THOUGHTS OF SEPTEMBER, 2015

1. Jesus told us that He came [and yet will come] to fulfill all that is written in the Old Testament, that not the smallest thing said therein would fail to be completed, and that anyone who tried to do or say otherwise with those words would be in trouble with Him – Matt. 5:17-19. He added that every word would be accomplished – Luke 16:17. Add to those assurances that all of the Old Testament is inspired by God, making it profitable for 1) doctrine [what is right], 2) reproof [what is not right], 3) correction [how to get right], and 4) instruction in righteousness [how to stay right] – 2 Tim. 3:16. Be encouraged that those ancient words are very reliable. Jesus of Nazareth laid down His life trusting in them, and so do we.

2. If your romantic fire needs some stoking [adding of holy fuel], you two can take some time to study Solomon’s book of songs. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines, which should grab our attention when he speaks of things pertaining to marriage. His book’s erotic content caused the rabbis to forbid it to anyone under the age of 30, so it also comes with considerable advocacy from the traditionally minded.

3. It is amazing! The divorce rate in America is the same whether among Christians or non-Christians. Likewise, 65% of all abortions in America are performed on Christians. Among those are 200,000 per year who label themselves as being born again Christians.

James wrote his letter to us to define faith: Faith is “obeying despite the consequences;” not “believing in spite of the evidence.” Grab hold of that! Obeying despite the consequences shows by that very work that our faith is alive, not dead – James 2:17.

4-A. I have known for years that the giving of one’s testimony is more than relating the history of an event. If done “right” it is the reliving of history. It is the incorporation of others into that again-fresh initial event. The Hebrew word for “testimony” means “do again.” When we talk about what the Lord did yesterday or 50 years ago [or 2,000 years ago during others’ lives] the same power of faith is stirred as was originally. The Lord actually “does it again” for the new hearers. That’s the real power of storytelling, whether of God or otherwise.

As it was at the cross, some will “see again” your life-giving testimony but will just keep enjoying their popcorn, asking “So, what’s all the excitement about?” Others will criticize and attack you. Some will have their ears tingled and be interested in only hearing more. And others will take up their crosses and follow you/Jesus. Paul experienced that range of responses in Athens, Greece in Acts 17:16-34.

We already knew that the Lord knew what He was doing when He told the Israelites to regularly relate those old stories, as we do the Gospel story, so this gives some additional understanding as to why we are to re-tell them. When we begin to re-member [re-assemble, re-attach detached parts/members, again make sense of], we can even sense the original power and life of our original occasion. When the sin-full woman poured the ointment on Jesus’ head, He said that wherever in the world that aspect of the good news would be preached [testified about], the same spirit of worship would be stirred/released in those present – Matt. 26:13. That is more than her action being remembered and her being honored. Her testimony re-assembles that occasion for us to experience the same as she did.

That helps explain the root and route of the power that comes with preaching the gospel.

4-B. It may not be so, but read John’s second letter as if he wrote it to Mary, Jesus’ mother. John had an especially assigned responsibility for Mary – John 19:26-27. It is thought that he took her into his home and for the remainder of her life cared for her as for his own mother.

Has the Lord assigned someone(s) to you for special responsibility? Broadly, “Yes, He has given me millions of brothers and sisters whom He wants me to love and care for as for myself.” But, perhaps more specifically, He has chosen certain others for us to take responsibility for – very meaningful responsibility. It may be paying their rent, paying their pharmacy bills, educating their children, or stepping into their lives to do all of that and more, for years.

Now, to avoid being a hypocrite, where did I put my dusty old cross!

5. There are many promises in the Bible. In which book is there a promise to those who will read and heed that book? It’s in the book that many consider too difficult to study, and certainly too confusing to actually live, The Book of Jesus’ Revelation to John, chapter 1, verse 3. That difficulty can lead the disciple to study it more diligently, and other believers to lay it aside. Perhaps you are like me, having done both.

If you are interested enough about 1:3 to do something additional about it, ask and I will be glad to send you by e-mail my 72 page study on The Revelation. I have gathered my thoughts on The Revelation over the years into that study. It was a pleasant and rewarding labor, freely given to me through the Lord’s many resources, and I gladly offer it to you [and to anyone else] for the asking.

The causes of our attraction to The Revelation are 1) it is part of the Lord’s blood-bought Book, 2) we want to heed His words, especially as the times draw near, 3) we desire the blessing that He wants for us, and 3) the facts therein are efficacious. We are a people of the Light, called to walk in the Light, including knowing what is going on in the seasons that we are in.

