THOUGHTS OF JULY, 2018

1. Why did Jesus place so much emphasis on knowledge of the Bible? It sounds dumb to ask Christians that question, does it not? We believe in God, so we want to hear what He says and has said. We want to know what is ahead, and to prepare for it. We love Him, so we love His word. It’s similar to, “We love one another, so we want to hear what others say,” plus Jesus is our Lord and Savior! The lack of study of and adherence to the Bible leaves us in the position of the religious leaders of God’s people, to whom Jesus said, “You are mistaken, not understanding [knowing the meaning and application of – ed.] the Scriptures nor the power of God [which comes from receiving His word – ed. ].” They knew the words of the scriptures, and had even memorized all of them, but did not understand what He was saying in them. The religious minds had attached their own interpretations to God’s words and had “twisted God’s mind” [so to speak] as they presented His word to God’s people. In effect, they had devised their own religion. He tried to correct them before leaving but eventually had to “leave them desolate.”

I suppose that some understanding of their problem can be blamed on there having been a few millennia since some of those scriptures had been written, but others were more recent and even current to them. That gave time for many interpretations, many biases, and several empires to come and go -- all having their effects on that which had been “written.” That made it old stuff, and old stuff has a way of becoming irrelevant to the independent thinker. To counter the religious drift, the Lord regularly sent prophets among His people, sometimes with good effect.

But let’s continue our bit of sympathy for the carnal. There were centuries when God seemed to not be keeping His promises. Humanity is habitually self-centered and enjoys doing that which seems good and desirable at choice times. We try to persuade our God and gods to bless us in our wanderings. He did not and does not, so we consider Him indifferent, unable or absent – at least out of sight and out of mind. But what difference does it make anyway if things are going fairly well by our own evaluation? Also, who really knows what those words mean, how they apply to our lives today, so we rely on them to whatever degree we are interested. Besides, perhaps God had changed His mind as times have changed. [End of sympathy.]

So, there they were. Ignorance and deception were standard. There was no spiritual truth so how could there be any objective standards? God’s people believed anything and nothing. Into that situation came Absolute Truth. Anyone could have guessed what they did with IT. And they did. Now what will we do with IT – Jesus and the Bible? If we have God’s Spirit in us we have a hunger, a yearning, for Him and His love letters. A love of God’s word is a reflection of a love for God.

When Israel’s religious leaders refused Jesus as their king, they “missed the hour of His visitation.” That was 2,000 years ago, and He has not come back since then. Once again, “Do those words mean anything? What did they mean originally? Are they relevant after 2,000 years? That is a long time to await One who promised to return “quickly.” Israel is looking for their Messiah’s first coming after rejecting Him on His first coming. What a terrible and fatal mistake! The faithful church is looking for His second coming while the unfaithful church is actively rejecting Him as their Lord [“Why do you call me Lord and not do what I say?”].

For over 250 years America has had a Holy Spirit outpouring every 50 years. We are now 14 years past the most recent 50-year mark. Some think the window has closed; some hope that 2016 was the beginning of an outpouring. 2 Chronicles 7:14 still rings in our ears but have we, too, “missed the hour of His visitation?” I have in mind a certain church that wants to be known as a loving church, so is quiet and soft on sin [if it will identify any sin at all]. Its actions show that it prefers separation from Jesus instead of the truth in love. Their fear of offending anyone is more powerful than the gospel, so must be avoided at any cost. There is no understanding of “the truth in love.” Jesus has been removed from His headship and the Holy Spirit from their midst. In their places there are programs, drying religious liturgies, and well-planned meetings with glowing reports. While we are planning what place to give Jesus Christ, He has already decided what place to give us in eternity. Our time for revival is limited. The remnant is seeing revival.

1. Does the Lord make His people obey Him? How does the Lord accomplish something in or through you that you do not want Him to accomplish? What would you make of the response of, “The Lord has never asked me to do anything I did not want to do?” Are there those whom He “asks” to do things and only if He knows in advance that they will want to do what He wants? Are we deaf to Him on things we don’t want to do? What have been His methods in your life? Have you noticed those encounters enough to testify about them?

