THOUGHTS OF JUNE, 2013

PREFACE: The Old Testament story as we know it so far is that in the beginning [? whenever that was ?] God created the heavens [planets and angels] and the Earth [our planet] – Gen. 1:1. His highest angel, Lucifer [“light bearing servant”], was God’s grandest creation but became jealous of God because He was being worshipped by His creatures, so he rebelled – Is. 14:13-14. As hard as that itself is to imagine, then one-third of the angels whom God had created agreed with Lucifer and joined in the rebellion. The surface of planet Earth was destroyed [Gen. 1:2] during or after that rebellion as Lucifer and his followers were cast out of heaven onto Earth. That event as recorded in Scripture is the first shown visit to Earth of extraterrestrial beings. [We are shown more of such, and the consequences, in Genesis 6, etc.] When God created humanity, Lucifer [now known as Satan, the devil] continued his quest for worship, but now from among humans. No doubt he also wanted to get even with God. After some success, he considered it still insufficient that he had permanently corrupted and separated humanity from God, so he also began corrupting God’s revealed truths. He has not relented.

1. Paul said, by the Spirit, that there is more and more of Christ ahead for us as long as we are in this earth-body and that we should press on into and for that which we have been given our start. We were apprehended for God’s purposes. He who has started us on the narrow road can surely take us into those purposes [wherever He wants us].

Let’s do a progressive study of what we will call “steps” in the life of the called and pressing-on ones.

A. Repentance is a continual gift to the believer. It is a life-giving part of life if we are spiritually, relationally and emotionally healthy. At times when His people were unrepentant, God sent them the message of repentance, without which they could not participate in His offered and coming blessings.

Example: John the Baptist preached repentance to God’s people in preparation for the coming of their Messiah. It seems that the more religious the hearers were, the less they saw their need to repent and the more they protected their positions and religiosity. Those who repented were then positioned to hear the Gospel. Those who did not hear the Gospel killed the Gospel. The Gospel was their Messiah.

Example: Jesus began His ministry by preaching repentance -- Matt. 4:17. His last words to 5 of the 7 churches were “repent” – Rev. 2 & 3.

Pressing on without repentance opens one’s soul to self-righteous legalism.

B. Jesus rounded up those whom His Father had given Him, sat them down, and gave them a class on the basics – the Sermon on the Mount. He gave them a list of 9 ways to be blessed through godliness, then gave them some baby steps to take if they chose His described godliness. They could see that His way for them was going to be tough on the present status of their character: not swearing, not being angry, making friends of opponents, not lusting, not divorcing, not resisting evil people, giving to whomever is in need, avoiding hypocrisy, forgiving everyone, not laying up treasures on earth, not being anxious about anything, letting God do the judging, not wasting ministry on certain people, and being assured that God’s word is absolutely reliable. He ended that little talk by telling them that those things were only foundational to the teachings and life if they were going to continue with Him – Matt. 7:24-27.

All of that was baby stuff. It was to beginners and for beginners. We are all beginners until we pass the tests that move us onward. If we have not passed the beginner’s final exam, we have not moved onward. We may have moved on in our particular religious tradition, including religious education, titles and time in service, but not in spiritual growth.

C. Jesus had many disciples. At least there were many who thought they were disciples and indeed had appeared to be disciples until they uncovered what they considered was failure in their Teacher. Those were the ones who would come and go according to other important things going on in their lives, or according to the things He said, meaning whether they approved or disapproved of Him and His teachings – John 6:60-71. If they had done better in their beginner’s class they would have done better on this occasion of their elementary examination, which Peter and at least eleven others passed.

D. There were many who believed in Him and appreciated what He taught, but did not get up out of their living situation and go with Him. To some extent their lives were changed, but they were never listed as His disciples. They were believers who were blessed and apparently impacted in their ongoing lives. Zaccheus is such an example – Luke 19:1-10. Joseph of Arimathea was a secret disciple – John 19:38. Nicodemus also had some depth of belief in Jesus – John 1939. Lazarus was a close friend and provider, but did not become one of His disciples – John 11 & 12. Those and others fit into a loose definition of “disciple” because they believed certain things about Jesus and served Him in various ways but they did not walk with Him. There are those of us today who fit into that description.

As I understand Scripture, it is not necessary that a believer become a disciple, but that sincere and acted-upon belief will lead a believer into discipleship. A disciple rejects religiosity, takes up his cross daily and gets on it. A religionist is willing to talk about the cross but won’t get on it.

