THOUGHTS OF SEPTEMBER, 2013

1. Let’s jump right in. If you were the devil and, being the Great Deceiver [and thus the greatest deceived], you wanted to thwart the Lord and destroy His most prized handiwork [the church], and after having already lost the battles of Gethsemane and Calvary, what would you do as the time of your demise drew close? Right! Become more active within the church, in the pulpits.

2. Ordinarily, if certain people like you, you can’t help but think less of yourself. [You may have to reread that sentence.] As Christians, if those same people like you, it is evidence that the Lord is opening souls and doors for you to be good news.

We often do not know what the Lord is doing until we go forward. We don’t know what we can do until we do it. In fact, perhaps we don’t know who we are until we see what we can do. That last statement may be a bit off but I think it is true that we get a much clearer view of the King, His word, His kingdom, His subjects, and of ourselves when we begin to experience the joy and power of the crosswalk.

3. If you don’t take responsibility for yourself, who will? If you don’t take responsibility for your marriage, who will? If you don’t take responsibility for your family, who will? If you don’t take responsibility for your relatives, who will? If you don’t take responsibility for your church congregation, who will? If you don’t take responsibility for your city, who will? If you don’t take responsibility for the kingdom, who will?

Where in that line of questions do you cease to be the answer? Probably it was because your sense of responsibility became a corporate responsibility.

4. When we have our first really serious encounter with Jesus, it is common to think we know how He wants us both to be and to serve Him. That comes from a zealous, good heart but an as-yet uninformed mind in which there is still a lot of “me.” How He wants us to be is like He was – lowly, humble, servant-like, forgiving, and such as comes from going the way of the cross. How He wants us to do/serve is humbly by the leading of the Holy Spirit, from first-calling to completion.

That’s what Jesus meant when He told Peter that which John overheard and recorded in 21:18, that as Peter grew spiritually he would be made more like Jesus and would do things like Jesus did – despite the battle his flesh would put forward. The flesh has its own idea about life and service; the Holy Spirit will make us like Jesus if we accept the walk of the cross.

He wants to dress us and lead us where He wants us to go.

5. By trying we can learn to endure. Much of our trying is while being at rest.

6. Reject confusion, even if everyone around you is confused and telling you that if you too are not confused you just do not understand the situation. In order to avoid being confused we do not need to know the facts, we do not need to be in agreement with others, and we do not need to understand the situation, because confusion is not caused externally.

Confusion comes from within. It is a disorder of the mind, meant to destroy God’s orderliness in the minds of believers – 2 Tim. 1:7. We do not need to become confused [meaning to submit to the spirit of confusion] when conflicting events and misinformation are flowing around us, or when we have inadequate information for the work at hand.

One unconfused mind in the midst of the many confused ones can set the course and lead them out. Keep your cool. “One cool judgment is worth a dozen hasty counsels. The first thing to do is supply light and not heat.” – Woodrow Wilson, 28th American president.

7. A wise man said that if he had to choose between financially supporting a man who was starting a business and had never started on before, or one who had started one and failed at it, he would choose to help the one who had had a failure. Mistakes are good schools, although the tuition may be costly. They can be the bridge between inexperience and wisdom.

Then again, if we have wisdom, we won’t be getting into many places where it is needed.

8. I was asked to write a bit on a certain way the Lord works but which is not generally known to the church. That often unknown way is by not answering our prayer but by blessing us more through not answering our prayer. It is a bit lengthy for THOUGHTS, but you scholars will enjoy it as much as I did in putting it together. If you don’t mind, please give me your response to it.

IT SEEMS TO ME FROM LIFE’S EXPERIENCES AND FROM SCRIPTURE THAT THE LORD EITHER ANSWERS OUR PRAYERS OR GIVES US GRACE TO LIVE WITHOUT THEIR BEING ANSWERED. THAT’S THE LORD; FULL OF GRACE! IF WE DO NOT KNOW THAT GOD’S GRACE IS ALWAYS GIVEN AND ALWAYS ADEQUATE WE NATURALLY-MINDED ONES CAN GET INTO SELF-CENTERED DESPAIR BY THINKING, “WHERE ARE YOU, GOD? WHY AREN’T YOU HELPING ME?” – WHEN ACTUALLY HE IS ON THE JOB FULL-TIME REVEALING HIMSELF FOR HIS GLORY AND FOR OUR ETERNAL BETTERMENT. JOB GOT INTO THAT SORT OF SELF-CENTERED DESPAIR AND IT GOT HIM INTO REAL TROUBLE WITH THE LORD. SEE CHAPTER 30.