How did the Lord get Israel out of Egypt? [This is not a change of topic.] There were two problems: 1) Pharaoh did not want Israel to go, so: a) God had Moses and Aaron tell Israel, then Pharaoh, that Israel would be gone only three days, then would return – Ex. 3:16-22; 5:1-4. Surely, Egypt could spare their slaves for three days. b) God performed mighty miracles that convinced Pharaoh to let His people go, but each time God hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that Israel could not leave. Why did the Lord run Pharaoh in circles like that? Answer: It was not sufficient to the Lord that His people be delivered, but that Israel, Egypt and the world, would know it was by God’s ALL-MIGHTY power that they had been released – Ex. 9:16; Prov. 16:4; Rom. 9:14-18. Compare here our personal rebirth and conversion process, and God’s mighty acts in the midst of our helplessness. We were incapable of anything other than a yearning “yes” in our hearts. In my case, as with Israel in Egypt, He did not redeem me until I was in a hopeless condition, one that I would remember. c) God decimated Egypt’s mighty military, ending any real ability for Egypt to retrieve Israel.

2) Israel did not want to go, so: a) God sent them Moses who was God’s leader and spokesman, and Moses’ brother, Aaron, to speak for Moses who had some sort of speech disability – Ex. 4:10-16. b) He made their life in Egypt even worse than it had been. c) He showed them His power over His and their enemy and said He would be with Israel in the process. d) He had Pharaoh actually drive them out. e) He enticed Israel by telling them they were going on a 10-day trip to the land of Canaan, where they would live, a land that flowed with milk and honey [and warring nations – ed.]. f) The faint-hearted also remembered having heard God’s message to Pharaoh, that they were going on a three-day church celebration and picnic, after which they would return to the security of their Egyptian homes and jobs. During their years in the wilderness some tried to exercise this option – Num. 14:4.

How did the Lord get Egypt out of His people? 1) He closed the waters behind them, making it difficult but not impossible for them to return to Egypt, and for us to return to our Egypts. 2) Those committed to unbelief died off in the wilderness. Who was responsible for their deaths, some quickly [the earth swallowed them] and some slowly [of attrition] over 40 years, a process that can take Life from us? 3) He put them in a whole-life situation [the wilderness] in which they would be shown to be entirely inadequate and He would be shown entirely adequate and constantly faithful to them and His word. God was committed to them as He is to us, but it is hard to know what God’s commitment is when we have only a spotty knowledge of what He has said – Thought No. 1, above. 4) He put them in periodic situations where the faithful had their faith increased and broadened by experience, and the unfaithful died off. Example: Amalekites got the stragglers when they would not stay together [maintain their unity] during their wilderness travels. Hear that, fellow Christians of all denominations!

So, does the Lord make us do things that we don’t want to do? No, but He makes us willing. Consider other examples of this process: 1) Hornets example as God’s people endeavored to take the Promised Land -- Ex. 23:28 [20-33]; Josh. 24:12. 2) Jonah’s example in later centuries as God’s people labored to keep the Promised Land -- Jonah:all. You will enjoy googling up and listening to the song, “The Hornet Song.”

1. Part of our getting ready to get out of this world is spreading the word about the Antichrist [He is not “the Beast”]. Although all born again believers will be gone when he comes on the worldwide scene, there should be lots of information about him scattered about the world for the sakes of post-rapture new believers. This describes him:
2. He is a religious leader – Rev. 17:1-5.
3. He appears to be Christ-like – Rev. 13:11.
4. He works miracles – Rev. 13:13-14.
5. He will deny Christ in the flesh – 2 John 7. This means that he will deny that the historical Jesus was really a human, or that Jesus really does not come into us by the Spirit when we are born again – Gal. 2:20. [a necessary truth that is often soft-peddled or denied, allowing non-born again “believers” to “believe” simply via their human flesh].
6. He will reject God’s law – 2 Thess. 2:8-9; Dan. 7:25.
7. He will persecute true Christians – Dan. 7:25; Luke 12:32; Rev. 12:17; 13:15.
8. He will point the world to a Revived Roman Empire; a reasonable deduction from scripture.
9. I want to say something about prayer. We have all read books, heard teachings and read scripture about prayer, so this Thought will probably not be entirely new to you. The point: Get focused by starting your prayers talking to the Lord Himself, not by starting on the problem that might be prompting your prayer. Talk to the Lord about Him. Tell Him of your love for Him and of your appreciation of His abiding grace.

Take your time. [Since] He is present, act like it. Admit your failures if He brings them up. But talk to Him, face to face. See 2 Chronicles 7:14 and Matthew 6:8-9. That honors Him and brings you up to where He wants us to always abide, with Him in the heavenlies – Heb. 4:16; 13:6. He is bigger than any problem and we need to meet with and increasingly live with Him there.