E. Thus, a disciple is one who “gets up” and gives himself to Jesus to be made like Jesus in order to do the work of Jesus, not just to be blessed and become a better person. Disciples are imperfect, but have entered the narrow gate and are walking the narrow way. Self-improvement occurs, but is not the disciple’s enduring motivation. Service occurs, but is not the disciple’s enduring motivation. The disciple’s enduring focus is Jesus, his aim is Jesus, and he has given Jesus his life.

Jesus said that the requirements/tests of discipleship are: 1] that the disciple not try to elevate himself above his teacher – Matt. 10:24-42, 2] that the same things happen to a disciple as happens to his teacher – Matt. 10:24-42, 3] that a disciple must choose Him over family – Matt. 10:24-42, 4] that they face many fearful trials – Matt. 10:24-42, 5] that they have a conversational relationship with Him – Mark 4:34, 6] that a disciple knows how to carry his own cross, and does – Luke 14:27, 7) that he gives up all his own possessions – Luke 14:33, and 8) that He wash their feet (often – ed.) and they wash others’ feet (often – ed.) – John 13:3-17.

NOTE: Evidences/proofs of discipleship are: 1) knowing the truth and abiding in it – John 8:31-32, 2) love for other disciples – John 13:35, and 3) bearing much fruit – John 15:8, Gal. 5:22-23.

F. And then there is the overcomer. The overcomer is a successful disciple. He has a title/crown pronounced upon him by his Master Himself. Overcomers will reign with Jesus in Jerusalem during the millennium. The seven messages to the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, Jesus’ last words to the church, describe the route taken by disciples toward becoming an overcomer.

NOTE: I will add the following in our effort to see more clearly the mark that our Marksman is aiming us toward. Most disciples understand living victoriously, being blessed by the Lord, walking in power, overcoming the enemy, and living up to potential. However, there is a sub-group among the disciples. The disciples in that sub-group are becoming overcomers. They love the Lord and know of His love for them. They know they cannot grow spiritually by just deciding to grow spiritually. They have found a truth that empowers them, that the Lord is alive within them, that they are dead to sin, and are alive to God in Christ – Rom. 6:11. Only that group can find Life in self-denial, bearing their crosses, boasting in their weaknesses, being joyful in their painful trials, winning by losing, gaining by giving up, working while resting, accepting both the bitter and sweet as gifts of God, and enduring hardness and suffering. They are experiencing freedom from their flesh and are growing in Jesus.

2. “It doesn’t make sense! I want to be strong, to learn how to get even stronger, to have a place of honor in society and to be able to take authority among others! I want to develop a strong personality! I want to prosper in all ways! I want to be able to rise to all occasions, especially in others’ presence! I want someone to teach me the technique for becoming a bigger and better person! As a Christian, will not those things be of benefit to me and the church?!

“Then you say I’m going in the wrong direction and looking for the wrong thing? You say that if I am going to become a success as a person and social being I have to seek humility; to learn to accept and embrace weakness? Surely Paul and the Holy Spirit had something else in mind when he wrote, ‘When I am weak, then I am strong.’ That makes no sense to me.”

Right; that approach makes no sense to our natural minds when we want to make something of ourselves. In fact, the natural mind is upside down and Paul’s renewed mind is right side up. However, we don’t jettison reason and intelligence in order to walk in the Spirit. Instead, we are free to submit our best to the Holy Spirit. Vision, planning, persistence and success are parts of the faithfuls’ lives.

Question: As those who are now in Christ, have we yet found our ways in Christ who is the Way?

3. This Thought strikes my flesh where it hurts: “Discipleship is inconvenient.” The Lord is not looking for volunteers to serve at our convenience. Yes, discipleship is inopportune. It sets aside our own well-made schedules, and our natural and acquired talents, and calls for inconvenient, new-situation faith.

However, those customized small, inconvenient and unplanned opportunities, for which [aside from God’s grace] we are unprepared, are often the beginning of great enterprises. In them He may round up all of our natural abilities, cleanse them, and infuse them with His Spirit. Our flesh attributes count for nothing until then.

Of course, we can refuse the offer.

4. In my younger years I often wondered about King David’s staying home in his older years while his generals led the army out of Jerusalem into battle. He had wanted go with them but his soldiers told him he should stay home lest he die in battle, “putting out Israel’s light” – 2 Sam. 21:17. I have never been free to fault imperfect David, but I had to wrestle against the idea that he should have gone on to battle.

A ship in port is safe, but that’s not what ships are made for. God had made David a warrior. In fact, that is the reason the Lord would not allow him to build the temple. God’s call takes us into some things and away from others.

Now that I’m 13 years older than was David when he died of [apparent] old age, I’m forced to look at him with more gracious and perhaps wiser eyes. Besides, is it the lack of God’s call to some hot, sweaty mission that keeps me here in this air conditioned home?

