THOUGHTS OF JUNE, 2012

1. A biblical definition of “weakness” is, “freedom from self, freedom from what others think, and freedom from our circumstances – allowing total reliance on Jesus Christ. Life comes only from/after death. See John 12:24-25 and 2 Cor. 4:8-12. Many of us have a mental acceptance of our having been set free, but the Lord says that if we have been set free we are free indeed -- liberated not only from our past and its bondages but free now to live the fullness of the gospel in character and deeds.

2. It takes me a real stretch to almost understand those who believe that our reality is not real; that we are only imaginations imagining. I notice that those folks still look both ways when they cross the street.

When I poke fun at someone like that, it doesn’t take long for me to hear the Lord turning it back on me, to keep me honest before Him and man. In this case He pointed to my many frailties of soul, although I have Him alive within me, I love His word, and I teach Him and His word to others. That’s the real thing, but I still find myself looking both ways.

3. “The absence of proof is not proof of absence.” Wm. Cowper, 1700s

4. Earthquakes in antiquity can be dated by geologists. One method employed examines disturbances in sediment depositions. In the Dead Sea area, two evidences of earthquake have been identified, a large one for the year 31 A. D. and a smaller one for 26-36 A. D. One of them should cover the event of Matthew 27:51 -- the quake that occurred during Jesus’ crucifixion. Both were too minor to be recorded by non-Biblical historians, but were of sufficient magnitude to grab the attention of and terrify those around the cross.

There is a certain amount of satisfaction when I read this sort of Bible-confirming information, and I know that it builds up the faith of many, but it’s like seeing the same movie again and again – it’s nothing new when the Bible is confirmed. Just as for years I read and got tired of reading all of those things that supposed to disprove the accuracy of Scripture, it is also starting to be tiring to read those things that suppose to prove or substantiate or to simply agree with the Bible record. It’s good to get the information out into the public, but a Bible-educated faith doesn’t need it.

5. For the geometry buffs among us: “If one Indian squaw slept on a buffalo skin, another slept on a deer skin, and a third slept on a hippopotamus skin, and they each bore sons, which of the three would bear twin sons? It’s obvious! The squaw who slept on the hippopotamus skin would have the twins. Why? Because the squaw of the hippopotamus is equal to the sons of the other two hides.

Truth can be recognized, even in its most veiled forms.

6. O. K., you Brits. I knew that sooner or later someone would find an area in which American youth are superior to yours. The good news is that cigarette smoking is down among our teenagers. We are not raising numbskulls over here in the Colonies. No, sir!

On another note, American teens now smoke more pot than cigarettes.

7. A dear Christian sister was wondering what sort of gift she should get for the Church Sisters’ Party. It had to be under $15. She was going through some thoughts and hit upon a great gift – assorted cards, like birthdays, holidays, etc. Then she remembered that the recipient-to-be was very neglectful in that very area. The idea of a packet of assorted cards was immediately rejected. I asked, “Why?” It seemed to me to be the perfect gift. Her answer was that it would be too untactful.

You know what my thoughts were. It would be helpful to her, and loving. Not to do so would be to ignore the sister’s need, to avoid that which the Lord had uncovered for healing, to be fearful and evasive, to let the fault grow and have greater adverse effect.

Another example of the clash of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world.

8. The way to overcome fear is by being obedient.

9. If you don’t really and fully trust in [the sometimes very long-term results of] freedom, take a nap for a few minutes, then resume at Thought 10. On second thought, don’t do that because this Thought is for you.

My problem is that [probably] no one who mistrusts freedom will accept what I’m going to say. Said another way -- talks on true freedom will uncover our unbelief in freedom itself.

Every day you and I hear Christians and others say they do not like the way God does the things that only He can do, such as: He had given the world and the church “too much” freedom. Or, He does not act promptly, He “lets” humanity and the weather and the tectonic plates do what they do. Or, He is never coming back to Earth. Or, God is slow to do what He says, although He says He is swift to do His things. Or, if there even is a God, why is He allowing all of this sin and misery?