Our present need fits into His agenda because all things are working toward the fulfillment of His agenda – Rom. 8:28. Our feet are still on the earth but we are a heavenly people who need heavenly living and perspectives concerning our earthly condition in this seen and felt world. Continually praying [Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2] is necessary for walking/living in the Spirit, which can be pictured as earth-bound people with dirty feet having heavenly fellowship with our Creator-Master-Brother. Prayer is a bold and open exercise of that relationship.

1. Venezuela had more than 40 years of stable economic prosperity in the 20th century and had become the world’s fourth largest economy, but it had two problems – it became corrupt and it forgot its poor. As it then went from a democracy [1958 – 1998] to socialism [1998 – present], it changed into an even more corrupt and bloated bureaucracy, and totalitarianism.

The new president [and then soon-to-be dictator] was a strong populist. He campaigned on “change,” social resentment [class warfare], and promised to change the constitution to “benefit the people.” Today, 12 million of its 31 million people live on a minimum monthly mandated wage of $1.61 on the black-market exchange. The people are dying of starvation and lack of medical care, companies cannot function due to lack of raw material, and many people “survive” by rummaging through trash on the streets.

Corrupt government, false promises and extreme reliance on the government are traps that we fall into when civil government becomes our god. The devil, using civil governments in his earthly kingdom, knows that his grace [mammon freebies] is really enjoyed by the flesh and that few will turn it down. What they and we need are political leaders with strong moral character, and an understanding that socialism [a government-centered society] corrodes and corrupts human dignity. All of that requires a return to the Lord.

1. When you write your autobiography, or someone writes your biography, and points to your life and service to the Lord Jesus in His kingdom, would you like to know one of the foremost points that will be said about you? Yes, of course. Although there will be many good points, one of the first, in chronological order, will be how you entered God’s kingdom as a little child. Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all” – Luke 18:17. So, since you have entered God’s kingdom, you did it as a child. Wonderful!

In my book, “God’s Doctor,” it is written that when I was 34 years old, the Lord made me an offer I could not refuse; He offered to trade lives with me. It was, “Give Me your life and I will give you Mine.” I accepted His offer. Immediately, that night, I was a different person. My two doctor partners did not know what to do with me. We three were very close friends so they knew they had an entirely different me, a spiritual person, a son of God, but a very immature one at that, I am still a bit embarrassed to say. I had been born again – a babe, a child. The All-Mighty had slain the human spirit that had given me life from my mother’s womb but which had subjected me to the devil’s deceptions. Now the Lord had given me of His own Self, His Holy Spirit, who freed me from bondage to sin and empowered me to know and obey Him. Thus, by virtue of a change of spirits within me, my reprobate soul began a rehabilitation that continues daily. I had “metamorphed” into a child. I had been reborn into the kingdom of God for the purpose of my soul becoming like Jesus.

To help the readers of your book understand how that happened to you, it has been written of you that you, too, accepted your weaknesses before God and man and began to display God’s character, you suffered for righteousness sake and began to show God’s grace, and the more you gave up your life for Jesus’ sake the more you showed His eternal quality of life. The born-again reader of your book will recognize God’s fingerprints on your soul, will praise Him, and rejoice because of the testimony of Jesus in your life. The others, if they had the opportunity to read that which has been written in your book, would consider your life a waste, especially because of those very marks of reality.

Currently, the Lord is writing that which you are living. Isn’t that good to know?!

1. It is difficult and sometimes seemingly impossible for some faithful, biblically adherent Christians to correct or enlarge their biblical understanding. They love the Lord and His Word and have depended upon Him according to their present understanding so many times. Their solid Christian life seems to leave little else to be desired. It’s just that there is always more of and about Him. That should be good news, but until those steadfast eyes are opened, anything other than that which we already have is rejected.

The Book of Job lays bare for us the way the Lord uses the devil, and [if we can stand the thought] why the devil was essential to the whole of God’s plan of creation and redemption. God’s redemption process was necessary – humanity could not go directly from being created to heavenly eternity. The whole of us had to fail and need a perfect redeemer. Therefore, a devil had to be greater than all except the Creator, and in turn become God’s deceived, essential tool. To grasp that truth, we need to have a “higher” view than many faithful ones have. By “higher” I mean a view from the heavenlies, that view being God’s overview. We have other “high” views, like Jesus’ death and work on the cross, our calling to minimize ourselves so Christ can increase in us, the powerful, essential gifts of the Holy Spirit, and many more. But keep looking higher.