5. Besides the several good things said in previous THOUGHTS about the benefits of failure, it is the needed boost that gives success its best taste.

6. The Bible is structurally built one book, one chapter, one verse, and one precept upon another. It fits together as it should, and does not fit together otherwise. Lessons and sermons are put together that way. Scripture is clear in almost all cases, so selecting verses from several sites to build a lesson is standard and ordinarily trustworthy. The “however” is that if Scripture is not understood, or is intentionally misused, the result is a structure/teaching without foundation.

Having made that little and obvious point, look at Matthew 5:6 where Jesus said: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled.” Now join that with what Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:13 in order to get a good picture of what and when we should be now hungering and thirsting for, and when that hunger and thirst will be quenched. He was writing about that which he saw and about that which John wrote in Revelation 21:1.

In other words, my Thought is that our praying, hungering and thirsting for righteousness for ourselves and for others is for now and for that day in the New Jerusalem.

Isaiah got a good look at it, also – Is. 65:17-25. He perhaps got a better view of it than we have been granted. We all hope for a better world, nation, local society, church, family and self but we know this world in all of its forms [except the righteous ones] is deteriorating and will continue doing so until Christ reigns on His throne in the current earthly Jerusalem for those 1,000 years. But as good as that will be, it pales in comparison to the earth’s New Jerusalem in which will be the Father, Son an us.

It’s alright to look over our shoulder occasionally at those things while we continue in the work now at hand.

7. We don’t have the prerogative of defining spiritual maturity. The Holy Spirit has already done that through Paul – Eph. 4:13-16. Let’s briefly list the ingredients of spiritual maturity in the order found in those verses: 1) Unity with other believers [pan-denominationally, cross-denominationally and non-denominationally], 2) A personal intimacy and strong union with Jesus Christ, 3) An obvious Christ-likeness that enables others to see Him in our flesh, 4) Sound in doctrine as a way of life, without becoming exclusive or self-righteous, 5) Unable to be attracted to and drawn away by others’ unsound teachings, 6) Steady and comfortable in the habit of being able to speak the truth in love as others try to exalt or debase you, and 7) Still steadily increasing in Christ.

8. There has been a huge split in the Occupy Wall Street movement. Some of the main leaders saw that they had gotten nowhere with their technique of confrontation and camping out in front of skyscrapers. They decided to directly pursue social justice. They respond to various calamities and help clean-up – alongside the other first responders such as church groups.

The other part wants to continue annoying people, not wanting to give up their political vision and past methods used to try to change social and political systems. Their goal has been to forcibly redistribute wealth and bring in the welfare state full-scale.

If they have any success at all, I’m betting on the social projects group.

9. Today is another of the annual anniversary days of the landing of Allied troops on Normandy during World War II. It was a tough day for those thousands of soldiers. It would have been unbelievable if they had left behind their cannons, tanks, and all other heavy equipment? They would have had no chance of survival. At best, they would have been captured and imprisoned.

Many, many thousands of times worse than that is the condition of the church today. We have left behind our powerful weapon – the gospel. We launch our invasions, crusades, programs, committees and church services without gospel power. The gospel is God’s power for changing the world, for the world’s salvation – Rom. 1:16.

We talk about the gospel, but don’t have it. We have been captured and imprisoned. The result: Christian religion. Losing the power means losing “the church.” No true gospel; no true church. No true church; no reason to exist. Religion has no reason to exist. Transformed lives, freedom from sin, holiness and a zeal for the Lord are some evidences of the gospel’s presence.

Will there be a return of the gospel?

10. As the quantum theory evolves, knowledge about the existence and nature of quanta are presenting physicists with several implications, meaning reality is becoming more and more obvious. Measuring devices have improved dramatically, thus providing more clarity and more knowledge, such as “everything is quantized;” energy, length, time and mass exist in discrete quantities [divisions]; and everything is connected.

Consider these bits of information which they now must work with: All particles on the quantum level know instantly what the other particles are doing regardless of distance; and there is a size at which, when divided in half, a particle becomes “non-local,” meaning it is nowhere and everywhere.

Their conclusion: There is a foundational structure upon which all of the details hang and it is not gravitational, but electrical – such as like a gigantic computer. The physicists find themselves in a situation that is squeezing them toward an unwanted belief in a Creator who loves them and is continually trying to inform them of His existence. He is the Foundational Structure to matter, space, time and eternity.

11. In 57:15, Isaiah says that God inhabits eternity. It’s hard for me to nail down a completely accurate understanding of what Isaiah knew when he grasped that word out of the heavens, but it could mean that God is outside of time. He is. It’s like time is the water in a fishbowl, we are the fish, and the Lord is out there watching and doing things with His hands both in and out of the water. He lives in eternity, not in here where we are. Yes, He is with us and lives in us by His Spirit, but He resides “out there.”