Like I said, it can seem that He allows too much freedom; does not run as tight a ship as He should. All of that is evidence of our blindness and unbelief. Our natural mind does not have to understand or agree with God in anything – He is God. The biblically informed mind bathed in faith receives lots of information and assurance that otherwise cannot be grasped, although we never see everything.

For years, I did not appreciate the Lord’s care of wildlife, including birds. Then I found that He staked His reputation for caring for us on how He cared for those birds! I was not enthused. I had just begun to trust Him for everything. That bird passage was important! I hoped for better treatment than He provided for birds. Jesus [Matt. 6] said that we should not at all be worried about the necessities of life because He would take care of us like He takes care of those birds. I had a wife and 4 kids, soon to be 5, plus a household of 10-15 others. It was good news when I began to realize that He was talking about much more than material possessions, but certainly did include those items.

His more fundamental point is that we are not to allow our concern for material possessions to distract us from fundamental moral and spiritual matters. One of those is human freedom – God gives it to us, and we give it to others. Freedom is the way to go. We are purveyors of freedom – even setting people free to slap us on the other cheek, being good to evil people, returning good deeds for evil deeds, etc.

Back to moral and spiritual matters, and freedom. Men build systems that restrict the freedom of part of the group, in the name of providing for the good of all. We start with restriction of evil deeds such as murder and theft, then restrict the freedom to harm one’s self [drugs, alcohol, tobacco], then restrict the freedom to offend the feelings of others [“hate speech” such as supposed homophobia, or that Jesus is the only way to heaven], etc.

From antiquity to the present, states take on powers and authority in the guise of providing for the needs and improving the condition of the people. The irony is that they gradually produce opposite results from what was intended. They typically lead to material deprivation and demoralization of the people, ending in the denial of fundamental freedoms, including the freedom to be and do stupid. Have you noticed that God has not done that?

Is there a way on earth that God’s freedom can be found intact and functional? Yes; at least for a time. The working of the Holy Spirit produces freedom, including a free economy. He does provide us, without a central planner or an enlarged state, with all we need. Those who do not believe in Him, or believe in Him but do not trust His ways, or do not see His hand at work during times of personal or corporate trial and failure, will instead produce more government which crowds out the Holy Spirit’s corporate and independent private solutions to social problems.

Thousands of studies reveal that freedom is the way for an economy to go, that there is a guiding hand over the affairs of all men – Dan. 4:17, 25-26. The free economy is the best means to assure that society thrives and grows and that people’s needs are met.

Nations benefit from limited and righteous laws, but have a pattern of gradually adding a new law for every situation until there are several laws for every situation, some of which are contrary to others. Simple, basic laws, coupled with common sense and freedom are adequate to govern most of [a basically righteous] society.

It is true that the unrighteous will find their ways around laws, any law. But a moral and free people will eventually control those who try to game the free system. The Holy Spirit will see to that.

When Jesus spoke about caring for the sparrows, He was speaking far deeper into our lives that whether He is capable and indeed would take care of His human sparrows.

10. “One of the most wonderful things about being a Christian is that I don’t ever get up in the morning and wonder if what I do matters. I live every day to the fullest because I can live it through Christ and I know no matter what I do today, I’m going to do something to advance the Kingdom of God.” -- Chuck Colson, who learned to rest in God’s peace in this earthlife and now rests eternally in that same peace.

11. Something that can’t continue, won’t. Something that is inevitable, will.

12. “And [Zacchaeus] sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature:” – Luke 19:3

Question: Why could he not see Jesus? He wanted to. He went to a place where he could be expected to see Him. He had not been reluctant to try to see Him. Many others were being successful in their efforts. But, Zacchaeus could not see Him because of the thick crowd. Secondary reasons were; he was short, he was late arriving, the best seats were taken, he probably had not friends in the crowd [being a tax collector], and I’m out of more guesses.

 It’s good that the verse tells us that his problem was the press of the crowd. Many were there, jostling and jousting for advantageous positions. Let’s stretch just a bit, and say that many today are diverted from seeing Jesus because they are being distracted by religious systems, cares of this world, and personal unfruitfulness due to shallow roots. We can’t see Jesus because of the press of things that we let come into our lives which press us, so that we embrace other things that require our attention – Matt. 13:18-23.

