THOUGHTS OF DECEMBER, 2019

1. There is the Lord, then there is His wonderful and life-giving word [scripture], then there is delightful fellowship with His people [the church], then there are the ministries He gives us and the works He calls us to, then there are His exciting and essential prophetic utterances, then there are our praise and worship times, then there are the dreams and visions that are adjuncts to a walk in the Spirit. We love the Lord and everything about Him but it is possible to hold in higher esteem the things about Him than we do Him Himself. His things are attractive and exciting, so they can distract us from seeking Him always or at least foremost.

It can be accurately said that I greatly appreciate Nancy’s cooking, but it is much more accurate that I more appreciate and love Nancy. I have a good focus on that, and how it likewise applies to the Lord. In John 21:15, Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him [Jesus] more than the other good people and things around them. The question to us, who love the Lord and everything about Him, is do we love Jesus or the things from and about Him?

Many of our brothers and sisters, especially those in Moslem nations, have lost all of their possessions, including families, and are being martyred because they will not reject the only possession they have left, Jesus. They are deciding that He is enough to them for them to die for Him. Jesus is enough! Don’t overload on the things about Him.

From our beginning with the Lord, we were called to be with Him, as were His first disciples. On the night He was arrested, He had prayed that His disciples would be with Him during His coming distresses. In the times of our greatest trials [wartime battles, sicknesses] and pleasures [weddings, vacations] we want our dearest ones to be with us. That was true with Jesus, also. When He told us to go all over the world and preach Him, He added that He would be with us, always. Brothers and sisters in Christ, it is a pleasure to be with you, although I have never seen some of you face to face. We are one.

1. I don’t know that we appreciate sufficiently the earthly weakness of Jesus, Paul, and others. It can be called faithful humility, unusual obedience, the power of the cross, or some other title associated with that which is ordinarily termed foolishness. But in those things, there is tremendous power to change the world. There is power disguised as weakness, beginning with our selves and marriages and families and jobs and society. It is the application of the cross to our many brief and long-lasting life situations.

Would you please stop reading here, and first read 1 Cor. 1:18-25 in a translation that you will believe. Thank you. Now, resuming after reading, the best of our flesh rejects the things in those verses, in deference to human strength of body and soul that will “get things done.” I think that we have not accepted the riches of Christ that come to us from taking up our crosses daily and following Him. That walk is powerful and comprehensive. It involves times of giving up [when we need not give up] in order to gain. Perhaps our most prominent, everyday examples of obedience and submission are faithful wives who know the power of obedience and submission to their husbands. It is husband-changing, thus family-changing – powerful, eternal stuff. She finds true strength in her supposed weakness.

I said this last month, but is too good to not say again: Jesus told the teachers of God’s word to keep it clear, meaning to not obscure the vast difference between His word and the world’s words. In Matthew 12:33 He is recorded as saying, “Either make the tree good and it’s fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit.” There is no middle ground, and the truth is far different from Satan’s deceptive lies.

1. In this present earth-life it is not God’s purpose to make us sinlessly perfect in body or soul, but to draw us close to Him into an intimate relationship in which He will nourish and with which He will launch us into the next stages of life. Yes, as we draw near to Him, He has us moving toward perfect righteousness, but none of us will arrive there while in this present earth-life.

My thought is that we humans wrongly tend to focus on getting better, on working on our perfection, wherein we encounter failure and dejection, success and pride. That misfocus is reasonable [but wrong] because we are faced daily with our failures and we are told to deal with them, but the Lord has His ways – conviction, repentance, confession, forgiveness, cleansing.

It all fits together in His plan, because our failures [weaknesses and sins] are designed to drive us to our knees asking for His help. It is in our weaknesses and failures, and times of drawing near to Him, that we and our world are changed. Have you noticed that when the Lord speaks of His chosen ones, He speaks not of their sinless lives but of their path of obedience?

1. And it is good to put on the full armor of God [Eph. 6:11], and to know how to stand and fight, but our confidence and victory are in Jesus who is our strength and protection. Put Him on and we will have His armor.
2. After 40 years in the wilderness, and a change of leadership from Moses to Joshua, how long did it take for Joshua and Israel to conquer the nations within the Promised Land? Scripture does not give a direct answer, but it has been approximated from a couple of verses to be 7 years. See Joshua 14:10 and Deuteronomy 2:14. Their job in the Promised Land was not done perfectly or completely, but neither will be ours. But it will be finished a “day” or so later.
3. Wouldn’t you agree that it is essential to know about the cross of Jesus, at least the story, at least the biblical foundation? The foundation can be put this way: Jesus said He is “the resurrection and the life” [John 11:25], not the crucifixion and the death. That’s another need for us to keep focused. Of course, resurrection and life first require a death, but like a woman in labor, the focus is on the outcome. When death no longer has any power over us [and that is a common grace among believers], we stand on solid ground. The path to that ground is different for each of us, but it always requires that we bear our own crosses.
4. Alert! This is a test. In John 16:33 Jesus is quoted as having said, “In the world you will have trouble. But cheer up, I have overcome the world.” The first and toughest question is [as always], “What did He mean?” The second is, “What are we to do about what He meant?”