In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 Paul and the Holy Spirit still tell us that, like Job, Paul was afflicted by the devil for God’s purposes. Initially, Paul did not know that the Lord was behind his problem and that there were things of God that could not be done without that affliction. When Paul saw his affliction from a “higher” view he became “well content” and “strong.” At that revelation, he began to boast about God’s perfection because of his obvious disability, which was caused and maintained by the devil. His disability did not change, but his heavenly insight was higher and better.

1. As of the date of the writing of this particular Thought [7-11-2018] the General Convention of the Episcopal Church is debating whether to make God gender-neutral in the Book of Common Prayer, intending to send a strong message that God does not have a gender. That goes along with its teaching on homosexuality [it’s “o. k.”], same-sex marriage [it’s “o. k.,” too], and a lot of other sinful practices [all of which are “o. k.”]. As a noted psychiatrist titled a book, “Whatever happened to sin?” An appropriate question for the Episcopal church is, “Whatever happened to God?” Watching the decline of the Episcopal church has been like watching kids at a religious Schlitterbahn having great fun sliding downhill into a firepit.

Of the several end-times themes in the Bible – global disasters [Matt. 24], the rise of the global super-state, the identity of the Antichrist [1 John 2:18-23; 4:3], the mark of the beast [Rev. 13:16-18], and the Magog invasion [Ezek. 38-39] -- deception and apostacy in the church is listed more times than any other end-times “sign of the times.” Those religious organizations formerly known as part of “the church” have long-since ceased loving the Lord, submitting to His word, and representing Him to the world. And they don’t know their deception. What a mess! Pray that the Lord raises up those who will speak out against sin, starting with us [meaning both the raised-up ones and those who need to hear] whoever and wherever we are.

While on the subject, who can be deceived? Some answers: a) Anyone except me! [The deceived one’s position. 2) Those most confident and content with what they already have. [That’s a caution sign.] 3) Anyone. [Correct.]

How can we avoid being deceived? Jesus said we should get the truth from Him – John 17:13-21. So:

1. Know the truth – John 8:31-38. The problem here is that Jesus is the only human who fully and perfectly knows the truth, so ..
2. Receive the Truth [Jesus] – The Pharisees had the Old Testament scriptures and much more memorized, but it did them no good. Judas had his own purpose for going along with the Truth, and it did him no good. Mohammad researched the best of the world’s religions and used that information to formulate his own religion, and it did him no good. Gandhi did the same and it did him no good. The four founders of communism [Marx, Stalin, Lenin, Engels] were all seminary trained and were searching for ways to cure the world’s problems, but it did them no good. None of those men received the Truth, Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, as a child so they could not enter the kingdom of God – Mark 10:15. They had tremendous mentality, energy, charisma, leadership, and dedication but it did them no good. Those talents alone still do us no good.
3. Fellowship with The Truth, Jesus – Take up your cross and follow [closely and behind] Jesus. our crosses render us dead to the world so we can successfully walk about in the world, bringing life to others who are blind and deceived, and not be affected by its evil.
4. Study the truth [Jesus and His words – Avoid religion, or at least recognize its unintended consequences. Man, including the most religious of man, can do only the possible; God does the necessary impossible. Religion will insert itself between God and man, telling us that we can save ourselves by being religious. Religion does not teach us to let go of things and thoughts and pick up our crosses, which is the way to Life.
5. Receive the Spirit of truth to receive more truth another way, through revelation – John 15:26-27. That requires humility, confident pursuit, and hunger for more. All of us need more than we already have, and more things that we have none of.
6. Know that we do not know anything as we should know it – 1 Cor. 8:2; 3:18; 13:8-12. If that threatens you and weakens your confidence a bit, good; the Lord means for it to move us from confidence in what we have and believe, into confidence in the Lord’s faithfulness. That means we have found that the keeping of our faith is in Jesus’ hands, not in our hands, so that He has us covered, no matter what. Then our faith is in His faithfulness, leaving us stronger than when we were strong in our own faith – 2 Tim. 2:11-13.

At that point we are but one step from the ultimate trial and reward, that being when the Lord has “forsaken us” but we remain faithful – Matt. 27:46. This was the ultimate trial for Jesus, partly because He was not expecting it. It appeared that all of His life had come to nothing -- now His Father was not “with” Him, no flow of grace and love, only total separation and rejection. Even in these last few minutes of intense trial He could have come down from the cross, driven out the Romans, and set up “His” kingdom on earth as suggested by and in submission to Satan. He didn’t. That is the ultimate act of resistance to deception.