Martha couldn’t see Jesus because of the press of her responsibilities in the kitchen – Luke 10:38-42. [God bless you who have kitchen ministries!] Those who were invited to the dinner excused themselves because of the press of their responsibilities – Luke 14:16-24. When we get under pressure, now called “stressed,” many things go on which are of this world, and less things go on of the kingdom.

So what did Zacchaeus do about his problem? He ran ahead of it. He knew that he could not see Jesus if he followed the crowd. If we don’t get Zacchaeus’ message, we will remain in the crowd and always be in the press, blind to spiritual truth. We cannot follow the crowd. The press will rule our days.

Then Zacchaeus rose above the press [and above his personal disabilities and excuses] and climbed a tree. He was not earth-bound. He saw Jesus and Jesus saw him. Things happened. He and Jesus were criticized for their following actions and friendship, and those of the press were offended; but these two new friends handled it quite well. We and Jesus can still handle the press of life.

13. More on metaphorical numbers in Scripture and the contexts in which each is used [and this is very condensed]. One is the number of God the Creator. Two represents division or dualism. Three is the material creation, resurrection and the godhead. Four speaks of the natural world, and ultimately the Kingdom of God on earth. Five is the number of grace. Six is the number of man. Seven is the number of completion or perfection.

Those are the basic numbers. They run from creation through completion. Throughout the Bible, those seven numbers represent the initial set of symbols concerning creation, man and redemption. For centuries, the religious have derived meanings in Scripture and interpretation and understanding by using this series of insights. It is more than a mere observation; by it God has provided an additional way to know Him and His ways, and more fully His will.

As always, whatever God designs is all about the central feature of the cross. Jesus Christ raised fallen man to a new level of life through the new birth. Jesus became the Author of an entirely new creation called sons of God. Whereas the first creation brought man to earth, the second creation takes man to heaven. The cross changed the world and required a readjustment of the Bible’s numbers. It became a launch-pad for the number eight. Eight is the number of new blessing, superabundance; indicating “the day” when creation was brought to new heights.

Let’s work through some of the eights in Scripture. Noah was the eighth patriarch and of the last genetically righteous line of Adam’s humanity – 2 Pet. 2:4-5. That was God’s reason for preserving him and his family. His ark saved 8 people. He and his sons gave mankind a new life, genetically -- a new physical birth. They were also the agents of a new spiritual birth. Their passage through the waters purified humanity, enabling it to continue toward an appointment with the new birth in Christ Jesus – 1 Peter 3:18-22. Peter made it clear that God’s plan for the salvation of humanity rested upon Noah at that point.

Although Aaron and his sons were already fully compliant with the Lord’s commands through Moses, and had obeyed every one of the special commands for beginning the priesthood, they had to await the eighth day before they could begin their very first action as priests.

On God’s fifth [grace] appearance to Abraham, He gave Abraham and his descendents the covenant of circumcision – a token of the covenant between the two – Gen. 17:11-12. But on God’s eighth appearance, He promised Abraham that his seed would bless the entire earth, that promise coming only after Abraham had “sacrificed” all means of his own for the fulfillment of God’s words to himself – Gen. 22. This points to the sacrifice of Jesus, God’s son.

Other important points worth noting about the number 8 is that the sum of the numbers of Jesus’ name in Greek is 888, and that He was circumcised on the eight day of His life [Luke 2:21].

Jesus arose from the grave on the “eighth day,” the day after the seventh day. Seven, the number of completion, was transcended by eight, the number of new birth. That’s God’s well-planned, heavenly order on earth as in heaven. Creation and its mankind were brought to new heights where we now reside.

14. In Luke 9 the Lord gave His disciples an absolute. He told them that there were some there with Him that day who would not die the earth death until they saw the kingdom of God that He had been telling them about. Eight days later, knowing what or somewhat was about to happen, He took three of them with him upon a mountain to pray. There occurred the Transfiguration. Those three saw Him in His glory, which was a quick fulfillment of verse 27. When 11 of the 12 persisted with Him, they say the full fulfillment of His promise – Acts 1 & 2.

