THOUGHTS OF DECEMBER, 2015

Old Testament prophets sounded the alarms of their times. Some of God’s people listened and responded; others hit the snooze button and went back to sleep. Then came John the Baptist and his cousin, Jesus of Nazareth. Some listened to them and responded; others turned them off and went back to life as it was for them. What is the Lord saying to you about yourself and the whirlwind of spiritual activity going on in your [every] church, city, nation, and world? Remember that all things are spiritual.

1. There are lots of things going on in the world that show the gradual out-working of the Truth, Life, and Way as the Lord births His kingdom from in heaven onto earth. For example, Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East. As such, it has elections in which the winners win, the losers lose, and both sides adjust to the elections’ results. Israel’s institutions and rule of law carry the nation through the changes that follow elections and allow the nation to work out its problems, even if it is with difficulty. That is a remarkable result, especially in the Middle East. At least in an earthly sense, Israel is re-forming.

Another example: Doing the wrong thing for the purpose of achieving a good result does not work, either in the flesh or in the Spirit. For years, America [and Europe, et. al.] has been distancing itself from Israel, hoping that the Arabs would respond by becoming better friends with us. The other side of that bad coin is the thought that if we align ourselves too much with Israel, the Arabs would shun us even more than they have. You notice the deficiency of basics in that thinking, such as the basic of: “Do the right thing because it is right, and say that you are doing it because it is the right thing to do.”

Even more basic is the necessity of knowing the times and what is and is not changeable. Peace between Israel and the Arabs has been, is, and will be impossible to achieve during this dispensation. By doing the wrong thing we make our misguided efforts even more and quickly unsuccessful. Since the end of World War II, and the re-birth of nation Israel, America has been distancing itself from Israel and aligning with the Arabs, not seeing that such will not work – for two reasons: 1) There will be the Israel-Arab problem until Jesus reigns in Jerusalem and makes straight the ways of all nations, and 2) the Arabs will not have peace even among themselves until that same time. The Book of Genesis, the Prophets, and the Gospels, are full of resource reading to cover those two reasons. It will require the Messiah to bring peace between tribes, nations and religions. In the meantime, He makes peace from person to person.

That last bit of information is particularly helpful because the Arab Sunni nations [Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Arab nations] continue to need both Israel and the United States [and allies] for protection from the Arab Shiite nations [mainly a nuclear-armed Iran]. The priorities of the Arab Sunnis are not the death of Israel and America, but the help of Israel and America for survival against other Arabs. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict does not threaten their survival; that is mainly a traditional, populace matter. Israel’s existence as a neighboring nation does not threaten them. The Syrian civil war, ISIS, and Iran do threaten them! That which is currently going on in the area of security between Israel and the Sunnis is remarkable and unprecedented – joint military exercises, shared information and technology, and even more of the top secret nature.

Clear, applicable Scripture is unfolding before us. Those who do not read or believe God’s word must wander in darkness and take the consequences. As always, use your biblically informed mind and lively imagination to see spiritual reality, but don’t quit your day job.

2. The more we over-focus on [see, live, and teach] certain aspects of Scripture, the less we see, live, and teach certain other aspects of Scripture that appear to be contrary but are meant to be balances. It is not necessary to fall into that habit. We can honor and cherish both aspects, even while emphasizing one during a brief time of rejoicing over God’s new or deeper or more important revelation to us. Don’t be reluctant to highlight an apparently contrary revelation and admit to ignorance of its application. Much of Scripture appears contradictory or irrelevant at times, but that is part of the nature of fallen although redeemed humanity. We can believe that which we do not understand. That is both Old and New Testament faithfulness.

3. What do you need improved in your soul before your next trial/test/wilderness journey? What are you now doing about that need for improvement? How do you expect to do during the trial? Does your answer read something like: “I’m not perfect. I do quite well in most of my trials. The Lord will not allow me to be tempted beyond my ability to prevail, so why bother between trials with improving my weaknesses? Isn’t that what the trials are for, anyway?” Not the best of thinking.

If so, this is for you. We are provided with abundant resources that enable us to grow, other than awaiting our next trials. It could be said that trials are for us to see how we are doing with using those other resources, and to motivate us to use them before the next trial. Consider: 1) Prayer, specifically directed for our needs, for others’ needs, and to the Lord Himself in thanksgiving and praise. 2) Brotherly counsel from those with whom you walk in openness of soul. 3) Un-brotherly counsel, meaning from those who do not enjoy you. This is a deep source of counsel, if we will seek it. 4) Scripture, as you read/look into it as a mirror.