12. Discipleship is poorly understood in modern Western society. We are too individualistic, and teach men to be even more of the same “stand alone” type. Where tried, discipleship usually has been legalistic [heavy-handed, controlling] or shallow [a monthly or weekly meeting or Bible study for an hour]. Discipleship costs the life of the leader/teacher, who leads his/the disciples into the same death. Real Life flows, if both are disciples of Jesus.

Disciples thus have the opportunity to see their teacher live the Life. They see his frailties and how he deals with them. They see his strengths and how he deals with them and others. They have the opportunity to be drawn away prematurely or into error. They learn to live by standards which are beyond them and experience God’s and the teacher’s grace when they fail.

I have been exposed to both sides of discipleship. Some disciples were so incapacitated in soul and/or body that they had to turn their lives over to their leader for complete re-molding in Jesus. The leader gave himself [time, home, money, activities] to the disciple who, by God’s grace, usually responded with the yielding of his own life to the leader. In those extreme cases, the disciple was indeed completely under direction and discipline of his leader.

Others, who were already healthy and committed Christians, received all of the same but not the control. I realized that those healthy ones were eventually called beyond me, and that I was a temporary [but for years] teacher/former of Christ in them. For our time together, it was enough that the disciple became as their teacher, then more would follow. They did not lose their personal distinctiveness. They were free to leave at any time, with my love [and on-going assistance, if proper]. I did not have a kingdom and they were not my subjects. They learned the same for themselves as they made disciples.

Note: Some of John the Baptist’s disciples joined up with Jesus as John cooperated with the Holy Spirit who was diminishing him and increasing Jesus. There is no record of the Pharisees sending their disciples to Jesus except for unrighteous purposes. We can take our choice – increase or diminish.

13. A recent study showed that obese patients had better weight loss when being treated for their obesity by overweight physicians. They say they trusted the advice of their physician more if he, too, was overweight.

Where do we find that human characteristic described in Scripture? How about “Jesus [our physician] being better able to ‘understand’ us [His patients] and our problems, and to have more compassion for us because He was once in human flesh” – Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15-16 paraphrased? Without our Physician, we are short of many things needed for our redemption.

14. “The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.” That contribution is by way of William James, American psychologist, physician and philosopher, but not very solid Christian. However, as I have pointed out before, a Christianized society will be saturated with Christian principles, so that it and individuals will benefit thereby. Wm. James had the benefit of American and Scottish Christianity in the late 1800s and early 1900s, which were really good years for the church in both countries.

So, Wm. James had the benefit of two Christianized societies. He employed many Christian principles, such as knowing how to deal with stress. He may have known the Scripture [Phil. 4:8]in which the Lord tells us to put our minds on the things that are good, righteous, pleasing, faithful, etc. Sometimes it is difficult to do that, but “putting our minds” is another habit that is established and improved with experience.

We can put our minds on the truth, and live. Or, we can put our minds on lies, and die. Yes, that is a spiritual principle, so it applies to cooking, doctoring, sewing, human relations, driving our cars, etc. It may be during a crisis when “this too shall pass” becomes the key thought to endurance and success. Or, “I’m determined to turn my other cheek, Lord.” Placing our mind and setting/locking it there is a necessary part of life. Once the way is chosen and set, stress is reduced or gone.

It was helpful to Him that Jesus set his face when heading to the cross – Luke 9:51.

15. “Without the freedom to criticize, there is no true praise.” Pierre Beaumarchais, French playwright, inventor, diplomat, watchmaker, inventor, musician, fugitive, spy, publisher, horticulturalist, arms dealer, satirist, financier, and revolutionary. You may remember him best for his three Figaro plays. Much to his credit, he was a Catholic who campaigned on behalf of Protestants all of his life. He was a champion of liberty who, while located in France and Spain, greatly assisted the American colonies during the American Revolutionary War.

It is not difficult to see the influence of Christian teaching on Beaumarchais. The above quote can be applied to “without freedom to sin, there is no righteousness,” “without freedom to hate, there is no love,” “without freedom to believe a lie, there is no merit in believing the truth,” “without freedom to break covenant, there is no covenant,” “without freedom to disobey, there is no obedience,” etc, etc. The Lord first established that principle with Adam.

16. Some of the Lord’s most un-available saints [unavailable to Him and others] are those who are absolutely the most responsible with things He has already given them/us. We are so much aware of our responsibility for those God-given things, people and projects that when He tells us to put something down or to not fulfill some responsibility, we will not hear Him, especially in the area of spontaneity – which should be common events for us. We seem to be more faithful to the responsibility [the gift] than we are to God [the giver].