15. I believe that the world is groaning, straining toward the time of its remodeling – Rom. 8:22. There are signs of a tremendous, spiritual, invisible-to-us battle in our heavenly [atmosphere] and earthen [on and beneath] world. That groaning is being noted and recorded worldwide. If we accept the Scripture message having to do with the ending of life on earth as we know it, the earthquakes and floods and severe weather of all sorts seem to tell us the same. But in this Thought I want to focus on one aspect of all that – the sounds that are being heard, but which have unknown sources.

Around the world this mystery is underway. People have begun to hear bone-chilling, unexplainable, echoing, resonating, harmonic, crashing, metallic clamor. They seem to be coming from the earth and from the sky. Sometimes they are droning trumpets that sound notes in the lower to middle registers, but are musical in nature. As they moan their blasts, people are swept into a state of emotion.

In addition, there are growing numbers of reports on explosions that come without warning, are heard for a few days, and then fall silent again. Sometimes they seem to come from underground, often seem to come from just outside a room or wall – resembling the crash of two locomotives head on. The sounds can be heard for long distances, but not always. Although unbelievably loud to the hearers, they seldom, if ever, register traces on local seismographs.

These sounds were heard beginning in the last 3 decades of the 1800s. Scientists theorize about true distant sounds that are transmitted to faraway locations due to unusual meteorological conditions. But what about the musical instruments?

The trumpets gained attention on August 11th, 2011 over Kiev, Ukraine. It was shown on YouTube and lasted 11 minutes and 28 seconds as the camera searched for its source. It echoed throughout the landscape. The incidences of the sounds increased throughout Eastern Europe.

On January 12, 2012 the sounds were recorded in central Chili, where they seemed to play variations on the calls made by the first trumpets. On January 19th they were heard as a chorus of trumpets in Olive Branch, Mississippi. Then on January 22nd they were heard and recorded in Monchengladbach, Germany. Obvious fakes were predictable and did occur.

Then the phenomena seemed to move westward into parts of Canada and the northwestern U. S. Still, authentic recordings continue coming from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and other European locations, including England. Then they were heard in a variety of locations, such as Topeka, Kansas and Los Angeles, California. They were all variations on the original strange trumpets.

Finally, and continuing into today, a new series of spectacular sounds have begun. They are loud bangs, booms, explosions, dull thuds, some tympanic resonations, others metallic crashes. The locations of the “hearings” were March 6th in Georgia and Alabama, with no source being found; March 15th Montello, Wisconsin; and March 18th in Clintonville, Wisconsin. That last location made the national news when a series of booms with metallic, clanging overtones were heard by most of its population. The whole city was upset, as municipal workers scoured the city’s systems but found no problem. The sounds had been intense but nothing was out of order. That persisted off and on for 2 weeks, starting before dawn and ending at daybreak. The area’s seismic readings remained normal.

The uniform belief among those who have experienced these sounds is that they portend some great disaster that is about to befall them. I am reminded that the Lord gave David the gift of hearing God’s army fighting the Philistines, and invited him to join in at a certain time – 1 Chr. 14:13-16. Jeremiah 25:29-33 tells of more to come. We may be in the time of major battles ongoing in the invisible.

16. You will remember that in recent editions of THOUGHTS I have pondered over the Lord’s reversal of His commands at certain times and with certain godly people. I think He has shown me the basic reason for His doing that. The Law was made for those who need the Law, not for those whose obedience comes from a heart to obey God. That included the saints of both Testaments. Let’s digest that for a time and see what else comes.

17. Here is another Thought about advice vs. counsel, which I have written about before. Since the beginning of my walk with the Lord, during which time I have been in close, daily, body of Christ fellowship almost without interruption, I have considered advice to be a word given to those who want a suggestion. The person receiving the advice remains free and independent in the matter, can take it or leave it, and is on his on to get it done.

However, counsel has meant that I was ready and willing to walk through the matter with the person, according to the proper use of my counsel. That meant I was in the mix with him/her. It’s like James’ teaching about prayer – don’t just pray for him; give him a/your coat.