4. Here is a series of questions designed to stir us to action toward being prepared for life’s difficulties, whether they be daily, occasional or “the end times.” The list has purpose and progressivity to it.

1) Are you an adequately “walled” person? Being walled in this case means to have control of your goings and comings; having established standards for you and yours. In that sense, is your home adequately walled [T-V, literature, guests, prayer, faithfulness, reliability, peacefulness, biblical focus]? Is your church adequately walled, or does almost anything get taught or preached [homosexuality, divorce, family and human relationships]? And your town; does almost anything go and come? And our world? Yes, more and more. You may have noticed that the protective walls are down all around us. A person or city without walls is open to whatever comes, and it does not require a strong force to do much damage or to take over. Conversely, a person or city with walls can resist a stronger force than the city has within itself. A person or city with walls and gates can withstand onslaughts. They will not be easily or quickly overcome. They will be able to resist the enemy until the enemy fails or until friendly forces come to the rescue. Keep those walls up, and maintain friendly forces.

2) Are you guided by the Holy Spirit in all that you do [allowing for imperfection]? That’s God’s project for us and ours for ourselves. We are designed to live by and walk in the Spirit. That’s our normal condition once we are born again. Not being Spirit-led means we are still babes.

3) What is your response when you are attacked? I have a younger brother in the Lord who is an outstanding example of peacefulness when he is attacked. He is patient, does not reactively strike back, battles internally as is needed, checks with the Lord about what is the bigger picture, watches and listens to the enemy, stays engaged, perceives what the problem really is, then moves ahead well-armored and equipped. He is a blessing to behold in action.

4) What are you sure of in life, in your family, on your job, while driving your car, while flying commercially, while pumping gas in your car, when you go to sleep, and when you arise? Assurances, competencies, and absolutes give us strength and peace. Can you enlarge and strengthen those in you and your family? Kids really need sureties.

5) What has the Bible revealed to you about yourself? Is it still revealing new stuff? If not, why not? If yes, you get an A+. See James 1:23 [19-25]. We don’t yet know as much about ourselves as we should, and the Holy Spirit still uses those inspired, written words as a mirror for our souls.

6) Give us 3 examples of how you are currently deceived. [None can be named.] Any you may have named are not deceptions because you already know them. When we are deceived we think we are right. It takes someone else, God or man, to reveal our deceptions to us. How many people do you think know they are capable of having deceptions? Simple deceptions can be such as thinking we are funny or nice when we are not. Other deceptions can be more costly. Jesus said, “Do not be deceived.” Can we come into obedience to Him? Certainly not, if we think we have no deceptions. The truth is a good scrubber of deception, because it/He sets us free when we know the truth [simply hearing the truth does not set us free].

7) Are there any hazards to being spiritually lazy? Notice in the Beatitudes [Matthew 5:3-12] that each of those beautiful rewards also have built-in requirements. For example: If we are merciful we receive mercy; but if we are not merciful do we still receive mercy? If we are not gentle do we still inherit the earth? Why would the Lord have said those things if they were not accurate, meaningful, eternal truths?

8) Are you known as a wise person? Proverb 9:10 [7-12] says that wisdom flows through us when we have the right attitude about the Lord and what He says. What’s so important about being wise?! Isn’t being good adequate? [That’s like saying we don’t want to be good all the time because we want to have some fun.]

9) What is the spiritual past history of this world? Who are its current spiritual leaders? What is its spiritual destiny? It’s good to not be too attached to things that are temporary, imperfect, spiritually off course, and headed for destruction.

10) What is your spiritual past history? Plan to write it out -- only your spiritual history. Who are your spiritual leaders? [That’s a tough question for many Protestants.] What is your spiritual destiny, in this earthly and in the heavenly future?

11) Jesus pointed out that worldly authorities [whether religious or non-religious] work to establish their rule over us. Holy Spiritual authority must be freely submitted to before He has authority. Properly submitting to any level or type of authority produces powerful results, revealing the power of humility.

5. “If you have always done it that way, it is probably wrong.” – Charles F. Kettering [1876-1958], American inventor, engineer, and businessman. That is an essential character element for inventors and visionaries. All of us, even the most solid, grounded, and stable, need some of it in order to remain renewable and repentant.