A mark of that sort of saint is that they/we become and stay very busy. No one else can do the things we are called to do. We have a sense of being very necessary to God and man. We have a niche that is ours alone, because we have made it so [and because when others see us in it they want no real part of it].

Responsibility can be a steel trap with sharp teeth. Strange, is it not!

17. Pope Francis is working on getting rid of that which he calls “the gay lobby” in the Vatican. He spoke of there being “a stream of corruption” among the righteous. Continue praying for that brother and his ministry. Those in it who are born again are a part of the one church, and a church divided against itself cannot stand – Matt. 12:25; Mark 3:24-25; Luke 11:17. We have no idea what we are missing by being divided and spiritually puny. The Lord deserves better of us. Although things will not be straightened out until He comes, each of us can improve our part and perhaps a larger part around us.

It is still surprising when I meet a person who thinks others must believe as he believes, or they are not saved [here “saved” means going to heaven instead of hell]. I am delighted when I meet a believer who obviously has a love relationship with Jesus Christ and calls Him Lord, and I don’t doubt his salvation when I find that he has some remarkably non-Biblical beliefs [compared to mine, that is]. We have a kindred spirit without agreement on certain theology.

Having certain facts wrong does not keep us out of heaven, and having certain facts right does not get us into heaven. The devil has more facts right than do some born-again Christians, and he is headed for the pit. We are told to be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” -- Eph. 4:3. Granted that it is easier on the flesh to do that if we first have agreement on such variables as doctrines, race, social status, politics, etc., but we are not often granted all of those similarities before being faced with obedience.

Instead of laboring to maintain unity of the Spirit, we abandon Him and find ourselves laboring to maintain/establish unity of doctrines, which to our flesh is a much more “tangible” and important goal than the seemingly intangible unity of the Spirit.

18. Simplify. Everything is simple. In the Book of Proverbs 8:8-9 it is said of God’s instructions: “All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing crooked or perverted in them. They are all straightforward to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge.”

Much of simplicity has at least a thin layer of complexity smeared on it. The Lord sometimes does that in order to teach us that He rewards diligent searches for Him and His truths – Prov. 25:2. He adds in 8:17, “I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek me will find me.” Like refining gold, the end product of searching for the basic truth in anything is worth the search. That’s true in science, religion, farming, etc.

A good, basic approach goes like this: We are in the world. It has both clear, basic truth and trashy complexity. You will encounter both. Good and bad things will happen. Don’t be afraid. Peel back the superficial trash. The truth is worth uncovering.

19. Life is so works dominated that I occasionally find myself being confident in my relationship with the Lord, and in my eternal future with Him, because of my natural and spiritual works. That really is self-exaltive, is it not! It entirely ignores God’s work and grace. It says that I have earned God’s love and my salvation. I know better than that, so the thought does not persist very long. Once again, the truth is more comforting than is a self-centered lie.

20. Preconceptions can be distractions. Look at the word: Pre means previous; conception means impregnated. Preconception means previously impregnated.

If a man marries a woman and finds her to be pregnant by another man, she has been previously impregnated. That’s not good. That which is within her is not of him. He may take responsibility for her in that preconceived condition, as did Joseph for Mary when they were yet only engaged. Or, he may set her aside, as Joseph was about to do until the Lord told him to marry her.

My Thought is that we all have been pre-conceived in many ways. All of our lives we have had attitudes and behaviors placed into us, which are either blessings to others or they have to be dealt with, or we get set aside. The Holy Spirit, as with Joseph, often has us accept those negative things in others and move ahead together. As also did Joseph, subsequently we have the opportunity to place the things of our own lives in the other person. See Mark 3:31-32 for reference to Jesus’ half-brothers, children of Joseph and Mary.

However, preconceptions can be an ongoing problem if we do not perceive that they are of the Lord. That doesn’t mean they are only good, or righteous, or easy to deal with, but that we have accepted them into our lives as from the Lord, and have begun to embrace them with His love and wisdom, as did Joseph of Jesus.

21. Then there are things called hurt feelings, a very non-brainy aspect of our souls. Remember that feelings are a part of our God-given flesh/body makeup. They are important. We are not to get rid of feelings, but to perfect them and to bring them under control. Like every aspect of our souls, feeling are submitted to/perfected by the Spirit as we walk with Him. That happens over and over, does it not?

Then, again, there are those who seem to hold to their feelings as their guide, instead of holding to the Holy Guide. Being mastered by our feelings is disastrous. It can get even worse if that person becomes spiritual. They may then rely on their feelings for knowing the Lord’s presence, for getting direction, for discernment [a real problem-producer], and for making most of life’s decisions.