During His time on earth, Jesus did not do things so that we would not have to do them, but He did them to show us the way and to give us the power to do the same. We are offered similar but miniature [perhaps “greater”] situations during our cross walks.

We are sent into the world of deceptions and lies. The Truth is within us and with us. Greater is He who is within us than he who is in the world – 1 John 4:4.

1. It seems like every step we take with the Lord leads directly to another cross experience, doesn’t it! Some are immediately delightful encounters, others take a while to show pay off – perhaps only in the hereafter, but that’s the best time for rewards. Many involve relationships, close or distant. The Lord really blesses us when we obey Him in our relationships. Thankfully, we are loaded with all kinds and degrees of relationships.

It is delightful when two or more know, love and obey the Lord. Fellowship abounds. But you know what can happen, even if only one person ceases his fellowship with the Lord – human relationships in due time will weaken and may crumble. When a brother backs off from fellowship he usually has something against the other. “Whose fault” is not the real problem. When we know that there is a breakdown of fellowship, we are instructed to go to the other and get it restored – Matt. 5:23-24. True fellowship with others is based on our relationship with Jesus; we must “go.” Jesus’ “go” was not a suggestion. When we are reluctant, He does not force us to go but He begins a process of making us willing – Josh. 24:12. Then we go. If we don’t eventually go, we suffer loss. Some losses are obvious and heart breaking. Others are not noticeable, because we don’t necessarily know that which we could have had, the blessing we missed.

1. In Mark 11:12-14, 20-24 a fig tree had a serious encounter with Jesus. Jesus came to the fig tree [or believer, or congregation, or ministry, or denomination] when it was not the season for figs [during its down-time, day off, vacation, non-Sunday, mowing the grass time, driving down the street, etc.]. It was unexpected and “unreasonable” that Jesus would expect to find some fruit at that time and, some would say, “mean spirited” that He would curse and dry up the fig tree considering its circumstances. But the Lord calls for fruitfulness when we might not expect Him to. When He looks for fruit, whatever our condition, it should be there.

When the church has a social gathering, the Lord may be expected to walk in and ask us, “What kind of fruit are you expecting here, and where is it? Where are the eternal results of this effort?” The social benefits are nice, enjoyable, and beneficial, but where is the eternal fruit that would justify the attendance of God’s Holy Spirit and be evidence of His presence? When we see the need for more Life, meaning for more spiritual Life, for more of the blessings promised us by the Promise Keeper -- what to do?

Noah’s example is a good answer for our question. What did he do to get the Lord’s promises? In Genesis 6:22 it is written, “Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did.” Then the Lord’s promised blessing “flowed.” He listened to the Lord and obeyed Him. He did not try to get the Lord to do something his way or according to an established tradition. It was much simpler than that; he heard what the Lord would bless and did it. He cooperated with God. He did not have to make something happen. He knew the spirit of Matthew 7:7-11.

The Lord denies no request that is in agreement with what He Himself has originated and already has prepared. Of course, we have our personal desires and motives that we seek, and can end up not asking for what the Lord wants – so we miss out on God’s action and settle for something “good” that we can do. He calls that sort of behavior “adultery.” Here we can apply James 4:1-10. The Lord is doing things, starting with the basic: “He desires a people who will be conformed to the image of His Son.” Nothing happens without His direction and purpose. He offers us a special invitation to be with Him, written in Jesus’ blood.

1. What is there to do when you talk with professional religionists about their spiritual darkness and of their leading others into their religious darkness? They don’t share our Christian beliefs, so those points are useless. They don’t want to handle the God question or the authority of scripture so “positions” of faith are also useless. To them, those truths are “positions” that are no longer authoritative. What do you do at that point?

It is wise to follow the lead of Paul, who followed the Holy Spirit. In Romans 1:16-17 Paul wrote of the spiritual power of God in scripture, for righteous people. But onward into verses 18 through 32, for the sake of the unrighteous, he took the position of the truth as revealed in creation, not in scripture. Paul stepped out of the spiritual into the natural to bridge the gap. What a condescension. He said that God’s nature and power are evident in nature, except to those who suppress the truth to fit their desires. He said that the truth is so easily seen in the natural that there is no excuse for not seeing it. He was speaking to those who believed somewhat in God but would not honor Him as their God and His word as from their God. They were fools walking around in darkness. That bridge is still there.