6. Scripture gives us lots of end time signs. Does it surprise you that the most commonly given sign of end times is deception and apostasy in the church? Part of the church will be fine-tuned and growing spiritually as the end draws near, and will be ready. Another part of the church [along with those who are considered to be part of the church but are only part of the church’s religious culture] will be falling away from the faith/truth. That is speaking of the church, ourselves, not the non-church. Paul was talking about “us” in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

Apostasy must deny its apostasy; its only alternative is repentance.

7. A study has found that when young adults are dissatisfied with their physicians they tell their peers. When seniors are dissatisfied, they tell their physicians. How are we to interpret that?! [Best answer, from K. H., is that “the seniors have a solidarity concerning their physicians being in the battle with them, not for them as the younger patients may think.”]

8. “There are many kinds of success in life worth having.” -- Theodore [Teddy] Roosevelt [1858-1919], 26th American president, Dutch Reformed believer, author, explorer, soldier, naturalist, 1906 Nobel Peace Prize recipient.

One “ministry” we all have is “the ministry of our current reality.” We are often given the opportunity to speak the truth to someone, that often being that they are not a failure. A couple of years ago I spoke to a large gathering of prisoners in a maximum security prison. Some were homosexuals, which showed openly in several ways. My topic was that all of them were MEN, no matter what they did to be sent to prison, no matter how bad they had been, no matter WHATEVER! They were MEN! They listened closely. Many of us do not see our value to others and our successfulness, especially when we have done poorly and are in seemingly impossible circumstances.

Typical things like lack of great financial success can obscure parents’ success as parents. Plodding workers may miss seeing the importance of their well-done work.

Teddy had asthma as a child but “grew out of it” to become an energetic outdoorsman. In Cuba during the Spanish-American War he led his regiment of volunteer Rough Riders [ivy leaguers, amateur and professional athletes, upscale gentlemen, cowboys, frontiersmen, American Indians, hunters, miners, prospectors, former soldiers, tradesmen, and sheriffs] on an open ground charge up Kettle Hill against entrenched soldiers with repeating rifles. His was the only horse, which made him an easy target. He said later that because he was asking his men to do the impossible, “The only way to get them to do it in the way it had to be done was to lead them myself.” That sounds Jesus-like and Churchill-ian.

9. “Develop success from failures. Discouragement and failures are two of the surest steppingstones to success.” – Dale Carnegie [1888-1955], American writer and motivational speaker. He who works all things according to the counsel of His own will also turns all things to good for those who love Him and are called according to His will.

Christians are not the only ones who have learned that and other godly processes, as they have built upon the crumbled foundations of their failures. The created universe [that’s everything] has built-in principles. Anyone who gets in step with the Creator finds that things work as if there is an overriding guiding and controlling hand. All of creation proclaims the existence and nature of its Creator.

10. “There are no traffic jams along the extra mile.” – Roger Staubach [1942-present], Dallas Cowboy football player, Roman Catholic believer, commercial realtor. What is your observation along that mile?

11. It is an occasional thought: “Am I on course and in step with the Lord’s plan for my soul?” I’m not sure that anyone should devote much time to that question, but it might be due an occasional reflection between the saint and the Lord. I’ll offer a poor-boy gauge for the question, for which there are many other gauges. James told us we are to count it all joy [which is different from being happy about it] when we encounter various trials. His immediately offered reason for being joyous in trials is because we know that the trial is a test of our faith, from which we will emerge stronger – James 1:2-4. You noticed that if we do not know that the test is our Lord’s customized situation for “me,” we will flop, fail, complain, fight against the pricks, react superficially by fighting against the humans or the devil, and in general work backward instead of forward -- Acts 26:14.

Gold in the furnace comes out more pure and more valuable to the Jeweler. By definition and purpose, time in the fire is not an easy time for the flesh, but it results in our righteousness and our service being on the Lord’s schedule. That is being “perfect” -- perfectly on course and in step with the Lord’s plan for my soul. That’s the perfection that is attainable in our daily walk and for His eventual inspection when each one of us stands alone before Him on that wonderful day.

12. The Syrian refugee situation is a disaster and is causing serious problems all over Europe and Asia, and the Americas. Thousands and thousands are fleeing for their lives into formerly christianized Nations. That inflow would be good news to homegrown evangelists if there were enough of them/us, but instead it is a time bomb because needy Moslems [spiritually, financially and culturally] are among them/us and there is little help for them. They are out of their immediate danger, and that is good, but they are now in danger of not being culturally christianized and evangelized.