Those of us who are subject to/led by our feelings tend to get hurt easily and hurt others often. It may be fear or anger or any other from our big bag full of tender feelings. We were trained by our previous father [the devil] to rely on feelings, so we yield to the old habit of acting upon how we feel, not being able or inclined to control them! Instead, they become our controlling guides.

When the Lord shows you that you have your feelings hurt, repent. As a physician I can tell you that dead men are completely protected from hurt feelings. Being dead to self and alive in Christ delivers us from hurt feelings, as we grow in Him – Rom. 6:all.

22. At the transfiguration, as was usual for him, Peter said what was on his and the others’ minds. The same would have been on ours if we had been there with only their pre-cross knowledge and pre-Pentecost anointing: “.. it is good for us to be here; ..” I don’t know if, in that little phrase, we get a clear picture of how deeply blessed Peter was. I think he spoke like a kid in a toy store, or a sports fan at the ballpark. He was thrilled!

Of course, he missed the real thrill that would have come had he known he was in the presence of the Eternal God and Creator of all creation – much, much more than being in Moses’ and Elijah’s presence with his rabbi, Jesus. It was such an unholy deficiency and spiritual putdown of the Son of God that Jesus’ Father did not [could not?] stand by and let it continue. He immediately stepped down from His throne, came to earth, and corrected Peter. [He may have only had to move into our dimension from His dimension.] After that escalation in their knowledge of God’s presence, Peter and the others could not even speak of the event. Jesus told them to tell no one, and they apparently had no difficulty obeying His instruction.

I am reminded of the times when I heard a choir of angels singing “up there” above us while in church praising the Lord. Over 1,000 of us, each singing praises to the Lord in our unknown languages, as naturally harmonious and beautiful as it was, was not as beautiful as that angelic choir. When our singing stopped, they continued singing. We were silent! I and others had the same reaction as did Peter and his others – we said nothing of the event until several months later when we cautiously asked one another if they had heard the same. They had, and knew what it was they were hearing.

23. While we are thinking of God’s majesty, take a look at what He said through Isaiah in 40:15, 17. The nations are but a drop in the bucket, a speck of dust on the scales, as nothing and void [meaningless] before Him.

That’s given to us for an adjustment of our relationship with the Lord, a brief reminder “least we forget,” like Peter got at the transfiguration – Mark 9:7. And yet the same One said, “Fear not. I have called you by name” –Is. 45:3; John 10:3. UTTERLY REMARKABLE!!!

24. Maya Angelou, living American writer, journalist, poet, actor, director, producer of plays, movies and television programs, spokesman for black people, defender of black culture, pimp, prostitute, nightclub dancer and performer, talks about the need to lay aside our fears. “Fear not” was one of Jesus’ more common commands. She said, “Without courage, you cannot practice any of the other virtues.”

Although I cannot recommend all of her writings and productions, she certainly has a grasp on courage.

25. We can look so far down the road that we neglect the close things. And, we can be so focused on the things close at hand that we don’t see the overall plan. When Jesus was revealing present and future things to John in the Revelation, He showed us that both present and future vision were necessary. All seven messages to the seven churches [chapters 2 & 3] require us to see and obey now, in order to receive greater blessings and responsibilities in the hereafter. He gave us clear pictures of the hereafter so that we could anchor our hopes there, not simply here.

In the message to Philadelphia, He offered overcomers a permanent blessing and responsibility in the New Jerusalem [see chapter 21]. You may not be interested in looking into this, because lots of Christians think it is self-centered of them to look to our rewards. That is a problem between them and Jesus, who taught heavily about rewards, and greater rewards. In this case, He is offering us the position of being a “pillar” in His/our Father’s temple in New Jerusalem. What does it mean to be a living pillar and what might be required of us here and now to qualify for that position?

Pillars do not come and go; they are stable and dependable. They are always there fulfilling their functions. Abiding in the Lord and in the congregation is one of their strong points. The congregation depends on them. Without them the building falters or falls. They are always doing things as unto the Lord, ministering to the Lord and to people. They are giving back to God that which He asks. Those same characteristics are with them in all that they do in their lives. They may not know much of what is ahead for them in the hereafter, but the Lord is preparing a place for them in His New Jerusalem temple.

26. “A human being can survive almost anything, as long as she sees the end in sight.” -- Elizabeth Wurtzel, living American writer, journalist and sometimes lawyer. The eternal truth to her statement is that a vision of/grasp on the future is a powerful life-energizer, especially for Christians. Without vision, both short and long range, we can grow faint.