Onward further in Romans chapter 1. The result of not taking that bridge was and is that God gave them over to the impurity of their desires, to degrading passions, and chose as example the obvious perversion of homosexuality. Their deception is so complete that their minds are depraved, and they are convinced that all manner of unrighteousness is proper. [That list grows longer as the carnal mind imagines more and more desires.] Those deceived were very religious: “.. although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”

When the deceiver has you, that which is called obedience to God and His Word is supposedly performed but is actually 180 degrees in opposition to the truth. Things that are self-evident, immovable and of routine human reason are rejected, also. How far we have fallen from the prophetic and apostolic word, while supposedly holding to it!

1. Do you want to see more of God’s glory as a direct result of your actions? Try this: The next time you feel your temper getting out of control, or the person you resent is bothering you, or things are not going right, or you are tempted to quit -- decide that instead of reacting the way you always do, you will trust in the Life of Jesus within you, then stand back and watch what happens. Where there is an obedient Christian, there is Life. Then you can rejoice in your trials and tribulations, counting them all joys – Jam. 1:2.

When the believer gives up his self-effort, he begins to see what the Lord can do in his most simple and in his very complex human situations. It may be something that he himself could have done but had not thought of, or it may be something not humanly possible. It may have to do with washing the dishes, mowing the lawn, preaching, or some other form of laying down your life. There is a law of God that cannot be broken. “If we have been crucified with Christ [not, ‘If Christ has been crucified for us,’ which He surely has], it is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us, and the life which we now live in our present bodies we live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us.” That is a faithful paraphrase of Galatians 2:20.

1. Leopold Kohr [1909-1994], economist, jurist and political scientist, said, “Wherever something is wrong, something is too big.” Spiritually, it can be true that if something or someone is broken or not working, it or he is likely too “big.” Similarly, “smallness is a solution to the problems of bigness,” per C. N. Parkinson. You already see my point, of how that can be true for us. Jesus said that little people are the blessed ones. They are poor in spirit, they are gentle, they hunger and thirst for righteousness, they are merciful, they have pure hearts, and they are peacemakers. The kingdom is made of those who have found that Life is in and of the little. Jesus shunned being “big” and is still looking for disciples who will go with Him.
2. We have talked about the necessity of becoming as babes in order to enter the kingdom of God – Matt. 18:3. Look at Peter’s entrance into discipleship as an example of becoming a babe and entering the kingdom.

Peter was an experienced fisherman; Jesus was a carpenter and traveling preacher. Peter had fished all night and caught nothing; Jesus had started His day with a morning teaching on the shoreline and had just finished speaking. The knowledge of God’s will [that reality called faith] began working in Jesus situationally. He told Peter to move out into deeper water and lower his nets for a catch. Peter grumbled a bit but did as Jesus said. That’s remarkable. The result was that he pulled in so much fish that they filled his and his partner’s two boats.

Peter’s response to Jesus revealed a perception of his own sinfulness as he had encountered Jesus’ suddenly-revealed depth of holiness. He said, “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” That’s when Jesus invited Peter into the kingdom, saying, “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.” Peter beached his boat and left everything to follow Jesus.

Peter made a grand entrance into the kingdom by a) obeying Jesus, contrary to his own well- established fisherman experience, and then b) by frankly acknowledging himself as a sinner. The Lord took Peter as he was and began disciplining him. Years later Peter [1 Pet. 2:2-3] would write to “.. newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.” Part of the imagery is that babies know no better than to plunge into faith despite their utter incapacity.

1. In early creation God appeared to humanity and spoke for Himself as in Genesis chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 which brings us to Abraham. Those appearances and conversations are called theophanies, meaning visible and audible appearances of God [the Son] in the form of a man [later known as Jesus of Nazareth], visiting and talking with mankind. Those appearances and conversations have continued and will increasingly continue into eternity without end. That is part of the blessing of fellowship between God and His human creation, beginning in the garden.

Starting with Abraham, the patriarchs and other faithful ones began to pass along that which God said in those theophanies, and that which God said by dreams, visions, inspirations, and revelations. Those whose calling was to speak for God to His people in those ways were first called “seers” [a very good label because they really “saw”]. Later they were called prophets [“before speakers”, meaning “foremost speakers for God,” or “supreme speakers”].

Gradually, the office of prophet was officially formed and recognized because their words were frequent, true, insightful, convicting, and God fulfilled them. Prophecy found its perfection in the prophet-Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Since then, with Jesus having re-ascended to heaven, the ministry of God’s word has been passed through Jesus to individuals in the church as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers [and any other believers who would speak up]. Jesus was and did all five of those and He gifts the church with Himself in those ways wherever people of faith will receive Him, His word, and His gifts.