To begin with, He told us we would have troubles as long as we are in the present body of our flesh. He will not keep us in a trouble-free life, but will be with us in our [carefully customized and measured] troubles. That is a double guarantee, is it not, so let’s settle for them.

But how about that “cheer up during troubles” part? That is downright impossible, isn’t it? Wrong. It is wrong because, when He put His Spirit in us, making us His born-again children, we found ourselves moving out of our simply human outlook. Our minds had been made ready to be remade [Rom. 12:2], which was the reason we suddenly began yielding our time, place and things to the Lord.

Along the way of growing up, something basic happened. We began to understand and live new truths – in this case, our responses to what happened became more important than what happened. That’s the answer, isn’t it. Our responses to what happens are more important than what happens, and they flow from within our remade minds. He commanded the cheering, and He enables us to cheer. Hallelujah! It’s true. We are born again from above.

I would wager that you made 100 on your test.

1. If you are among those who have been sweating the resistance of those in the swamp who are destined for drainage, take heart. When Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, those warring nations did not simply roll over. They fought against Israel. The Lord reminded Israel that He was their strength and that He would fight with and for them, which He did. None of them [one exception] gave up without a fight; they even gathered together, as many as five nations of them, fought against Israel, and lost.

If they were nations within the Promised Land, everyone and everything that breathed was slain. That was the Lord’s orders, and Joshua led them to victory and obedience. You may note in Joshua 11:20 that the Lord even hardened the hearts of the enemies so that they would not surrender but fight and be destroyed by Israel. Resistance was futile, but they resisted [it looked like, with their superior numbers and strength, they should have beaten Israel] but were totally defeated. The Promised Land swamp was drained, although in the natural it looked impossible. But for God ..

1. How much difficulty do you have living out that which you know is true and good for you, even something that you have found true over and over, and have been blessed by? The answer is probably “variable.” Foundational to the faithful’s lives are, 1) “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. I am going to live out God’s purpose in it.” And, 2) “All things work for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose. I will keep my attitude righteous until God’s truth becomes evident.”

Those are life-changing every-day working principles. There is so very much of our self [good and bad] that needs to be laid aside in order to live those good truths. Wives and mothers exemplify that sort of living in a major way. But what is being promoted here by the Holy Spirit is not the practice of automatically rolling over and yielding to every opposing force. Those wrong things that present us with the opportunity for righteous resistance need to be engaged and hopefully overcome, but if not overcome, to be righteously submitted to.

You recognize that this is but a mini-contribution to a very big topic, but the principles are basic.

1. I’ll call this a little thought, but a basic one. In Genesis 1:3 it was Day One of the Lord’s creative process of earth-making. He had created “stuff” before, that being angels sometime [before there was “time”] in the past. Now, just before creating light, He created a formless and void dark something that was to be the beginning of the earth and of all creation.

That mass of “stuff” is described as “waters,” which I understand as meaning a mass of something that was nothing. It was a mass of nothing, which had a great potential in His hands, but was nothing without His life. It even included the necessary ingredients for making humans, but they would need His Light.

Then Light came into the world. He inserted Himself into the mass of otherwise worthless nothingness by the mighty power of His “said” thought, “Let there be light.” The Light was Himself, His life, a manifestation of Himself by the Spirit, so the mass of nothing was now something. He was in and with it.

Although on Day One, creation did not yet have what we would call animal, plant or human life, it had God’s unlimited potential. [Can you see yourself yet?] It was a mass of living something, yet to be formed by Him. He was [is and ever will be] a life-giver and He had given Himself to create a creation, and for Him to be a part of it and it of Him forever. No turning back on His part, no wavering, no changes, not even a shadow of change. He would not be deterred. Light continues increasing the size of our universe infinitely in every direction.

That is a lesson to us, to whom He has made masses of nothing and to whom He has given life. We are to have the same purpose in this nothing world – give life to whomever and whatever He puts our hands to.

1. Not to neglect the political, because all things are spiritual. Atheism loves socialism because socialism removes the Lord God from lordship in life’s formula. He [God] may be allowed to hang around, but not as the authority – and His adherents are treated as low-level idiots.

