilitates our ministries because it makes our missionary field immediately available to us.

Example: Yesterday, the chauffeur at our automobile shop gave me a 10 minute ride while I left my car in the shop. He was about 25 years old, single, a recent graduate of a diesel school, new to his job at the auto repair shop, and was very thankful for his job. Next we moved our conversation to which church he goes to. It was one [sometimes] noted for promoting primary focus on the church and less on Jesus. So, we talked a bit about his church, then about Jesus whom he believed to be real but could not say he knew Him a personal way. I gave him a 2 minute report on how Jesus speaks to me and to many others, including our city’s leaders. Then it was time for me to get out of the car so I asked if I could pray for him. He readily consented. I prayed my typical, to-the-point, 30 second prayer and we both “amen-ed.” Whereas he had been very business-like for the entire ride, now he was beaming and saying “all right!”, “thank you!”, “that’s cool!” Our missionary field may indeed be an arm’s length away.

3. Read Numbers 26:63🡪27:3. The father of these 5 daughters was not a bad man. He had not been among those very evil men who rebelled and died with Korah. Instead, he had simply been bad “in his own right,” in his own personal life – not really too bad of a fellow, but bad enough to die in the wilderness [Num. 26:64; Heb. 3:7🡪4:13] because of his unbelieving heart, at the hand of an angry God. Along with all the others of Israel, he had suffered afflictions in Egypt and afflictions in the wilderness, and had wasted them. He went through the tough times, was not immoral, corrupt or wicked – but he lived in his unbelief without turning his thoughts and actions to trusting and obeying the Lord. Yes, he wasted his afflictions. He acted as if the Lord was not absolutely the Lord, as if things were simply natural and were happening according to chance. He was wrong. He died in his place of trials. We are told that we can do the same. Let’s not.

4. There are those of us who cannot function adequately “within the armor that the church employs.” David rejected Saul’s armor [without rejecting Saul], instead using that which the Lord had taught him to use. I think there are many saints who would step forward with Holy Spirit-inspired ministries if the church did not impose its traditions and ways, at least not beyond the Holy Spirit’s biblical patterns. That leaves lots of room for Him to express Himself and to create a church out of those whom He has chosen.

5. This Thought has to do with unheeded warnings. Sometimes warnings come to us as stricken consciences after an unseemly act on our part; sometimes as blunt warnings by someone [perhaps in the Bible]; sometimes as a subtle hint from a circuitous route; sometimes warnings present as threatened lawsuits or waved swords. Whatever the manner of presentation, the wise person heeds them. We would be wise to consider all warnings to be from Him, from His loving Father’s heart.

But what about unheeded warnings – especially those from God? He is not surprised by any of life’s circumstances, and He prepares His [listening] people for every encounter.

There came a day when God’s people thought He had walked out on them. He had warned His people, the Jews, over and over again. Yet, they thought His love for them and the necessary earthly actions would always be forthcoming. They continued to indulge in destructive actions, heedless of their effect on one another and on their union with Jehovah. But He did leave them. As He had warned, He took His promised blessings with Him – replacing them with His promised chastisements [camouflaged blessings].

He removed His obvious presence from their lives – not His presence, but the earthly evidence of His faithfulness to them. They had never seen Him do that. Their history had shown that He would do what He said He would do, but they did not believe He would do it again, at least not in their lifetime. They ignored warnings, thus ignoring consequences. Why?

The answer: False prophets. Israel apparently had many false prophets, and a few true prophets. Jeremiah was pained by those false prophets. Remember that the nation, Israel [prince with God], was treated as one Christian person – me, you, Jim, Joe, Betty, Mary, etc. We can look at God’s dealings with Israel and recognize His dealings with each and any one of us. That means that we have false prophets, lying thoughts that tell us everything will be o.k. They tell us that we can get away with disobedience because God loves us.

The true prophet within us [the Holy Spirit] warns us that there will be consequences to our actions. Our flesh likes only the “good news” of God’s love without consequences for disobedience. Separation from the Lord, here meaning not having His abiding presence and fellowship and not enjoying His companionship, happens only after unheeded warnings.

6. In a few places in the New Testament the Lord is referred to as the Most High God. That is a good title, because there are many [false] gods, and He is indeed the Most High among all gods.

However, remember that our Most High God is the All-Mighty, not the most mighty. His is all the might, not just most of it, and all has been given to/earned by Jesus – Matt. 28:18. The Lord shares His glory, might, etc. with only those whom He chooses.

7. It has been said that there are three pastoral acts that are so critical that they determine all else of the ministry. They are: praying [bringing oneself to attention before God], reading Scripture [attending to that which God has said], and giving spiritual direction [giving attention to that which God is doing in the person who is before me]. When those things are neglected, the pastoral posts have been abandoned, even if the pastors are still present physically with their congregations, are still drawing a salary, and are still called “pastor.” Since those three acts are not necessarily public, no one knows if the pastors are attending to the Lord in those ways. Aside from them, the pastoral ministry is left with preaching, teaching and administration – non-pastoral duties.