Over the centuries of active prophetic ministry, the prophets have spoken out or remained silent; been sought out, listened to, or ignored; lived in the wilderness in caves or in cities; lived alone or had seminaries for training more prophets; been slain or highly rewarded for their ministry; and been faithful or carnal. Their work was to speak for God, to open the minds of those called to God, and to reveal God’s heart, commands and coming actions. Defined more simply, the work of a prophet is to establish the functionality of God’s covenant with and among His people.

[It’s testimony time.] With that sketchy overview, how personal and functional is your link with one or more living prophets? You go first, with someone to listen.

Now me: C. G. is a disciple of Jesus. He is a prophet. He flows with prophetic thoughts, feelings, insights, and words of the Lord. He is thoroughly spiritual and minimally religious. He is married, has a wife, kids and grandkids, is active in an independent parish church and very active and successful in the leadership of significant non-parish, workplace ministries. He is a brother. A couple of days ago he was spending some time with us, with Nancy and me. At one point I asked him to speak to us for the Lord. He took about five minutes to think and pray before speaking. He spoke, and we heard.

One of the several things on C. G.’s and the Lord’s hearts was that Nancy and I are to take communion together frequently, reminding one another of the covenant we have with the Lord and with each other. We have started doing that and have enlarged our remembrances to include those many covenants the Lord has established between us and others over the years. That list is long and the covenants are both universal [“love your brother,” “turn your other cheek,” “rejoice in persecution.”] and specific [“lay down your life for your wife,” “honor and obey your husband,” “obey those of the church who have the rule over you,” “pray for the peace of Jerusalem.”] It has been edifying to go through our memories and evaluate for intentional action those big and little, old and current covenants. You might even hear the Lord for yourself in this testimony.

The prophet’s message a) corrects, tears down, warns and alarms, and b) comforts, encourages, heals and builds up. C. G. is a good friend so, before he started, he warned me that he would not temper God’s word if it was a stern one. That encouragement reminded me of King David’s good friend, Nathan the prophet, who spoke for the Lord to David when David had broken covenant – 2 Sam. 12.

If you have not already done so, ask the Lord for a prophet-brother, one who would be much more effective than an occasional one passing through town – Matt. 10:41. He who receives the prophet, Jesus, receives the reward of Jesus the prophet, which is God’s covenant of eternal life with its earthly contents and heavenly consequences – we all know about that part of that Prophet’s blessing. But then there are His today prophets whom we are to receive. If we do, we will be appropriately rewarded.

1. From the beginning there were and still are three basic types of responses to Jesus and the gospel – those who receive, those who go to sleep during the presentation, and those who throw stones. The receivers are blessed by everything they see and hear [although not necessarily all at initial hearing]. The sleepers are the ones who are really in trouble. They would be better off by being in either of the other two groups. In the Revelation [3:15-17] is shown that group among the church. It is not good to be lukewarm or asleep; better to be for [obviously the best] or against [at least there is an engaged awareness of the Lord, like had Saul of Tarsus.].

At any rate, when we do enter the kingdom and begin to know the King, radical changes are made in every area. Our lenses for perceiving people and things, the ways we go about relating to them, and the basics we have used for understanding life all must be at least modified.

But we are more than modified; we become a new person. He who has placed Himself within us presents us with victory over the challenges of our flesh. Do you recall the early days of your re-birth? The Lord had become your life. Because of that, and the passion of your response to accept “all of Him that came with Him” [the wisdom of Him, the righteousness of Him, the sanctification of Him, and the redemption of Him – 1 Cor. 1:30], the Greater One in us nullified the things that were and are, and we knew it. We boasted a lot, and some of it was of ourselves instead of all of it being of the Lord, but He began the process of cancelling out that weak stuff and purifying our boasting [increase that reference to include verses 26 through 31].

1. The devil’s answer to the problem of world conflict is to remove all of the troublemakers. That seems simple and practical. We have seen and possibly used that solution ourselves at work and elsewhere, even at home. He and his followers have been applying that solution to the world from near the beginning, and he is about to begin the big push of that last “Final Solution.” This time it will not only be against the chief troublemakers, the Jews, but against their sympaticos [those on the Jews’ spiritual wave length, their “sympathetic ones”], the Christians. It will be the battle of the ages.