IN PAUL’S CASE HE FIRST ASSUMED THAT THE EVER-PRESENT LORD WHO HEALS WOULD HEAL HIM OF HIS “THORN IN THE FLESH.” HE HAD SEEN AND EXPERIENCE GOD’S MIRACLES. THEN HE WAS BLESSED. HOW? HE LEARNED FROM HIS OWN EXPERIENCE THAT UNANSWERED PRAYER CAN BE MORE OF A BLESSING THAN ANSWERED PRAYER – 2 COR 12:7-10. HE HAD AN AFFLICTION, APPARENTLY IN HIS BODY, AND PRAYED THREE TIMES FOR ITS REMOVAL OR HEALING. AFTER THE THIRD PRAYER THE LORD TOLD HIM THAT HIS AFFLICTION WAS GOOD FOR HIM AND FOR THOSE HE WOULD BE WITH [GOD CONSIDERED PAUL’S AFFLICTION FROM GOD’S VIEWPOINT, WHICH IS THE RECOMMENDED WAY TO LOOK AT ANYTHING] AND THAT HE WOULD GIVE PAUL EVERYTHING IN ABUNDANCE THAT WOULD BE REQUIRED FOR HIM TO LIVE IN VICTORY WITH THE AFFLICTION. ONLY THE LORD CAN TURN INTO BLESSINGS THOSE THINGS WHICH WE CALL BAD.

THAT PUT AN END TO PAUL’S PRAYERS FOR THAT HEALING, AND HE WAS SATISFIED. IN FACT, THEREAFTER HE AND THE KINGDOM PROFITED FROM HIS AFFLICTION. I THINK WE HAVE ALL READ ABOUT OR KNOWN PEOPLE WHO HAVE DONE THE SAME WITH AFFLICTIONS SUCH AS BROKEN NECKS, CEREBRAL PALSY, TERRIBLE BURNS, MORE COMMON ONES SUCH AS CANCER UNTO DEATH, AND MANY LESS DRAMATIC AFFLICTIONS – ALL IN THE LIVES OF FAITHFUL SAINTS WHO EXPLOITED THEIR AFFLICTIONS TO THE GLORY OF GOD. SO IT SEEMS TO ME THAT WHEN WE DO NOT RECEIVE ANSWERS TO OUR PRAYERS, OR WHEN OUR ANSWERS ARE DELAYED, ALL IS TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND WE SHOULD KNOW IT AND SHOW IT.

HOWEVER, OUR THORN MAY NOT BE IN OUR BODY [FLESH] BUT IN OUR SOUL [FLESH]. AS SUCH IT MAY SHOW AS A WEAKNESS OF CHARACTER, OR A HABITUAL SIN, OR AN IMMATURITY MUCH LESS THAN OUR AGE OR CHURCH STATUS REQUIRES. IT MAY BE HARMFUL TO OURSELVES AND OTHERS, BE EMBARRASSING TO US AGAIN AND AGAIN, CAUSE BROTHERS TO TAKE US ASIDE FOR PRAYER AND COUNSELING, AND PERHAPS REMOVE US FROM FORMAL MINISTRY FOR A TIME. WE MAY REPENT, ASK FOR FORGIVESS FROM GOD AND MAN, AND CALL ON THE LORD TO STRENGTHEN US AGAINST THAT AFFLICTION IN THE FUTURE -- ONLY TO FAIL AGAIN AND REPEAT THE CIRCULAR PROCESS, LIVING IN EMBARRASSMENT AND TORMENT.

MY POINT HERE IS THAT THE LORD OUR POTTER KNOWS HOW WE HATE [OR DON’T HATE] THE SIN IN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS. WHEN WE ARE UNDERGOING THIS PROLONGED TRIAL BY FIRE SOMETHING ELSE MORE IMPORTANT IS GOING ON IN GOD’S PLAN FOR US, SOMETHING FOR WHICH HE IS USING OUR REPEATED FAILURES TO WORK DEEPER IN OUR SOULS THAN WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF HE HAD EARLIER DELIVERED US. THIS APPLIES TO INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS AND NATIONS – SUCH AS ISRAEL FOR THE PAST 2,000 YEARS.

[NOTE: THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT WE ARE THEN NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR SOUL-AFFLICTION IF IT IS AN ONGOING UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. IT IS OUR REPEATED GUILT AND REPENTANCE, HIS LOVING PRESENCE, AND READY FORGIVENESS THAT ARE MAJOR TOOLS IN OUR SOULS, WORKING OTHER THINGS THAT MUST COME FIRST.]