The nation of Israel is being pressured [nothing new in that!] to accept more Syrian refugees by opening its borders to them. Israel has treated thousands of wounded from the fighting in Syria, and has helped them rebuild their lives. But Israel is a very small country people-wise and territory-wise, and must control its borders. Israel is noted by the informed for helping other countries following natural disasters, while not receiving much international credit for doing so. In truth, they have nothing to prove regarding their commitments to humanitarianism.

Israel is fortunate to have a buffer zone of Syrian Druze villages between them and the Islamic State (IS) terror militia. The Druze is a political and religious sect that broke from other Muslims in the 11th century. They are monotheistic and Abrahamic, and have elements of other religious such as Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism. They are strong on matters of the mind, and are seekers of the truth. Being a minority among the Muslims, they have suffered persecution, including ethnic cleansing over the centuries. They are a close-knit, cohesive community and have integrated fully into their adopted homelands – including in and adjacent to Israel. They serve in the Israeli military, have attained top positions in Israeli politics and public service, and are well-integrated into Israeli society.

13. The Holy Spirit inspired Ezekiel [36:22-28] to write about the return of scattered Israel to the Land of God’s Promise. And why is the Lord bringing them home: “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went.” Did you hear that? He had scattered them among the nations of the world, where they have done poorly. They have diminished and contaminated His name [by denying Jesus and by their unrighteous behavior – ed.] and the way He is handling it is to again gather them in the Land and do things that will show Himself to be who and how He is. He will prove Himself holy among them in the sight of the world -- on the world stages of television, etc. He will then clean them up, put His Spirit within them, cause them to live His righteousness, and they will be in the Land – where He had said they would be and how they would be. He will do it before the eyes of the world. What patience! What clarity of intention! What adherence to purpose! What power! What faithfulness! The return of long-lost Israelites from Ethiopia is almost complete. The return of those from India is underway. And the return of the Kaifeng Jewish Community from China is beginning.

14. What are your thoughts about those people who seem to take too much of your time by bringing you their complaints? Do you wish they would keep them to themselves, or stop bothering you altogether? Colin Powell [1937-present], American military leader and statesman, is sharing a thought with us: “The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can lead them or concluded that you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership.”

Listen to those complaints.

15. “By leadership we mean the art of getting someone else to do something that you want done because he wants to do it.” – Dwight D. Eisenhower [1890-1969], 34th American president, Presbyterian. It is wonderful how the Lord and His ways ripple out into a christianized culture. That definition of leadership is a perfect description, from a unique perspective, of how the Lord leads us.

16. There is value in believing that there is [an invisible] god, even if one’s belief goes no further than that, for such simple belief can prevent simple idolatry and worse. Moreover, that level of believing the truth can lead one onward toward perceiving the nature of that god [who is the Lord God] and produce well-directed worship – Rom. 1:18-32. Measures of faith produce measures of righteous living.

The unbeliever who turns to Jesus, and the believers who continually feed on and drink from Jesus, are certainly rewarded. But, there is also value in going to Jesus and His written words [John 7:37-39], even if one is not a Christian. Gandhi and others have studied Christianity and gained head knowledge, understanding, good behavior, right living, coordination with Christian culture, etc. Many are christianized without becoming Christians. Cultures have been greatly influenced by studying and agreeing with Jesus and His teachings. Obviously, such rudimentary “belief” lacks essentials of being born again, but such becomes part of the calling of the church. The rivers of living waters that flow through us are meant to water the desert in several ways.

17. When reading Isaiah 50:4-7 notice that those were the words of the pre-incarnate Son of God as He spoke them to Isaiah, their recorder. Notice God’s purpose for the tongues of disciples – to speak the Lord’s word to the weary – the mind and heart of God to those whom He loves. In these verses the point is not that He will change their/our situations, but will help us in our souls when we are weary. He sustains us in our troubles. While we are in the process of being discipled/disciplined He sustains us by His words [and attitude] through others who have been through our situations.

Then notice that Jesus was awakened every morning for the day’s briefing, to have His ears freshly tuned to His Father’s words. Jesus of Nazareth had to be taught what to do and say, because He was committed to doing and saying only that which His Father wanted Him to do and say, even if it was for Him to delay helping His friend who was dying. By the time He had delayed several days, Lazarus had died. Lazarus’ sisters had sent word to fetch Jesus but He did not respond. That’s tough love, which always has a higher purpose. Lazarus’ death had that higher purpose. According to Isaiah, Jesus had been told those mornings to not go to Lazarus’ sickbed.