6. The most basic thing about ministry is whether it is of our flesh or of the Spirit. The bulk of the church's life and ministry can be of the flesh and little of the Spirit. Things of the flesh need not be way-out things like drunkenness, murder, and thievery. They can be our well-meant plans and best good works, and can have obviously good results, but which have no eternal value to them [at least to the doer] because they were not Spirit-directed and empowered – 1 Cor. 13:1-3. Religious flesh supposes that anything it does with a good or God label on it, and with good social results, can be labeled as God's work. Indeed, a Christian's life should show good works of a personal nature, as did Jesus' life during the 30 years before He began His ministry.

But, whether things are of the flesh or of the Spirit take some spiritual discernment because reason and logic can work against spiritual understanding, insight, and discernment. That means the spiritually-minded person can be expected to lose many open debates with good people. Fortunately, we can find agreement between the Bible record, church history, personal experience, and spiritual discernment.

Consider Jesus. He was born of the Spirit, then the Spirit came upon and stayed on Him, then He laid down His life to start doing only His Father's will, then He was Spirit-led into a time of personal wilderness, then He came out of that wilderness in the power of the Spirit, then He was qualified and empowered to represent His Father and begin reproducing Himself. His time spent making disciples [sheep] was capped off with His breathing on them and imparting His same Spirit to them, then telling them they should remain a unit but not begin their ministry until the Spirit had come upon them, after which they should spread out and begin their ministry of spreading the good news and making more disciples who would continue the process until He came again.

The summary: He said we must be born again of the Spirit [become an eternal Family], be anointed by the Spirit [with Jesus' power to be living martyrs], and learn to walk/live/minister in the Spirit. All else is "nothing." It may appear to be lots of something, but on the records in heaven it is nothing. Even if Jesus had impacted the problems of poverty, Roman occupation, and disease, all would have been nothing because His Father had not directed Him to do it and He would not have been empowered by the Spirit for those purposes. He Himself would have been like those He spoke of in Matthew 7:21-23.

All of that "process before doing something" seems so unnecessary to the good, conscientious, religious church -- or, the church may presume that we have already qualified in every way. One course of action is to be assured that we are born again, obey Him into becoming a unit, "sit" and learn of Him, and await God's anointing for ministry. That takes a lot of dying to self during a joint wilderness trip. Many will not abide that. Israel with Moses in their wilderness is our example because those things happened to them and were recorded for our sake -- 1 Cor. 10:11.

Another course of action is to suppose [perhaps rightly] that we already have what it takes of God and man and that we should set about developing our outreach ministry(s).

7. To begin their lives together, Jesus gave His disciples only one target, to be as perfect as their Father in heaven. Nothing is written about their immediate response to that impossibility, so I think it went so far over their heads that it gave them only a warm, theological fuzzy. As time passed He worked on the details of that challenge in many ways, such as God’s standard for covenant making and covenant keeping. When He told them they should not divorce, no matter what, they decided it would therefore be better to never marry. They were getting the picture of how impossible the process of their perfection was going to be, much less its accomplishment. It took them three years of life with their Messiah, the tragedy of His cross, His resurrection, and their acceptance of their own crosses as a way of life before they got the picture – their focus was to be on The Way! They were to be people of The Way! Indeed they had an absolutely perfect target, God their Father, but that target was to serve as a mark only for their aim. As people of the Way they were to be His workmanship. Theirs was the faithful commitment; His was the accomplishment. They had to learn to keep their hands off of their souls and to apply themselves in the righteousness of faith. Selah.

Joseph Joubert [1754-1824], French moralist and essayist, said: “The goal is not always meant to be reached, but to serve as a mark for our aim.” He was mostly right. God’s fullest project for all of His family is for each to be made into the likeness of His only begotten Son. If so, that’s way out there and certainly requires that we be His handiwork. Thinking about it gives me that same warm, theological fuzzy of His beginner disciples.

8. “If you’re bored with life, if you don’t get up every morning with a burning desire to do things, you don’t have enough goals.” – Lou Holtz [1937-present], American football player, coach and analyst. Well, I’m certainly not bored with life, and I have plenty of things to do that I think are Spirit-led, but I don’t get up every morning with burning desires. And I don’t have a burning desire to get up every morning with burning desires.