THE LORD IS THE MASTER PLANNER. IN FACT, HE IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN CHANGE OUR SOULS. WITH SOME STRENGTH OF CHARACTER WE MAY TEMPORARILY MODIFY OUR EXTERNAL BEHAVIOR TO SOME EXTENT IF WE MUST OR WHEN WE ARE SUFFICIENTLY MOTIVATED TO “BE GOOD.” BUT WE CANNOT CHANGE OUR SELVES, OUR SOULS. WE ARE THE LORD’S WORKMANSHIP – EPH. 2:10. HE KNOWS BOTH THE SHALLOW AND DEEPER WORKINGS OF OUR SOULS. AS MASTER ARCHITECT AND MECHANIC HE KNOWS WHICH PART NEEDS FIXING FIRST. THE LORD OF ORDER HAS ESTABLISHED THE ORDERLY PROCESS OF PRECEPT UPON PRECEPT, LINE UPON LINE. HE ALSO WORKS IN OUR SOULS IN SIMILAR ORDERLY MANNER. THAT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO REMEMBER, LEST WE TRY TO CHANGE THE ORDER OF GOD’S WORKINGS.

SO THE LORD KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT IS GOING ON BECAUSE HE IS DOING IT, AND HE KNOWS WHAT IS NECESSARY TO CHANGE US. THERE ARE TWO ROUTES TO BEING CHANGED: 1) THE DIRECT, PRIMARY ROUTE TO BEING CHANGED BEGINS WITH THE HUMBLING OF OURSELVES BY OURSELVES – MATT. 18:4; JAM. 4:10; 1 PET. 5:6. AS WE DO, HE CHANGES US. THAT’S HIS JOB. 2) THE SECONDARY, INDIRECT ROUTE TO CHANGE OCCURS WHEN WE DON’T DO OUR FIRST PART – SO HE HUMBLES US HIMSELF. THIS SECONDARY PROCESS IS FAR MORE UNCOMFORTABLE ON OUR FLESH THAN THE FIRST. HOWEVER, IF WE ARE SERIOUS ABOUT HIM AND HIS KINGDOM WE WILL HOLD STILL LONG ENOUGH FOR HIM TO COMPLETE HIS WORK. AT LEAST WE WILL NOT RUN TOO FAR DURING THE PROCESS, ALTHOUGH IT WILL BE EXTENDED, LIKE A TOOTH BEING SLOWLY PULLED. REMEMBER JONAH.

DURING THE HUMBLING PROCESS, WHICH MAY BE A MILD SLAP ON THE WRIST OR A SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE IN GOD’S WOODSHED, THERE WILL BE AT LEAST SOME BROTHERS TO WHOM WE WILL BE CONTINUALLLY ACCEPTABLE – ROM. 14:1; 15:7. THEY KNOW THAT WE HAVE BEEN APPREHENDED BY THE LIVING GOD, THE “HOUND OF HEAVEN,” THAT HE IS WORKING IN AND ON US, AND THAT WE ARE ON THE ROAD TO BECOMING A FINISHED PRODUCT. THOSE SPECIAL, CHOSEN ONES WILL NOT FORSAKE US. WHAT A WONDERFUL CALLING OR GIFT, IS IT NOT? SEE JAMES 5:19-20.

[NOTE: REMEMBER THOSE BROTHERS WHEN THE TIGHT SHOE IS ON THEIR FOOT. THEY ARE PRECIOUS IN THE KINGDOM AND TO THE KING. DELIBERATELY REMEMBER THEM AND CLOSELY TEND TO THEIR NEEDS. THE HOLY SPIRIT USED THEM TO HELP YOU BOND TO YOUR CROSS WHEN YOU WERE TEMPTED TO CLIMB OFF AND QUIT. THEIR GREATEST NEED MAY BE FOR YOU TO HELP THEM BOND TO THEIRS.]

OF COURSE, WE MAY KEEP OUR PHYSICAL OR SOUL AFFLICTION TO THE END OF OUR EARTH-LIFE AND NEVER BE DELIVERED. JOB AND JONAH WERE DELIVERED PRIOR TO DEATH. JESUS AND PAUL WERE NOT.