We are already in the time when the governments of this world [under the direction and power of the prince of this world, Satan] will do things like censor “hate speech” by whatever degree of penalty needed. It will be announced as the only solution for world peace. We have already been hearing its rumblings: 1) Religion is the cause of most of the world’s wars and deaths. 2) Silence, punish, and eliminate anyone who “offends” or disturbs the peace with “hate speech.” 3) Hate speech is defined as anything that appears to offend someone else’s beliefs or religious practices. That means Christians [those who love the Lord and His word], and His people, Israel, will be targeted. That’s people like you and me because we know that salvation is in Jesus and only in Jesus. [That’s hate speech!]

Widespread persecution and death will follow because politics and religion will merge into a single entity and attempt to destroy all who oppose it. Read about it in God’s history book, found in The Revelation, chapter 13. But we who are already born again will have left the world via the Rapture of the church before the worst of that “Final Solution” begins. However, there will be many new believers who will suffer at that time, with the Jews. Those will be the persecuted and martyred and blessed “trouble makers” of that day.

1. There are lots of events that will happen before the Lord returns to earth [after the 7 years tribulation]. One of the most obvious ones is that the gospel of Jesus Christ will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations; and then the end will come” – Matt. 24:14. The many Bible translator ministries are really getting the job done. They need our prayer and financial help. Now, in even the most remote areas it takes only a few weeks or months to have parts or all of the Bible translated and printed and into the hands of local believers. Get ready, stay ready. It seems to us that He is delayed, but His last invitations are in the mail. The King is coming.
2. If you cannot understand this Thought, it is because I have poorly written it or because it is especially for you. Through sin [our fallen nature that submits us to the devil] we are upside down creatures, and since this is a millenniums-long problem that we have long considered “normal,” we have almost entirely forgotten about the availability and power of the Spirit – John 14; Acts 1 & 2. We call things good or bad based on how it feels mentally or physically, or how it fits or doesn’t fit into our lives. That means people, work, church, health – anything. Those things are real and important, but they are not part of our deepest life and self – our inner man. To classify those things, and then to deal with them, the Spirit is almost entirely and without effort forgotten. When we do that, we become incomplete creations of our perfect Creator. We were perfect, then by Adam we became imperfect, and by Jesus we again became perfect [perfectly equipped]. Between Adam and Jesus, humanity had to function as partly human. No wonder humanity considered that condition “normal.” Since Jesus has restored believers to fulness we have really new life; we are really a new person. We are in position to turn things [including our world] around and right side up. Every time we have a confrontation with our old man we can nail him to the cross that we have been carrying for that purpose. There another area of self dies to itself and our new identity shapes better into the image of Jesus. Holding onto the old self-image may seem reasonable and “real” but it is now a false image. In my case everything changed, including my food and friends preferences, my self-identity, my whole life. I think those changes were the cause [or perhaps the effect] of my newfound peace.
3. The Lord told the world that He would bless those countries who would bless Israel, and curse those who would curse Israel. The United States has received both and it has deserved both. Our recognition of the new nation of Israel 70 years ago was a major contribution to our receiving God’s grace, and our recent official recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel is another. To confirm that recognition, we promptly moved our embassy to Jerusalem.

But in the news of our recognition of Jerusalem there is another testimony that needs to be heard all around the world. Guatemala quickly follow our lead, and then Paraguay. Guatemala’s ambassador told others about the challenging crime situation in her country, but also stated that on the same day the Guatemalan embassy opened its doors in Jerusalem, not a single crime was recorded in the entire nation for the first time in Guatemala’s history! The Lord is faithful to His word. Going a bit further back into Israel’s history, the ambassador of Guatemala cast the first vote for recognition and creation of the State of Israel in the United Nations in 1948.

1. Do you desire to be a mentor of Life or of a talent or of a profession or of a family member? Remember the process for success: 1) You must have “it.” The “it” is that which you want to transfer to your mentee. If you are a father mentoring your son, it’s “Do as I do” not “Do as I say.” 2) Open your life to your mentee. Get personal. 3) Invite others into every aspect of your life. 4) Teach; if necessary, use words.
2. A church renewal consultant stated that young people are looking for spirituality, and are looking for it outside of the declining churches. That’s good news, about their looking for spirituality, but no surprise that they are looking for spirituality outside their original churches. One could imagine that if those churches had holy spirituality the youngers would not be looking for it elsewhere. I suspect, besides spirituality, they are looking for the Truth, the living God, and for the crosswalk. The declining traditional churches have little of those. Their solution: Programs. God’s solution: Repentance, Jesus, the Gospel Truth, the Holy Spirit, the crosswalk. It’s in the Book; in the Manufacturer’s Handbook.