9. What do you think about being forgiven of a debt, say $100.00, but after having been forgiven that debt you automatically incur a $1,000.00 debt? Is that a good deal? The man in Matthew 18:23-35 did not know that he had incurred a much larger debt when he was forgiven his smaller debt. The principle is that when we receive something from the Lord we are indebted to Him. Those debts can be paid off only by passing along that which He had given us. If He gave us forgiveness, we must give others forgiveness; if He gave us peace, we must be peacemakers; if He gave us temporal wealth [small or great], we must be generous with our wealth; if He has brought us to spiritual maturity, we must make disciples; if He has made us His family, we must be openly hospitable to others. That man in Matthew 18 was not given an option. For him and for us it is “pass it on” or suffer punishment [chastisement]. If you read that otherwise, please bring me up to date. Our loving Father chastises those whom He loves. That’s us.

So, what do you have that you have not received from the Lord? And, how do you decide what to consume [keep for yourself] or to pass onward to others? Do you have a social perspective that makes you an intentional passer-oner? Are you a fulfillment of Jesus’ words in John 4:10 and 7:37-38: “Out of their bellies will flow rivers of living waters?” Those words cause me to Selah -- pause and evaluate myself. They are also encouraging. Let’s pass onward that which the Lord has given us. [That’s why I write these THOUGHTS.]

10. The truth is simple and straightforward. It clears the air of doubt and confusion. The truth and its results are obvious characteristics of mature and maturing Christians. Kingdom leaders are armed with the truth, which is what had made them leaders. Michael Korda [1933-present], English-born writer and editor, said “Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers, who cut through argument, debate and doubt to offer a solution everybody can understand and remember.” That sounds like Jesus.

11. I have shared before that more of my and Nancy’s time in prayer is spent talking to the Lord about His helping others [and ourselves] to be faithful in their trials than is spent asking Him to relieve them [and us] of their trials. Our perspective is that He is the totally wise, totally loving All-Mighty who is the Master Architect of all things and therefore all things are customized to us and have eternal purpose. Job knew that. Jesus knew that. We are learning that.

Many times I have asked the Lord to not end my trial until I have gotten all from it that He designed. To that end, we enjoy Philippians 4:4-7 which reads: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Right!

12. If Ezekiel [18:20] and Moses [Ex. 20:5] do not seem to agree, consider the following. Ezekiel was talking about each person bearing the responsibility of his own sin before God, and Moses was talking about the earthly effects on others of our sins.

13. “In times like these,” actually meaning any and all times, there are simple basics for us to remember: 1) To every individual believer, “Keep your peace.” 2) To every group of believers, “Love one another.” 3) Then to all who are doing 1 and 2, “Now, turn to the world and I will do through you that which I would have done Myself.”

14. Christian institutions are great. Are you ready to think about the “but?” We started with only the institutions of the church, family, and local church. Then there were developed institutions like the persecuted Christians who buried the dead found on the streets of Rome. That gracefulness grabbed the attention of non-Christians because the Christians were an outcast minority. Emperor Constantine stopped the persecutions and made Christianity the religion of the Empire. The church was then institutionalized socially. Then followed more very good Christian institutions, including civil governments. As the world became Christianized, more Christian institutions were formed, thank God.

Do you know what happened in that process? Christians began to depend on their institutions – church, civil, business, etc. and less on Christ Himself. Faith was placed on our institutions; dependence was placed on our institutions, efforts went into maintaining our institutions; money went into our institutions – the downward slide was natural and inevitable [almost]. We became so attentive to and dependent upon our institutions that we became less attentive and dependent upon the Lord. As our active faith in Him diminished, our cherished institutions diminished, eventually becoming non-Christian and anti-Christian.

Nowadays there is a move, but not a new move, toward having church as in its original, spontaneous, living expression without the strictures and structures of its developed institutionalization. That is the way the church first began, and the way it has been rejuvenated or introduced in pagan nations for 2,000 years. As we lose the cultural war in Europe and America [or at least are facing exhaustion of the carnal church] paring down to the essentials, having close personal and sacrificial ties once again, and a living faith in Jesus Christ without the tapestry of formal religion have become not only attractive but essential. Unfortunately, the opposition of this form of renewal is the existing religious institution. There is little of the early, healthy weave to hold or bring the spiritual and the institutional together.

Looking with what is probably a poorly informed eye at the unfolding process, some refer to the early results as post-Christian. Yet, hidden within that changing society is Life, although in its present form it shows little social responsibility, authority, or power [thus the post-Christian view]. In time, some sort of “nonsensical” spiritual, good work will again arise to grab the attention of the new pagans.