WHEN WE PLACE OUR EYES ON JESUS IT MATTERS LITTLE OR NONE AT ALL TO US IF WE KEEP OUR AFFLICTION. AT THAT POINT, IF THE AFFLICTION HAS TO DO WITH SIN, WE MAY NOTICE EVENTUALLY [MEANING “IN GOD’S TIME”] THAT THE SIN HAD CEASED. WE HAD STOPPED STRIVING IN OUR FLESH AGAINST OUR UNRIGHTEOUSNESSS, GIVEN OUR PROBLEM TO THE LORD, AND HE HAD DELIVERED US. SIN HAD SERVED ITS PURPOSE [BUT WAS NEVER JUSTIFIED – ROM. 5:20 -> 6:2] AND BY GRACE IT WAS LEFT BEHIND.

[Insertion: R. N. read an early mailing of this long Thought and quickly responded, saying, “As I have committed myself to follow Him, and never even think of anything else, He is able to have His way with me. I started following Him with many sinful ways as part of my life. As I followed Him those sinful habits and ways just kind of fell by the wayside. I was never able to just make a list of bad things I did and deal with them. Following Him was dealing with them. He has been faithful to deliver me from a long list of shameful things, and has not stopped.” (minimally edited – ed.)]

AS WITH GOD’S PEOPLE, ISRAEL, THOSE THINGS WHICH AFFLICTED US, INCLUDING THOSE CAUSED BY SINFULNESS, HAD HAPPENED FOR OUR AND OTHERS’ BENEFIT – 1 COR. 10:11. GOD’S PEOPLE ARE PRUNED [THAT’S GOOD] AND CHASTISED [THAT’S NOT SO GOOD] BUT ARE NEVER THROWN IN THE TRASH CAN [THAT’S BAD, AND NOT GOD’S WAY].

THERE ARE THINGS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE REMOVAL OF OUR MORE NOTICABLE AND DISTRESSING BODY OR SOUL AFFLICTIONS. IF WE ARE HEAVILY INTO “PERFECTION ASAP” THAT STATEMENT MAY SOUND LIKE HERESY. BUT THOSE UNRIGHTEOUSNESSES THAT WE CONSIDER LESS NOTICABLE AND LESS BOTHERSOME MAY BE OF HIGHER PRIORITY ON THE MASTER’S LIST THAN THOSE THAT ARE MORE OBVIOUS AND MORE BOTHERSOME. IT IS REMARKABLE HOW THE LORD MAY BLESS THE WORK OF SO MANY OF HIS OBVIOUSLY UNRIGHTEOUS CHILDREN, FOR A WHILE.

ALTERNATE GRACE IS FOR PRODUCING A DEEPENED DEPENDENCE UPON HIM, A GREATER EASE OF BREAKING OTHER HABITS AND OTHERS’ HABITS [IN THE SPIRIT INSTEAD OF IN THE FLESH – GAL. 3:3], AND AN EASE of MAKING CHANGES IN GOD-GIVEN RIGHTEOUS RESPONSIBILITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS [JOB, FAMILY, CHURCH, NATION – LUKE 14:25-35]. HIS GRACE IS ALWAYS PRESENT AND ALWAYS ADEQUATE.

ADDENDUM: IT IS EASY TO SPOT THE MAN WHO HAS ACCOMPLISHED SUCCESS [FINANCIAL PROSPERITY, OVERCOME HIS ALCOHOLISM, ETC.] BY VIRTUE OF HIS OWN EFFORTS – THE SELF-MADE MAN. THEY HAVE NO PEACE BECAUSE THEY STROVE MIGHTILY TO GAIN SUCCESS AND MUST CONTINUE VIGILENTLY TO MAINTAIN THEIR SUCCESS, AND THEY ARE HARD ON THOSE WHO CANNOT DO THE SAME. THE MAN WHO KNOWS HIS SUCCESS WAS BY GOD’S GRACE HAS A RELAXED SOUL AND IS FULL OF MERCY TOWARD THOSE WHO ARE YET STRUGGLING.

9. What is the difference between Old Testament and New Testament prophets and their ministries? Answer: Nothing. Those ministries have continued and, where utilized, are producing similar fruit that cannot be produced without them.

Sometimes we hear harsh things about the prophetic ministry; for example, that it is not graceful or loving, that therefore it has no place among New Testament believers. That’s what God’s people in the Old Testament days also said. If you tend to think that way, reread the prophets. They were essential to God’s people. They kept them out of trouble [at least tried] and showed them the right way. When things went bad, they gave them direction and hope.

The New Testament prophets did and do the same – 1 Cor. 14:24-25. The problem: As in the Old Testament, our New Testament prophets are “in competition” with false prophets who pander to the crowd; and there are lots of false prophets.