8. Jews [and Christians] believe in the trans-substantial, incorporeal God, so why do they cherish the heap of stones called Jerusalem? It is supposed to be the pagans who believe in holy rocks, metals, wood, etc.; not the Jews!

It started in Exodus 25:8 when the Lord commanded His people to make a sanctuary/house so He could dwell among them. That sanctuary started as a portable structure containing the Ark of the Covenant. They carried it with them for 40 years in the wilderness, and when they were settling the land of promise. Then, about 3,000 years ago, David built an altar on Mount Moriah, site of present Jerusalem. On that spot, David’s son Solomon built the first temple and placed the Ark within, making the portable sanctuary permanent. It was called “The Holy House.”

The “house” aspect of the temple was reinforced in several ways: 1) It had furnishings of table, lamp, etc. 2) Its inner part was called “the bedroom.” See 2 Kings 11:2-3. 3) Its outer courtyard served the purpose of common courtyards in those days – food preparation, washings, etc. 4) The Lord Himself referred to it as “My house.”

Just as two circles can partly overlap, producing a “common ground” or union of the two circles, so did Jerusalem’s temple create a common area where two distinct entities existed together. Those entities were heaven and earth, containing God and man – when the temple was yet present there.

By the way; *bet* is the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It means “house” and has the numerical value is 2 because a house brings together 2 persons and creates their specific commonality. A home brings together 2 people of totally different natures [male-female] and personalities. The home leaves on the outside those character traits that are unbearable, while those that are common and acceptable are included and accentuated. That’s what happened in the temple, as one partner [Israel] divested itself of its offensive behavior and learned more and more to enjoy its and God’s common dreams and goals.

NOTE: At least that was what was meant to happen between Israel and God, and will eventually happen. And let’s not miss the application of this absolute [while also an allegory] to ourselves as born again Christians. It’s called the process of our being sanctified, as He resides within us, cleansing us of all unrighteousness.

Israel considers that temple/home/house/place of abiding with God, being chosen and created by God Himself, to be absolutely necessary or they cannot be united in their commonality. It is the place of God’s and Israel’s abode – the gate to and from heaven – Gen. 28:17. The faithful Jew believes that Israel must possess those rocks and re-create God’s and their house. Only then and there can the soul of Israel be made whole.

9. At our Tuesday evening Bible Study last night we studied and talked about original sin [sin nature] and our sins/sinnings committed. You would have enjoyed my personal testimonies of my own ignorance, immaturity and sins and how the Lord and I and others are dealing with them.

One of the Scriptures we studied was 1 John 1:7-10. Verses 7-8 are about our sin, not our sins. The topic there is our sin nature with which we wrestle in the Spirit. Paul wrote several chapters in Romans about our sin, of which we studied 7:7-13. But, in 1 John 7-8 you notice that the topic is our sin, and that God’s solution is our walking together in the Light. That fellowship is the setting for Jesus’ blood cleansing us from our basic sin nature – a life-long process called sanctification.

Then, in the next two verses, 9-10, he told us how the Lord has set up His method of handling our sins. Our committed sins are handled between us and Him, although James did tell us to confess our faults to one another. We confess our sins to Him and he forgives us our sins, and cleanses us of that which caused us to commit those sins – our unrighteousness. In verse 10 He points each of us toward the altar for cleansing.

10. One of last year’s NCAA championship teams [which was undefeated] knew what it took to be that kind of winner. Their coach described it as the entire team headed in the same direction, everyone understanding their jobs, and everyone understanding how their role fit into the team’s efforts. That is a powerful statement. It reveals a major aspect of that which the Head of the church is working to accomplish in us, does it not?

The church is Christ’s body. Can you imagine that He planned for His body to be at war with itself or, as an improvement of sorts, not warring but being divided into hundreds of groups of parts that function independently of the other groups of parts or, s possibly another improvement, millions of especially-made parts functioning very self-reliantly?

11. I’m including a poem written by B. H. T. It is good in itself, but even better because I have known her all of her life, seen her live-out this poem, and admired her victory in the Victor.

 THANK GOD

Waking up in the crisp clean air

And the warmth of the morning sun

As it reaches the mountain top

REMINDS ME TO THANK GOD.

The heat of the day,

The heavy sweat,

Tired sore hands

REMIND ME TO THANK GOD.

The smile on my beautiful grandchildren’s faces

And their kisses and warm embraces

REMIND ME TO THANK GOD.

The loss of one family member at a time,

Cutting me like a knife,

REMINDS ME TO THANK GOD

 And to praise His holy name.

Taking one more breath

REMINDS ME TO THANK GOD.

But the gift of His only Son

Makes me humble and fall to my knees and

THANK GOD.