15. As said many times before, the mark of a Christianized society is that its non-christian members speak and live the truth even without knowing its source. It is often the route they take toward becoming believers, as they affirm beliefs they later discover were first spoken by the living God, then by His believers, and them by themselves.

Walter Lippmann [1889-1974], American journalist and political commentator said, “The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him in other men the conviction and the will to carry on.” That’s right, but I’m glad that our leader, the Lord, left behind Him more than our human ability and the will to be convicted and carry on. He left behind Him the promise of the Father, the Spirit of Himself, who is with us and comes into us. It is not by human might or by human power, but by His Spirit that we live and breathe and have our being.

16. Test yourself to see if you are good or evil.

The test: Are you in agreement that God was right when He chose and blessed the Jewish people – Genesis 17? Some helps toward your correct answer: 1) Do your prayers and other actions show that you are in agreement with Him? 2) Do you regularly pray for the peace of Jerusalem? 3) Do you make a practice of being a blessing to the Jews near to and far from you?

How did you do with the question? The Jews and Israel are a sort of litmus test to help us see if we are good or evil. This little query makes a difference to God.

17. “When you believe you have lost your power and control, nothing will ever seem easy or simple.” – Shannon Alder, living American writer. She is right, if faith is the definition of power and control. Unfaithfulness chops our legs from under us. Then comes increasingly difficult and unfruitful labor in the flesh.

18. “One can never consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar.” – Helen Keller [1880-1968], American author and speaker, political activist, who was left blind and deaf from an illness at age 19 months. She learned to “hear” people speak by reading their lips with her hands. She soared.

19. This month’s definition of God: “The unmovable Mover who is willing to be moved.” That definition is accurate only because He has designed His creatids to work within Him in orderly love, and to move His hands accordingly. We are made to approximate Him to the fullest measure currently possible at our now-current level. He progressively enlarges our capacity. He is our highest faculties. Yes, it is a process but He is the workman and we are His workmanship. Our earthlife is but our first step in the process.

20. There is an important measure of truth to the following: It has been said that local, national and international aid agencies undermine good governments. When governments begin to receive aid which relieves immediate needs, the pressure to find local answers to problems is off of the governments, and the development of personal responsibility is lessened among the populace. If the governments and populace are no longer compelled by their needs, long-term improvements and solutions are dis-incentivised, the poor remain poor, and justification for more begging produces the dog chasing its tail syndrome.

Successful reduction of extreme poverty rarely occurs in places where large efforts toward aid have been extended. It is great to hear that between 1970 and 2006 the global poverty rate has been reduced from 26.8% to 5.4% [WOW!!], but most of that progress occurred in nations in which small aid investments were made [UGH].

Direct aid often [?] leads to corruption, distorts incentives, diverts efforts away from productive activities and toward aid-seeking, and relieves pressure on governments to make needed long-term reforms. That which appears merciful today leads to, in these cases, longer-term pain.

I don’t know of anyone who has the “this age” answer to this problem. Aid can and does lead to a culture of inbred poverty, resentment, sense of entitlement, and eventual rebellion. As far as I am concerned, voluntary charity with personal relationships and long-term oversight is the larger part of the answer. Charity, especially when compulsory, is death-dealing in both directions, to the giver and the receiver.

21. While we are thinking out of the box a bit, consider that the Roman Empire was one of the greatest things going for centuries, and that the Western World [and the entire world] is still benefitting from it. There was order, peace, productivity, travel, education, reliability, religious freedom [as long as your lord was Caesar], justice courts, etc. Christianity showed up as a stranger on the scene. If we consider that Roman thought was the basic thought [and we still tend to think it is], Christianity had weird beliefs, such as its previously alive leader dying, rising from the dead and coming back in the sky on a horse. Obviously, “real” power and logic were and still are on the Empire’s side. The exception was and is that real power and truth are on the Christians’ side and are able to produce the reality of present and future salvation in both present practical and future eternal senses. That tug of war on humanity has been going on for 2,000 years. Christ is still the same and doing the same.