Godly saints who are not prophets also occasionally receive a word from the Lord, and they are to properly minister it. They have the Holy Spirit charisma gift of prophecy – 1 Cor. 12:10. That’s a true gift to the church but is not to be confused with the office gift of prophet, which is one of the five ministries that Jesus had and which have been distributed more widely among the church than has the office of prophet – Eph. 4:11. That office of prophet is occupied by those who receive words and directions from the Lord and are called to watch over the Lord’s church and word.

In addition, there are many faithful saints who say, “God said” but that which they speak did not come from God – at least in the fashion of “God said.” Their words are from themselves, which is to be neither diminished nor elevated beyond that which it actually is. But, it was not a word that they heard from God which, if it was, they would lay their lives down upon it. Yet, they are a faithful and righteous group, have biblically informed minds, and are sensitive to the Holy Spirit. That which was generated in them was more in the form of advice, opinion, and insightfulness and originated from within them. They should be encouraged in their ministry and taught to call their offering what it is, but not “words from God.” God’s word always stands but the words generated in our godly minds do not attain to the infallibility of His.

Some additional points here: 1) False prophets and godly saints who know the Lord and His ways – neither of which receive “God said” words, seem to flourish among the immature, the untaught, and those who are looking for anything that tingles their skin or itches their ears. 2) The spiritually immature often seek those kinds of things, so will fall for error. One definition of spiritual maturity is “having attained to the day when we do not need to be lied to about anything, when the truth will not long pain us nor will we avoid it.” Being “almost mature” is when others do not need to soften the truth to us. 3) False prophets comfort sinners in their sin; true prophets confront sinners in their sin. 4) True prophets’ ministry is designed to lead sinners to repentance and restoration of their relationship with their Savior – Jer. 23:21-22; Lam. 2:14; 1 Cor. 14:23-25.

10. Christianity is not a religion about Jesus; it is a relationship with Jesus. Evil powers may stop or take over the religious aspects of Christianity, and even stop the dissemination of information about Jesus, but the Lord still reveals Himself to people by the Spirit who then draws them into intimacy with Jesus. That is happening these years, especially among Muslims.

There is a divine constancy at work. The Bible as a history book shows that God works behind the scenes to maintain and to propagate His life in the world. In the natural, it seems at times that all is lost, but actually little had been lost – God had secreted off a remnant which He uses to again spread the message of the Living God.

It is the same with us individually. Over the years, you may have been tempted toward unbelief at times, thinking that nothing of the Lord was going on in your life [Of course you were, you had to be, all of us have been.]. But even if all that the Lord wanted during those times was your trust in Him, He got it, didn’t he. [That’s a statement, not a question.] But He was working below the surface, behind the scenes, hidden even from your conscious mind so that your confidence could all be of faith.

That pleased Him very much. You knew that you were part of the irresistible kingdom and irresistible King who planted something in your soul like a seed in the ground, and that it would show and bear fruit in His good time – Mark 4:26-29. The schedule for harvesting from you is posted in His books. It may take a long time earth-wise, but remember that the Dark Ages lasted 1,000 years, during which time there was a powerful religious system that persecuted the occasional lights that broke through the darkness. Like with each of us, the Lord had all in hand.

The seeds of the good news and its harvest times are irresistible. You have good roots, have been watered and fertilized. The harvest is near.

11. In the meantime, what generic things are required of us? I do not ask what is each of our personal callings, but what commonality is required of every one of us? Everyone could make his own and long list, but how about Micah’s list in 6:8 – “Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.”

According to a dictionary of Bible words, mercy is “the outward manifestation of pity; it assumes need on the part of him who receives it, and resources adequate to meet the need on the part of him who shows it.” I think that we should not question whether a person needs mercy, but how may I extend mercy in an appropriate way and is my spiritual life rich enough to be helpful?

12. Another “in the meantime” to follow Thought No. 10: While we are waiting on the Lord [remaining still while being expectant – Ps. 37:7; Is. 8:17; Acts 17:16] we can wait on the Lord [attend to His needs as a servant at His table – 2 Chron. 7:6; 2 Kings 5:2; 1 Cor. 9:13]. So waiting does not necessarily mean sitting on our hands.

13. When we huff and puff to blow down the enemy we have abandoned our strong point, our strength. In Revelation 5:6-14 and 17:14 we are shown that it is the Lamb who defeats these unholy-backed earth powers. That says to me that resurrection power is received by going to the cross [the way the Lamb did], and taking it up daily [per the Lamb’s instructions]. Huffing and puffing does no good; force and fear are the devil’s ways. He goes about roaring like a lion seeking whom he may devour – 1 Pet. 5:8.