If a loved one is having a hard time, help them develop some understanding of the value of their ordeal, even if a happy temporal outcome is not assured.

27. Paul knew about self-esteem, did he not? He could have relied upon a multitude of accomplishments for building up his self-image any time he was down on himself. See 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 for his list of those things in his dung pile. Instead of relying upon them [which he could have said all came from God] he was a fulfilled Christian without them.

Check about in your soul and your daily living. Do you get your self-esteem from the car you drive, from your social status, your financial security, the important people you know by first name and they yours, or the like? Allow the Holy Spirit to use Paul’s words as a mirror – Rom. 12:3.

28. This Thought will contain several reviews for some, and some new Thoughts for others. In Daniel 2:43, who are those who “will combine with one another *with the seed of men*,” but will not adhere to one another? If they are not themselves of the seed of men, who are they? Compare to Genesis 6:1-4; Numbers 13:31-33.

Genesis 6 starts by showing us that demons cohabited with earth women and produced super-humans [the Nephilim, spoken of by that and other names in many other scriptures], so that the Lord decided to cleanse humanity of that worldwide (?) genetic contamination. Noah was without such ancestral genetic contamination, being perfect in his generations, which refers to physical, not soul, purity.

Jesus said His return would be at a time when things would be “as in the days of Noah” – Matt. 24:37; Luke 17:26. Since the two times will be comparable, what specific connection do you find between Genesis 6 and those two New Testament verses?

29. “People of mediocre ability sometimes achieve outstanding success because they don’t know when to quit. Most men succeed because they are determined to.” – George Allen, American football coach.

30. A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. If for no other reason, it is because there can be only one king in a kingdom. In the Kingdom of God, that king is King Jesus. Therefore, all citizens of the Kingdom of God must have only Jesus as our king. We cannot serve two masters. As long as we have another king [co-king, minor king, occasional king, king-in-waiting], we are dividing Jesus’ kingdom – and it will fail.

Around us we see that effect. Jesus’ kingdom is divided and weak [fallen]. Instead of strong walls around the worldwide church separating us from worldliness, we see walls within the church separating us from one another. Each group or person within his own walls has his own king, and it may be himself.

Actually, it is usually something else that represents him as king of his kingdom. The rich man’s self/king can easily be represented by his wealth. The good man’s self/king can be his goodness. The successful man’s self/king can be his success. The strong man’s self/king can be his strength. etc. See what the king of the Kingdom of God said about this in Mark 10:23-25.

31. Everyone will become a believer. WAIT; DON’T TOUCH THAT DELETE BUTTON!! Everyone will not be saved, but all will eventually become believers, albeit through unsalvific postmortem conversions. Every knee will bow to the Lord Jesus and acknowledge Him as the Lord – Is. 45:23; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:9-11; Jam. 2:19. I’m glad you did not punch that delete button. You would have missed another proclamation to the glory of God.

32. In Hebrews 11:7 we find a one verse New Testament summary of Noah’s life and ministry. Also, we were told by the Lord Jesus that there will be a time during these days when life will be like those of Noah’s and Lot’s days – Luke 17:28-30. And then we have a picture of how that will be, given us in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6.

With that brief background, let me say that there is no new thing under the heavens, including types and amount of sins. That which we do have in common with the world of Noah’s day and of Sodom during Lot’s day is that the mind of our general population is becoming dead to even God’s existence and alive to unbridled perversity. There is a declining sense of that which is right or wrong. That is a socially systemic thing that we have in common with those of the days of Noah and Lot.

Look up!

33. This Thought is for your evolutionist friends, which I hope are many but diminishing in number due to your love for them. Until you, they had only the cosmos. Their Carl Sagan said, “The cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be.” He had his own unsalvific postmortem conversion, but you are helping your friends find Life and the meaning of their lives premortem.

The emergence of life, and then complex life, requires a host of chance circumstances in order to happen. Just a few of those:

a. The existence of other planets with life on them depends on their having large planets around them like our Jupiter, which is big and tough enough to attract asteroids that would otherwise bombard us.

b. The Earth’s small size is ideal for gravity that does not cause problems with life, and big enough to hold sufficient atmosphere to support its life.

c. Our moon is large compared to our planet, Earth. Therefore its gravity can stabilize Earth’s tilt, giving us seasons so that life here is not a chaotic wobble of changing seasons. And as you look at the moon through even the weakest telescope, you can see that it is our [next to last] protective shield from space debris.

Scripture does not tell us of the creation of angels, chemical elements, molecules like water, and the Earth. Those things were already present when in Genesis 1:3 etc. the Lord began a week of creating all else. Job [38:7] knew that the angels existed before Earth. Therefore, there was created matter and an unspecified amount of time before Genesis 1:3 etc. and it is shown to us in Genesis 1:1-2.