But something has been happening. It has happened slowly but fast enough that currently living octogenarians have been able to recognize it and supply first person reports. The report is that the right side of history has not been found in any form of the Roman Empire, past or present, but in Christ and His never-more-than-a-minority. That minority is distinct from its cultural ambience, even when that ambience has been greatly christianized and has formed powerful religious structures. That minority works to build eternal righteousness, not righteous cultures. Righteous cultures are excellent by-products, but the never-more-than-a-minority do not depend upon their by-products for their life. Jesus Christ and His gospel is their life.

Depending upon christianized cultures [instead of Jesus] causes what the uninformed consider to be a failure of the gospel. Culture wars are never over. Cultural Christianity will always water down and compromise the gospel. It cannot be depended upon for support of the gospel, even as it often lends its duly appreciated support. Our many current examples of this lack of support is in matters of sexual and family issues – homosexuality, abortion, divorce, parental rights -- and religious liberty, freedom of conscience, and freedom of speech.

Those whom the Lord has called, those who are awaiting the gospel but don’t know they are, those who are now saying that they do not want Christianity – what they are saying is they do not want “almost Christianity,” they want Christianity!. Let’s give them Christ, crucified, alive and coming back in the sky on a horse. It’s in the Book.

22. In recent years the church in China certainly has been relieved of its worse persecution, leaving not much to complain about, compared to its earlier persecution by the Communist Party. This present prayed-for relief has even allowed for some lukewarmness to develop among our Chinese brothers and sisters. But overall, the church is healthy and still growing leaps and bounds.

For the Chinese government, control of the church is the issue. Among governmental forms, Communism is foremost for wanting control/regulation of all things and people. In China’s case, any organized group is a threat because it is simply an organization, meaning “people organized” other than “government organized.” People-organized groups are considered dangerous to the organization called the Communist Party. The church is a non-Communist Party organization. By the way, the same threat to the Party is perceived from libraries and other nonprofit organizations. Religion is permitted but only as organized and run by the Communist Party. Teachings and beliefs must conform to the Party line. Thus, essentially, there cannot be a faithful church except as it is underground and illegal, which invites persecution.

23. To a baby, freedom means being able to pull on the Christmas tree ornaments. To a youth, freedom means being able to ride his/her bicycle down the street. To the teenager, freedom means being able to drive the family car alone. To the young adult, freedom means having one’s own place to live. All of those measures of freedom have to do with personal and self-centered freedom.

Adult freedom is measured differently, such as by self-responsibility, self-control, freedom of speech and of religion. Nations and cultures that value freedom of conscience, property ownership, and protection of creation are those nations and cultures that have higher standards of living, better health care, higher incomes, and higher gross domestic product. Having freedom to virtuously conduct ourselves in politics, economics, religion, etc. removes so many of life’s obstacles.

Walking in the Spirit together produces a freedom that requires none of the above, as our Chinese family knows, but is certainly compatible.

24. More on Thought No. 21: Christian character results in the establishment of quality Christian social institutions. Those institutions, which often take generations to establish [plus blood, sweat and tears], then tempt us to depend upon them for our LIFE. Examples: The church, schools, civil governments, the military, family, medical care, social associations, etc. Our life only comes from the Lord. I thank Him for the many christianized things in the world, some of which are highly godly, but He is the only direct, perfect and totally reliable source of reality, truth, and life.

25. Notice what the Lord says about the attitude of, “Aw, shucks; things are so bad in today’s world that it’s evident that the Lord is not with us anymore. He is not paying any attention to us.” That’s Ezekiel 9:9. It may be that those people were saying and believing that because they wanted to act unrighteous in some way and thought they could slip under the Lord’s radar, or that He was asleep at His post. When we begin to think that way our thoughts begin to lead our actions.

26. This Thought comes by way of a recent Bible Study with some serious saints.

Question: What is your salvation for? There are many good answers. Tonight’s best answer: That I might work within God in His eternal plan.

Next, God’s nature: What is a nature? Answer: That which one is; our foundational aspects that cannot but be expressed. Does God have a nature? Answer: Yes. Then, describe His nature. [Many good answers] We are helped primordially by Romans 1:18-23 which tells us that God’s nature is evident to everyone through observation of His creation, and that His nature is so obvious in creation that no one is excused from knowing about Him.

But that is not like knowing Him personally. How did you come to better know God’s nature as a result of your personal encounter and ongoing relationship with Him?

For tonight’s Bible Study we will appreciate several aspects of God’s nature:

1) He has a “giving” nature. 17 times in John 17 Jesus came boldly before His Father, speaking of and drawing for us from His Father’s giving nature. Recall that it was because of His Father’s giving nature that Jesus came (John 3:16). God simply must give of Himself.