14. It has been determined that out of 156 countries evaluated, Israel is the eleventh happiest country on Earth. The six factors used to evaluate the nations were: real GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy, having someone to count on, perceived freedom to make life’s choices, freedom from corruption, and generosity. That’s a fine list of factors. They seem to be established according to the effect the kingdom of God has made on a nation.

The list of countries began with Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, Holland and Sweden. Israel was eleventh, the United States was seventeenth, and the United Kingdom twenty-secondth. Israel’s neighbors were far down the list.

Happiness seems to be a critical component to the development and progress of a nation. Yet, none of those factors openly considered the happiness enjoyed while enduring for being persecuted for Christ’s sake [Jam. 5:11; 1 Pet. 3:14], through being disciplined by the Almighty [Job 4:17], and for simply being one of the Lord’s people [Ps. 144:15].

15. Fear is a powerful deterrent, is it not? It has the same effect against evil as against righteousness. We can have everything necessary for victory, peace and prosperity, but a little fear can undermine all. The Lord through Moses told God’s people to not be afraid of all those nations, each of which was greater than Israel, and to not fear them – Deut. 7:17-21. He told them to remember what He did to the Egyptians and committed Himself to doing the same to all others of His and their enemies – except that He would incorporate His peoples’ faithfulness and fighting power in with His. If there was anything else needed to complete their task of entirely driving them out of the Promised Land, He had additional means that they had not heard of yet [v. 20].

No wonder the Lord Jesus often said, “Don’t fear.” Fear deprives us of reason, action and faith.

16. The best educated theologian is the one who understands the most about the life in which he has been placed.

17. For this Thought remember that “normal” is not the same as “average.” “Just being human” is being “average.” It is “just being human” when we worry, which is usually about our health, finances, or loved ones. That is “average” but not “normal.” It’s “just being human.”

Jesus said: “Stop being anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on.” See more in Matthew 6:25-34 and Luke 12:22-34. It is not normal to doubt. God is working for His glory and your eternal betterment in every situation of your life. I suppose we could say that worry is normal for a person who does not know God, but I am talking to those who do, who know that worry is a sin.

Worry says loudly, into God’s face, that He is not trustworthy, that He is a liar, and that He is being rejected because He does not meet my demands. Worry shows even more than that. Worry shows that I choose to believe a lie before I believe God’s truth.

The normal Christian believes the truth. He is an overcomer because he does not accept lies. The Great Liar, Satan, has no power over us when we do not believe him.

18. It is worth it. We will see the value of our crosswalk later, if not immediately. It took only a few hours for Jesus to see His results, although it was several years if we count His entire earthlife. But the Holy Spirit will increase Christ Jesus in us as we allow the cross to do its work of decreasing us. It will be worth it, saint.

I’m tempted to say: “Just do the opposite of that which is humanly natural.” That means, “watch out for self-esteem,” which would lead you in the wrong direction. Self-esteem increases the self and resists the Holy Spirit who will not push on or shout at us. We resist Him to our detriment.

The flow of human life is downhill. As we empty ourselves we are filled and lifted up.

The reward in this life is seeing Jesus’ character and nature coming to life in us. Certainly there is more reward later but for now we are blessed with seeing how fruitful God’s Seed in us is. It is in seeing how much of Him is seen in us instead of us in us. Our character is transformed as we walk those difficult paths with Him.

“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” – John 16:33. That’s a threefold statement: a promise, a command, and a powerful statement. Because it is poured in concrete, is seems that we should make the most of our tribulation events, doesn’t it. They are opportunities for growing, maturing and learning. In them we get to know the Lord better. Thus, the depth of our revelation of God is measured by the depth of our suffering righteously.

19. Adam ate the forbidden fruit in an attempt to, in some way, please or help his wife, Eve. He failed. Moses tried to please God instead of God’s people. He succeeded. David succeeded, John the Baptist succeeded, Jesus succeeded, and Paul and John succeeded. Bill Cosby, a living American comedian and serious social reformer said, “I don’t know the way to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.”

20. This is going to be a deep Thought. Basically, it will ask each reader this question: “Do you want God’s promises or God’s presence?” To answer accurately we must be introspective and honest.

The Lord had told Moses and His people that He would take them out of Egypt [and Egypt out of them], lead them across the wilderness, and into the Promised Land. We Christians take that pattern and leadership and appropriate it for ourselves, as indeed we should. I want to examine it just a bit.