So, when encouraging a brother in counsel, including that the Lord is faithful to fulfill His word, I knew that I was inserting myself into my brother’s life to be part or all of God’s faithfulness, if he accepted me.

You can see that the verbal content and spiritual anointing of advice and counsel may be exactly the same, but the participatory and power to accomplish aspects are very different.

18. To keep our selves alert to the prophetic, one of the strangest coincidences in historic timing that has ever occurred was at the close of World War I. This event did not happen by plan or intention of man. World War I ended at eleven o’clock on the morning of November 11, 1918, which was the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, just eleven months after General Allenby entered Jerusalem on the eleventh day of December, 1917, making Palestine a homeland for the Jews possibly the most prophetic fulfillment of the war. It may have been the Lord showing us that the world had entered the eleventh hour of history, and that the midnight hour of Jesus’ return is not far off.

19. Why did Queen Esther have good results for her calling at that time and in that place of her life?

a) She took the time necessary to prepare herself to capture the heart of the king. We should do the same, to capture the heart of our King.

b) She prepared herself to please only one man, the king. Our purpose is to please only our King. If we also please others, that’s great.

c) She understood her purpose in life; that it was not for herself. We are not here for our own purposes.

20. I have been told to avoid certain attempts at condolences to the recently widowed, especially efforts such as:

a) “If only he had taken better care of himself” or “If only he had gone to the doctor earlier” causes widow-guilt.

b) “Did you give him the 10,000 units of Vitamin C, canned asparagus, and take him to the alternative medicine doctor that I recommended?” I remember 25 years ago when Nancy was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and given 20 to 40 months to live, with treatment. A dear friend suggested alternative medical care, which we declined. We did the traditional medical care – surgery and chemotherapy.

c) “At least he is no longer suffering, and is at peace in a better place.” Hopefully, yes; but instead of being gone, having him here in a good place is usually preferable at the time of early widowhood.

Instead, I hope to remember such as the following:

a) “How can I help?”

b) “You two shared a deep love.”

c) “I was privileged to know and work with him.”

d) “He leaves behind a powerful legacy. He really made a difference.”

21. It is generally agreed that there are 3 things that qualify or disqualify us for marriage. One is that we should first know/understand our self. Another is that we should know/understand our prospective mate. Thirdly, to tie those first two things together, the two persons should have the same life-values.

22. My final Thought is to prepare us for that which may be in the “soon-coming” category – war in the Mideast, and I am not referring to Israel’s expected strike against Iran. The Muslim Brotherhood has overcome the governments of Tunisia, Libya and Egypt and is expected to take over soon in Syria. Syria, most particularly its capital, Damascus, is the bull’s eye of the next disaster in that area, a fulfillment of Isaiah 17:1. It will be destroyed, likely by a nuclear weapon in the hands of terrorists, over a span of less than 24 hours [Is.17:14]. Nothing of the old days could have accomplished that so, because that pronouncement has never been fulfilled, it is yet ahead.

Both Eastern leaders and Western leaders are struggling to form alliances strong enough to influence political and military activities of Syria and its neighbors. However, that state of affairs cannot be controlled. All seem to be groping in the darkness.

Russia has healed its longstanding problems with Turkey and is being encouraged by the United States to place a strong military presence in the Mediterranean ports of Syria, which it has been doing. The main reason for this move is to secure Syria’s huge stock of chemical and biological weapons so terrorist organizations cannot get them. The reasoning is that if Russia gets them, Al Qaeda won’t.

Israel is quietly watching all of this, having clearly heard the U. S. public commitment to withhold military actions until after our November elections. But Israel has made a major strategic move. In secret negotiations, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu brought the opposition and rival political parties into the government, forming a national-unity coalition bloc. All Israel and world leaders know what that means – the high risk of preemptive war requires unity from the top down. This is all about Iran, and having to act alone at a moment’s notice. It will be a sudden, unilateral, aggressive action. Israel is now prepared to fulfill Ezekiel 38:7-9.

Luke 21:28.