2) He has a “taking” nature. Our Father chose each one of us and took us to Himself in Jesus, and Jesus took our sin nature and our committed sins unto Himself. Now we who are in Christ have the “giving” and “taking” nature of God. God’s one-word definition of that nature is “hospitality,” meaning that He opened up His life and household to take us in, and gave us Himself. That’s His type of hospitality. In turn, let’s live hospitality as His life defined it.

To begin tonight’s Christmas Story: God the Father sent His Son. The Son of God did not leave home without a destination and a purpose, both of which were predetermined and accomplished before He left. That required that He be omnipotent [always all powerful], omniscient [always all knowing], and omnipresent [always completely focused on everything]. God is still meeting those requirements.

Therefore: 1) There are no accidents, although in the natural they may appear to be. 2) There are no times when we need to call God’s attention to something; it is our attention that is being sought. 3) There are no times when God’s eternal purposes are thwarted. 4) There are no times when the devil’s or someone else’s power prevails over God’s power, although in the natural it may appear so. Job knew this, and so should all believers. 5) All of those contrary naturalnesses are for the purpose of drawing us closer to God, for uniting spiritual ones with other spiritual ones so we can walk in the light together, and for causing us to walk by faith whatever may be the possible or actual cost naturally.

So, with that groundwork refreshed, let’s look at **THE** Christmas Story starting, of course, in The Revelation, chapters 21 and 22. In those two final chapters we see the long-awaited results of God’s giving and taking. Knowing the end from the beginning always provides us a better understanding of the Book [and any book] when next we start at the beginning and progress through it. The Bible contains mysteries, and reading the “last chapter” first provides understandng to its mysteries as we read through it.

We learned from those 2 chapters in the Revelation that our hospitable God planned a final habitat for humanity and that it is on planet Earth. Now we could go to Genesis 1:1 and better understand God’s hospitable nature. He gradually unveils Himself and His nature. From the beginning of His unveiling He shows that He is gregarious, meaning He is fond of company and is hospitable [He must give and receive, including the reproduction of Himself through the giving and receiving of Himself in others]. He must increase and be fruitful, despite the ongoing doubts of even the best of His chosen natural ones as in Genesis 15, and despite continual puny non-impedances as in Psalm 2:1-6.

The world does not exist for itself [no, not even for “myself”] but for God’s eternal purposes, for which, through His hospitality, I was saved [the answer to the question at the top of this Thought].

27. It has been said that the biggest adventure anyone can have is to follow their dreams. My opinion is that the biggest adventure anyone can have is to follow the Lord. If you take that course, be ready for two things. First, an initial dose of fraud and deception from the one who has lost control over you – the devil. He will act like a roaring lion who is about to devour you. Those who love you deeply with human love will give you grief. But re-read the first two chapters of Job, trust the Lord, and stay on course. You will come through the lion’s den unwounded and stronger.

The second thing to watch for is that you must not start half-hearted or compromise. Much of what passes for Christian dedication is watered-down biblically. The biggest adventure comes from taking up our crosses and following Christ, His ways, and His teachings. Don’t look for commands, because on this walk you will be responding to what He desires. Your heart will know what His heart desires. His desires will be your commands, while others will stand by awaiting His written and verbal commands. When you sense God’s desires, act. Adventure follows. The simplest and most mundane act will develop the most glorious testimony.

28. Here is one for our more biblically-informed minds and spiritually stirred imaginations. It is like Jeremiah 50:9, which speaks of the arrows of expert warriors that always hit their marks. The word for arrow in that verse is “chets,” which can mean an arrow, or javelin, or any missile fired from an engine of war, such as a bullet.

1. The EXACTO bullet is a self-guided 50 caliber round that hits long-range moving targets whether fired by a novice or an expert. It is self-steering. Bullet illustrations show no visible fins or other steering mechanism. How it is designed to change direction in midair is classified.

2. The MI-Bullet expands into 4 interconnected parts as it leaves the barrel. It is available for 99.9% of existing weapons on the market.

3. The XM-25 is a 13 pound gun that fires a 25mm round. The bullet does not need to hit the target because it explodes when near the target, like an artillery shell. A small computer inside the bullet monitors details of the flight and determines the precise time to detonate. These have been successfully tested in Afghanistan.