He took them out of Egypt, into the wilderness, but He Himself did not take them into the Promised Land. Remember that in Exodus 32 His people chose a god of gold, wanted to dance and play, discarded their memories of Moses [whom they thought dead], substituting lust and idolatry for their living God.

Then, in chapter 33, there was a radical change in Israel’s status with the Lord. They were still God’s people but the Lord told Moses that He Himself would not be with them. [THAT’S A BIG CHANGE!] Instead, He would send His angel to do the job. He was no longer with them, but He would see to it that they would be led and blessed and empowered as much as was necessary for Him to fulfill His promise of getting them into the Promised Land.

They could claim their inheritance which, unfortunately, was what they wanted, but He would not be with them. They would have their rights and His protection, but not His presence. Moses perceived the difference between God being with them and God providing for them. Moses did not like the idea of the Lord not going with them, but he had no choice – God had spoken.

What that says to me is that the Lord offers success of various sorts and degrees, even though He is not with us like He could be with us if we were not simply looking for success. See Matthew 7:21-26. When we would settle for angels, for obvious spiritual activity, for miracles, and for things we are settling for far less than is offered. The Lord is offering Himself. His people claimed all of their rights, His promises, and His results but they did not get His presence. There was no holy, awesome or convicting presence of God among them.

Moses wanted to know God [be intimately with Him so that he would be made like Him] – Ex. 33:12-13. Paul wanted the same – Phil. 3:10. There is something much better than walking in an abundance of God’s fulfilled promises. It is called being holy; having the presence of Jesus in and with us. If we want what Moses and Paul wanted, we will not be focusing on and feeding on God’s things, but on Him.

21. Recently, R. and J. M. were meeting with dangerous men – men who are dangerous to the kingdom of darkness. The dangerous ones were Kuwaiti, Egyptian, Palestinian, and Kurdish. All were Muslim background believers. All were believers with the world’s sentence of death on them. One had a $6 million price on his head. Some had worldwide satellite television programs aimed at Muslims. All were facing death for their love for Jesus. They had lost their families, fortunes and futures for Jesus. These dangerous men were encouraged by J. M.’s words and presence. They are willing to pay the price. They are our brothers.

22. Most of us would like to have godly spiritual power over a certain person or, perhaps, a small group. We have such small desires. I think that we had more grandiose thoughts when we desired evil upon those who displeased us, such as, “Smash the guy!” or, “Wipe out the entire team!” or, “Destroy that nation!” In our unrighteousness our scope of desire was unfettered.

My Thought is that the Lord wants us to think even bigger now that we are walking in the Spirit. He wants us to pray for and to exert His spiritual power over individuals, cities and nations. He wants us to have a world-sized practical vision. There is no need for us to shrink our vision just because we are now God’s righteous people who know that we are earthly nobodies with nothing and going nowhere. [That’s a definition of someone who is in a good position to be available to the Lord for becoming an overcomer.]

Some will become overcomers; some [many?] won’t. Not everyone will go on with the Lord. But somebody will! Some will be satisfied with being Jesus’ friend, sons of God, headed for heaven. But some will press on “into” the Lord, “into” the kingdom. To those He will give the fulfillment of their biggest thoughts. “He who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations” – Rev. 2:26. No reason why we should not start thinking big now.

23. “What is harder than rock, or softer than water?” The Roman poet, Ovid, asked that question. He put forth his question and its answer in order to teach perseverance. He pointed out that the softer of the two, water, hollows out the harder of the two, rock.

24. When you read 1 Peter 5:5 are you more encouraged or convicted? Can you name the elders to whom you are submitted? How much [deeply and broadly] are you submitted to them?

Here are some common reasons given for not submitting to leaders of the church: Perhaps you have extenuating circumstances that Peter and the Holy Spirit did not foresee. Perhaps times have changed. Perhaps no elder will allow you to submit yourself. Perhaps you have no elders.

All things considered, how do you fulfill that directive? Are you more encouraged or convicted? Neither? Satisfaction can create such a warm place for our flesh.

25. In my teens and twenties, on those rare times when I was curious about things religious and before the Lord grabbed me, I recall a question that a few of us know-it-alls would banter about, especially with young preachers or ministerial students: If we are believers in Christ Jesus, how much do we have to obey Him in order to not go to hell? In other words, what can we get away with? That approach to the Lord, together with lots of other junk in my soul, not only was bad theology but still magnifies the Lord’s love for me beyond my comprehension. Romans 11:33 comes to mind.