12. So much of life is filled with tests – long and short ones, easy and difficult ones, those caused by beloveds and those caused by antagonists. We must deal with life’s situations in effective and righteous ways. However, let’s not forget the “test” aspect attached to each trial, and that it is our Father who designs, directs and limits every test and that each test has His eternal purpose for each of us.

It has been said that 90% of a test is accomplished when we become aware that it is from our loving Father, and that another 5% is accomplished when we discern its purpose. That leaves the last 5% of our victory to be accomplished in battle, which may be “only” a battle to maintain our peace in the fire.

13. No longer do many Christians kill one another in religious wars. We seldomnly burn one another’s churches or homes, or deface their signs. Now we even meet in interdenominational meetings and have ministerial associations. Live is improving in the church. The next step appears that we will relate to one another simply on the basis of our being brothers of our Lord Jesus and children of our heavenly Father. Until then, as we walk together in the light of our individualism and denominations, our fellowship will be anemic. But, when we begin walking together simply as Christian brothers, our fellowship will grow and we will be cleansed of our unlikenesses to Jesus – 1 John 1:8.

14. I have a question. You don’t have to have the answer and you don’t have to answer it. However, it is an intriguing thought that I think will be answered. Many searchers before us probably knew the answer. The question: “What did the Lord Jesus mean when He said He was sent to the *lost sheep* of the house of Israel?” He was sent to the world; He was sent to the house of Israel; and He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It is about that third group that I am pondering – the *lost sheep* of the house of Israel.

Jesus offered the entire house of Israel a new covenant – Heb. 8:8-10. He Himself was not sent to the Gentiles – Matt. 15:24. And during His pre-cross lifetime on earth He did not send His disciples to the Gentiles or Samaritans – Matt. 10:6. Immediately prior to His re-ascension to Heaven He commissioned His disciples to go to the entire world – Matt. 28:19.

It seems not enough of an answer to say that the world and/or all of Israel were the lost sheep. He stood among God’s people [sheep, wolves, goats, shepherds and false shepherds] looking for certain ones --the lost sheep. He was the father in the parable of the prodigal son, looking for the return of the lost son. He was the owner of the lost coin among others not lost, and the shepherd of the lost sheep among many not lost– looking for the lost one.

If nothing else, this particular thought points to something special in Jesus, and I will adapt it to our time and to the particular situation of many unchurched Christians. Jesus has a special interest in those who are burned out on religion, fed up with churchianity, have been fleeced by the shepherds of flocks and attacked by wolves. He came to help those who were gotten rid of, accused of being troublemakers, and looked down upon. [Lost sheep have often caused or contributed to their own problems.]

Jesus certainly came to help the world and the Jews, and to form the church. But, if you are one of those lost sheep, He has a special attraction to you.

15. The first century was characterized by apostolic zeal; the second century by collapsing zeal; the third and forth centuries with bizarre allegorical interpretations of Scripture, heresies, fraudulent forged pseudo-scripture, and a variety of opinions about what was authentic Scripture.

 In the fourth century the church aligned itself with the kings of Rome, producing the “Holy Roman Empire.” Thereafter the church became entangled in rules and laws and with the carnal state. Paul predicted this descent and inserted it into his letter to Timothy – 1 Tim. 4:1-4.

Augustine, one of the church’s leading creators of doctrine, incorporated aspects of heathen religions into the church. He redefined salvation as conformity to the rule of the local church. He set the stage for extreme religious self-denial and celibacy. A new priesthood inserted itself between God and man, and the church descended into the Dark Ages. Paul, by the Holy Spirit, had seen it coming.

But, the greatest apostasies did not rise to prominence until well into the twentieth century. Humanism began to declare that traditional, orthodox religion [all of them, most especially Christianity] are now insufficient to deal with modern challenges, that knowledge has increased to the point that a new religion is necessary. Modern man must create his own religion. Such vain imagination has brought to bloom the perversion written by Paul in Romans 1:18-23. Even though Paul wrote those verses on the basis of past idolatry, the same spiritual forces have persisted into our day, and we are told to worship humanity, ourself. We are the “image made like to corruptible man.”

I’ll stick with the loving, all-mighty, prayer-hearing, personal friend, acting-upon-faith, saving-to-the-ultimate Redeemer.

16. “One word of truth outweighs the world” – Alexandr Solzhenitsyn. That makes Jesus’ word and Himself [the Word of God] very heavy. No surprise there.

17. Righteousness exalts a nation; but world governments corrupt so quickly and easily. That’s why our founding fathers wrote a constitution that greatly limited the new government. However, as our society corrupted, and the people neglected to ride herd on our government, government did what it naturally does – it grew and soured. A moral culture is necessary in order to limit government.

Only one earthly government has been immaculately conceived. Currently, He is on the earth in the hearts of certain people, but He may soon reign on and over all the earth.

Hold off, King Jesus. There is more work to be done. The harvest is ripe but not completed.