4. The M600 and M800 rifles beat the best shooters on the range. They are computer equipped with precision-guided technology. The shooter pulls and holds the trigger, guiding the bullet through a scope. It has been 100% accurate even at 2100 yards. That’s well over one mile here in Texas.

Whether one is interested in weapons or not, there are now hand-carried weapons that can do that which Jeremiah prophesied in 50:9. That alone stirs my thought process. Shades of Genesis 11:6.

29. After that heavy Thought, consider what Steven Wright [1955-present], American comedian, once said: “I woke up one morning and all of my stuff had been stolen and replaced by exact duplicates.” Although “difficulties strengthen the mind, as labor does the body,” (Seneca [4 BC – 65 AD], Roman philosopher), and faithful fasting strengthens the soul [Jesus], there are times for light heartedness and for feasting. So, try this while having a bowl of Blue Bell Home Made Vanilla ice cream:

1. Borrow money from pessimists – they don’t expect it back.

2. Half the people you know are below average.

3. 99% of lawyers give the rest a bad name.

4. 82.7% of all statistics are made up on the spot.

5. A conscience is what hurts when all your other parts feel so good.

6. A clear conscience is usually the sign of a bad memory.

7. If you want the rainbow, you got to put up with the rain.

8. All those who believe in psycho kinesis, raise my hand.

9. The early bird may get the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese.

10. I almost had a psychic girlfriend, but she left me before we met.

11. OK, so what’s the speed of dark?

12. Depression is merely anger without enthusiasm.

13. When everything is coming your way, you’re in the wrong lane.

14. Hard work pays off in the future; laziness pays off now.

15. I intend to live forever – so far, so good.

16. What happens if you get scared half to death twice?

17. A conclusion is the place where you got tired of thinking.

18. Experience is something you don’t get until just after you need it.

19. To steal ideas from one person is plagiarism; to steal from many is research.

20. The sooner you fall behind, the more time you’ll have to catch up.

21. If at first you don’t succeed, skydiving is not for you.

22. If your car could travel at the speed of light, would your headlights work?

30. Here is more ponder-material for us earthly-walking, eternally-minded people. In 2016 will be unveiled many breakthrough “advances” in science, technology, and philosophy. Read also “advances” in theology in all of that. We will be informed of several life-changing “advances” in cybernetics, bioengineering, nanotechnology, machine intelligence, and synthetic biology. Those things may sound distant and “very good” at first sound, but that’s why we have the word “sinister” in our vocabulary.

As always, there is more to each story. For one, humanity will be re-defining what it means to be human intellectually and physically. Transhumanism is developing as a tsunami. Minds, memories, physiology, children, and our immortal souls [???] are being radically redesigned. Those in the movement are forecasting a new species of superior humans. Thousands of government and private research organizations around the world are working on this. Human genetic codes are being rewritten. Human and animal DNA are being combined. Human brains are being interfaced with strong artificial intelligence systems. Bioethics is becoming “progressive,” having lost its roots in Judeo-Christian soil. For as long as the Lord tarries, we have now entered the Hybrid Age.

So, what to do and how to be? First, seek the clear-headed truth and follow it. The “it” is what the Lord has said and continually shares with the church about always-current matters by Scripture and Spirit. Before He left He warned us that shortly before He comes back there will be a falling away of many of His people, of believers. That’s addressed to us, those who will be tempted to fear, hunker down, withdraw, compromise, and even to [only temporarily be able to] surf the tsunami. Seeking the truth and paying the cost to follow Him in the truth is the way forward. If our life is our most precious possession, we will lose it. If His life is our most precious possession, we will gain it. See Matthew 10:39; Luke 17:33.

If you are one of His, have received Him into your soul [been born again by the Lord putting His Spirit into you], and are appropriating the purpose of life that comes from taking up our crosses daily and following Him – stay on course. Stay in fellowship, often. Design your life’s core social group to be with others who are on the same course. The world will be getting very bad, and sinister. We are on God’s course. Not only is there a definite beginning and end to all things, but He has established a time-line of events for our benefit. We are somewhere between the rebirth of the nation of Israel [on May 14, 1948] and the Gog of Magog war. We are 67 years from the rebirth of nation Israel, and Jesus said the generation that saw that happen would not pass away before He returned. Those two prophecies are bookends for that generation, of which many of us are members. Time is running out. The expiration date of that prophecy appears to be close.

That’s 30 for now. Coram Deo.