26. We understand the meaning and the partial accuracy of the saying, “Friendliness breeds contempt.” It says that when we get to know someone sufficiently, we find things in them that lower our respect for them. As I said, that is partly accurate.

How many people have you gotten closer to and found that your respect for them increased the better and longer you knew them?

27. Have you noticed how blessed you were when you created peace? That peace may have been created by turning off the T-V or tuning it to a different program. It may have been the day you decided that in your home people would talk to one another only in the same room, not by shouting to another room. It may have been when you decided to be a participant instead of a commander at home and work. It may have been when you put Proverb 14:1 into effect.

Peacemakers change ambience. That’s what Jesus said in Matthew 5:9. As such, we become ambassadors of grace sent to represent the King. We have been sent to represent heaven in the midst of hell. Peacemaking is not for the fainthearted. Right? Simply put, it starts with oneself.

28. On average, an acre of land in Texas can produce 821 pounds of cotton or 2,784 pounds of wheat or 50,000 pounds of strawberries.

29. None of us know ourselves perfectly, but the Lord does and He is able and willing to reveal to us that which He knows – at least those parts that are timely for us to know from time to time. My Thought is that if we accept our death sentence and stop alibiing, we will make faster progress in our growth toward righteousness and maturity.

We have the sentence of death upon our flesh [THANK GOD!!] because no good thing resides therein. When we begin to make excuses for that in our flesh which is not of God, we are appealing our death sentence, and delaying the Holy Spirit’s clean-up work.

ALLEGORY: Jesus resigned Himself to His Father’s plan for Him, gave up, and died on His cross. The two thieves resisted to the end and had to have their legs broken. Their resistance to God’s plan for their lives only prolonged their suffering.

Being resigned to our fate [God’s plan] means that we are in a position of at least partial insight and humble openness. That’s a really good place to abide.

If, like Paul, we are a prisoner of the Lord we will not protest our innocence. We will submit ourselves to the Lord, stop our struggles, and more soon live Christ’s resurrection life.

30. For the 100% of us who are pained by opposition but enjoy agreement, remember this little word of caution: “Opposition is no more a sign of there being a problem, than agreement is a sign of having the answer.”

31. How good are you at giving; at being generous? In this Thought we will limit our thinking to financial giving. For most Christians that starts with our regular giving to our home congregation. Then there are the established worthy charities – the ones that especially beckon to us. Then come the occasional needs that are put before us on an irregular basis, perhaps only once and very informally. I’ll let that list cover this topic.

The question: The King of the kingdom in which we live and breathe and have our being has given us instructions to give without notoriety, with liberality, and without too much consideration of its effect on our financial resources. Do you find that easy to do? It is easier to do if you give cash. No record is made except on the records in the King’s financial office.

Otherwise, giving a check means the gift makes at least one earthly financial record. I have never allowed that to bother me, because I don’t think the Lord’s command was meant to stir any amount of paranoia on the giver’s part. It’s o. k. to get caught unavoidably while doing a good deed, just so it does not trap us by stirring us to pride. That’s a lot different than experiencing the pure joy of giving secretly with no strings attached, isn’t it. For that free sort of giving we get to share in the Lord’s immediate pleasure and in a subsequent heavenly reward.

Another consideration for giving secretly is that it prevents others’ value judgments. It’s sad to hear someone say, “That person should have given more.” Secret giving prevents that sort of thinking in others.

32. New Testament applications of the Abrahamic Covenant are made and maintained unilaterally. God established them. His Abrahamic-type promises cannot fail because they do not depend upon us in any way. Once we are chosen to be children of faith [saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves, it being a gift of God – Eph. 2:8] our eternal salvation is secure.

Then there are the daily living promises that come to us by way of the Mosaic Covenant. They are conditional, meaning if we do [whatever] God will do [whatever]. We can suffer loss in regards to those promises – if we do, God does; if we don’t, God doesn’t – John 15:7 and many others.

We should understand the difference because we exercise those two covenants with our children on a daily basis. They are our children so that basic relationship is never threatened [Abrahamic Covenant]. However, if they do not do their chores they cannot go to the movie with the other kids. If they do their chores, they can go. That’s the Mosaic Covenant, based on “adequate performance.”

33. The following Thought is a Bible Study handout on POTTERY AND OUR POTTER. It has been an encouragement to a few saints who thereafter were better able to take their hands off of their souls and leave that job to the Lord. Help yourself.