34. Those who take Naproxen for pain will be blessed to know that the manufacturer of every dose you have taken has been careful to produce the correct isomer, because Naproxen’s mirror image [isomer] is a deadly poison.

35. This is hard to imagine, unless you know a bit about world and regional history. During the 20th century 262 million people were killed by their governments.

36. Do we become righteous by doing righteous deeds? No. We become righteous by appropriating Christ. By faith we “Put on the new man [that’s the man, Jesus – ed.]” – Eph 4:24. We abandon our individual efforts to be/become righteous and attach our attention and affection to Jesus. It is an exchange of life that then leads to a changed life. God offers us the change, we accept, and grace gets it done. The life and works of Christ then flow out of our new being.

Some years ago I read in a medical journal about a man who had died, been resuscitated, and as he was coming back to life was shouting, “Don’t let me die! Don’t let me die!” He had experienced darkness and terror during his brief time out of his body, during his medically documented death. He was among those who have died and not wanted to again die. He was not born again before his out of body experience.

There are others who experienced great peace and pleasure after they died, as they testified after their resuscitation. Of those whose records showed religious labels, they previously had been born again.

Those reports are to say that a life that has once passed through death into Life for Jesus’ sake has the testimony of Luke 9:23-24 – that holding onto our lives causes great loss, and losing our lives for Jesus’ sake causes great gain. The life that has been lost for Christ’s sake has the mark of the cross on it. Having once passed through death, it can no longer be touched. We are no longer fearful of dying. There is no fear of death. Our cross-walk “keeps us dead,” Christ in us is increased and the strength of His life is matured through our weaknesses. So Paul was and we are able to say that when I am weak I am strong.

37. It has been shown that time slows down as something approaches the speed of light. At 99.9% of the speed of light it takes only 6 months to go 37 light years. [A light year is the distance light can travel in one year, which is about 6 trillion miles.] If someone tells you that humans can never travel interstellarly because of the time and distance involved in travel from one galaxy to another, don’t believe them. We only lack the machinery to go that fast.

No surprise there! While in our teens, all of us learned that the faster we went the sooner we would get there.

38. More mind-stretching information. In Bolivia, South America, there is a rock slab that weighs nearly 400 tons. It had been transported to Tiahuanaco, 12 miles south of Lake Titicaca, from a quarry over 200 miles away. That happened many centuries ago.

39. “You are either for or against us” is a call to clarity of involvement. It means that there is no middle ground, although there are shades of commitment between any two sides. A Christian brother said it well: “Those people who will not be ruled by God will be ruled by tyrants.” – William Penn (1644-1718), Quaker, English real estate entrepreneur, champion of democracy and religious freedom, friend of the Lenape [Delaware] Indians, founder of the colonies and future states of Pennsylvania and Delaware.

40. No matter how little you are or have, put it to use in a way that is pleasing to God and it will be what He intends for it in your hands – 2 Kings 4:2. If He multiplies it greatly, rejoice and abide in your blessing. Your new man is being rewarded. Enjoy it. The cross is only for the old man – Rom. 6:4-7.

41. It all starts with character. We probably do not think of the Lord as having “good character,” but of the ingredients of good character such as love, patience, and others. Simply said, He is holy. It is not something He does that makes Him holy, but His holiness makes Him do what He does and how He does it. It is the same with us. We are holy because we have God’s nature within us, which grips our hearts so that we are glad to separate ourselves unto Him, which creates the evidence of Christ being within us and shows that the things He said about Himself were and still are true.

So the Creator is still creating, although perhaps only of the evidence of His being within us. All else that we are creating is probably a revelation or rearrangement of that which was already created [my opinion – ed.]. Because we were created in God’s image, and He is creative, we must have something called creativity in order to be like Him. Thus our discovery and remodeling of that which already is.

In order to be creative, we rely upon His established orderliness of things. That’s not too difficult because the Lord and His creation are predictable. In religion that predictability can establish what is called tradition. When we lose our creativity, we are left with tradition – which some consider a strong point. If, instead, we lose our traditionality, we are left with creativity – which some consider a strong point. Tradition and creativity can be good for one another. To have both in one place requires wise leadership and tangible love.

[It would be easy to go into talking about tradition becoming so void of creativity that it is dead -- like doctrine without faith, or faith without works, or love without character. Or, go off into creativity becoming so void of tradition that it is non-Scriptural, emotionally ugly, or so independently contemporary that it has neither root nor fruit.]

42. If you know, really know, that you and God are friends [John 15:14-15]; you are more concerned with pleasing Him than obeying Him.

Savor that until next month.