Also, socialism embraces atheism because it is allowed to hold itself up as the highest of ability and to gather to itself all authority. Both atheism and socialism see moral vacuums and step into them with their even emptier answers. Mindlessness and darkness follow their paths. One must have a shallowness of thinking to go that way.

If what I have just said has any reason, it may be seen that vacuums are what remains when truth and life depart from society [persons, groups, nations, the world]. The gospel of Jesus Christ is taken into the world to bring truth and life, to empty trash out of minds, to fill souls with Jesus Himself. He changes souls, minds, wills, desires, consciences, morals. He replaces even the most comprehensive socioeconomic ideologies, to say the least, as He is seen as the merciful one who gives us our daily bread, who creates different talents and desires that give us different economic results, and that wealth acquisition funds charity.

As Christ is held up, the welfare state shrinks. But when the church weakens, the religion of socialism increases, with atheism finding its comfortable home there. The power and order formerly provided by the Lord is outsourced to civil government. Have you noticed that less laws are required when the nation is righteous? We become more and more a nation of laws, laws trying to make us obey our laws, when our righteousness diminishes.

Let no man cheat you – Col. 21:8. “See to it that no one takes you captive [cheats you] through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

But don’t let your religiopolitical insights twist your attitude or taint your relationships. As R. C. says, “I would not choose to be divided from someone [such as a socialist or atheist friend] based on politics [or food, -- Rom. 14] so long as I thought that the other was sincere and, importantly, being truthful with me and themselves and prepared to have at least some dialogue about what God’s word/truth and calling is or is not.” Good word, R. C.

1. The waters of the Red Sea did not close until all of God’s blood-redeemed people from Egypt had passed through – Ex. 14:21-29. Likewise, the ark did not come out of the Jordan River until it had secured passage for all of God’s people – Joshua 3:17; 4:10-11. Those were obvious acts of God, accomplished in the lives of people who exercised an adequate measure of faith and obedience. The New Testament application of those graceful acts is found in John 19:28-30.

Their position had been, 1) impossibly lost in slavery in Egypt [that was us], 2) the Lord sent a redeemer, Moses [Jesus], 3) Moses [Jesus] did his job, 4) Moses led them about in the wilderness for 40 years [until all who would not learn to trust and obey their invisible, living God had died off], 5) Joshua led the remainder into the Promised Land [the place in this life when believers have adequately learned to function in the power of God – Heb. 3 & 4].

God’s process had been, 1) create humanity, 2) teach us to trust and obey Him [if we will], 3) grant us opposition and victory so as to become overcomers [if we will] – John 20-21 , and 4) to take us into glory forever [Rev. 21 & 22]. The process has taken so long, six days so far, because the Lord wants more [quality and quantity] of us. He is gracious and patient – 2 Pet. 3:8-9.

1. The process of our sanctification is the responsibility of several persons – the Lord, ourselves, and those who share responsibility for our souls throughout our lives. Human sanctification is the setting apart of ourselves for God’s use. In Exodus 13:2 it was the firstborn. In Exodus 19 it was the personal cleansing of God’s people *by their own obedient action.* First, the Lord chooses us, setting us aside from the unchosen, for His purposes. Then, we begin having to exercise self-responsibility – 2 Tim. 2:21; 1 John 3:3; James 4:8. It gets done, all by grace.
2. What do you consider to be the main purpose of authority? It can be a group’s rally point [like “rally around the flag, boys”], or the focus for unity [looked to for focus], or the “big stick” for maintaining order, or the example of the power of humility [power under control], or the known ultimate responsibility [the supreme “court”], or the source of whatever is needed [ultimate succor], or the one from whom flows the purity of our vision, or more. Do you have difficulty remembering that all authority is of the Lord? Properly relating is important.
3. The twenty-third Psalm ends by saying, “The merciful God will hound me continually day and night until I turn to face Him.” You recognize that that is a paraphrase and has been personally adapted, thanks to A. H.’s testimony of the Lord pursuing him until he gave up. A. H. wrote: “I remember some dark times many years ago when I was far away from the Lord. I was lying on icy concrete repairing my rusty old car in the depths of winter. Things were not going well as I was unable to “simply remove” [as the repair manual casually instructed and the phrase I came to dread] a seized bolt. I lost my temper and shouted at the Lord, “Just leave me alone!!” He did not answer that particular “prayer,” but continued to pursue me, hunt me down and restore my soul. Praise Him for His Faithfulness! So the goodness and mercy of the Lord hunts us down until we are thoroughly blessed by the Shepherd of our lives.” May those you love be equally blessed to have the Hound of Heaven on their trail.