As a result, Jesus had the tongue of disciples and brought life to His dead friend, His friend’s sisters, His disciples, to the other mourners, and to us.

What is the alternative to having the tongue of a disciple? Answer: deafened/closed ears. In Luke 9:43-45 we see that the disciples did not understand why Jesus [again!] inserted information and a teaching on His coming death – right there in the middle of tremendous displays of God’s presence and power. Why did God close the ears of those who [partially] wanted to be disciples? The next several verses show that they had functional, un-dealt-with sin, and they did not want it disturbed. The Lord conceals His heart and words from those who conceal their sins, and withholds His forgiveness. Think Adam and Eve. Think Pharisees. But He reveals his heart and words to those who are in the active process of being conformed to Him. Therein is shown the power of unrepentant sin, exampled also by the lack of answers to our prayers when we do not forgive others.

18. For 2,000 years Christians have had a problem, but only in our flesh. Our problem is that our God is invisible. We cannot show pictures of Him [yet], cannot touch Him [yet], cannot point Him out to others [yet], and often do not have [flesh] evidence of His very presence with us. Only those whom the Lord opens their eyes to “see,” can “see” Him. That is the way He is building His church. The invisible God must reveal Himself to unbelievers, or they are left to be unbelievers or to have an intellectual belief.

19. “Patience is the best remedy for any trouble.” – Plautus [254-185 B. C.], Roman playwright. That probably helps some but, for me, “keeping my peace” has been my most helpful focus in my more trying times. That involves being silent, drawing closer to the Lord, and focusing on the condition and needs of my at least temporary opponent.

20. In Genesis 2:15 Adam found himself “alone at home” and with a garden to take care of. He needed some company; whatever that may become only the Lord knew. What did he get? Only some animals – additional responsibilities. What he needed was a helpmate, an auxillary, a subordinate who was equal in personage, an aide-de-camp, a creation who had the essentials that he lacked, one who would collaborate with him without being an inferior or less important person, someone who would create within him and draw from him the nature of God – love, productivity, provision, responsibility, sacrifice, redemption, and protection.

To create that perfect helpmate God put Adam to sleep. Guys, do you remember how you were “asleep” when the Lord was processing you for your wife? We knew what we were doing but we didn’t know what we were doing.

On the topic of Adam and Eve, isn’t it wonderful how simple, non-explanatory answers to important questions are totally adequate when you respect the persons who are providing those answers and making the decisions. Paul’s answer by the Holy Spirit, to the question of why women are subordinate [in authority order, but equal in personage] to men is that Adam was created first and that Eve was deceived when she transgressed – 1 Tim. 2:13-14. Try that for adequacy at a meeting of feminists.

21. How content are we when the Lord does something we don’t understand, especially when we don’t agree with what He did? Does He have to explain Himself to us, and do we have to agree with His explanation? Is “It is done, [ultimately] God did it, so I accept it from Him” our response? That was Jesus’ response to having had a ministry failure in Matthew 11:20-26. He had done miracles but the people had not repented, which had been the purpose of His ministry. Repentance was the project, not the glory of God as shown in His miracles. He held them personally responsible for their lack of repentance but knew that His Father had been the One who had prevented their repentance, so He accepted the results without knowing any more than, “It pleased you, Father, to do it that way.”

22. What is it of yourself that has brought you along into success in life, business, family, kingdom living, etc.? We have the insight to know it was God’s grace, but what outstanding aspect of yours can you see that brought most of your matters to accomplishment? I’ll guess that “hanging on longer than most others” is high on your list. That is “endurance until the end” working out in your life. I’ll say, “Congratulations.” The Lord will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

23. There are two directions for us to look in order to know about God. One is into the heavens: 1) to know that He exists, because a creation requires a creator, 2) to be persuaded about His wisdom, because a design requires a designer, 3) to sense His power, because a movement requires a mover, and 4) to be impressed by His infiniteness, because the universe is endless. As science has progressed over the centuries, these evidences have become more persuasive.

The other direction for us to look in order to know about God is upon the earth where His: 1) holiness, 2) justice, 3) love, 4) mercy, 5) goodness, and 6) faithfulness proclaim Him. The Holy Spirit uses the record of Him in His Book to heal our blindness and deafness to the One who is the Truth, the Life and the Way.

24. God’s blessings are abundant through faithful obedience. Help yourself.