

The Return of the Lord Preparing the Bride

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Part 1A

I so appreciate the kindness that the brethren have consistently shown. Ah, good to see you my brother. Some of our brethren are here from Juárez and we are just delighted. They have treated us with such kindness and grace ????? parents and of course Saouls wife is here. We're delighted to have you all, do feel very welcome. They have welcomed us with such open arms when we have been in Juárez. And some of our other brothers are here, who normally live here but they have close connections in Juárez as well. And brothers and sisters we are honored by your presence and delighted to have you. That was the first place I ate nopales. Laughter.

I also thank you for the encouragement that your faith is to me, I greatly appreciate that. Now, tonight what we want to do is bring something of a wrap to what we have been speaking about. Although we spoke about the events of the end of the age and began to open up some new perspectives and challenges, just as Corbet said to us; our intention is to affected and to be changed. Helen, I so appreciated your encouragement earlier today, I enjoy so very much the way your mind works. And the Lord gave us this afternoon, earlier, I think it was this morning, the Lord gave us an understanding of freewill and foreknowledge. And we just watch kind of the panorama of how God has moved through this time and deposited such richness of His grace in our midst, and I do hope that we are, and will continue to be, profoundly changed.

You know, it's amazing how over the years we have come to think that the things of God are ultra dumbed down so that there's no meat, no substance, to what hear in most of the preaching that you hear today. This is not the hope to exalt oneself by putting anybody else down, it is that the riches of God's grace, the richness of the fair on the table of our Lord, is so overwhelming that why we should be starving for bread when there is such richness in our Fathers house is a great tragedy. I resolved that I would speak to you, not as children, but as mature saints. And I would charge you, in as much as the grace of God lies in you, to live up to the measure of what you have already attained because truly you are the light of the world. It's pleased the Lord to ignite the candle of your spirit, by the Holy Spirit, and to have you walk in the world, not as those who have to retire from the problems of the day but those who have answers. Those in whose faces the very hope of God shines forth to people.

One of the things that God does to make us so fully available and powerfully deployed as examples to the world around us, is He lets us go through many of the same things that the people around us, who are not believers, go through, He does. We have crafted a theology over the years that suggests that if you're going through trouble it must indicate the displeasure of God; you messed up somehow and Gods at angry at you and therefore you're getting your comupins. So people have become ashamed and embarrassed that they're facing problems, rather than understand the role of suffering in the life of a believer.

So what I want to do tonight is to take a closer look at the role of suffering in the life of a believer. And to do that I'd like to lead off with a passage in the book of Hebrews the 12th chapter. I referred to a verse, earlier today just in passing, it was Hebrews 11:35, I just referred to it. One time I was reading this and it just rose up off the page and struck me. You know how it does that sometimes, jumped out at you. It says this, "Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured (I mean, this actually says this) and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection." That was always there. In the early days of the body of Christ, many of our brothers and sisters were in prisons where they were tortured and they had the chance to be released, and they refused to be released because they hoped for a better resurrection. Meaning, they hoped that somebody would actually kill them so they would die for the Lord. Do you see what I see with this? These were people who had a grasp of something, I mean this is huge.

The early apostles were themselves people who suffered greatly. And one may very well ask, "Why is it that God seemed not to have spared them these sufferings and what is it that the people raised under their care, what is it that they learned?" This isn't about masochism; this is about learning the value of your example in suffering. And understanding that suffering was not about God punishing you, not about you being displeasing to God but that there is a distinct role that suffering plays in the life of the believer. Now let's see if we can get a handle on this from going on and reading in chapter 12.

In chapter 11 he had given us this long list of people who suffered for the name of the Lord. Samson and Jephthah and David and Samuel and the prophets and so on. They had suffered for the name of the Lord. So he says, chapter 12 verse 1, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses." Now this is one of those verses you're going to have to readjust how you thought about it. We thought that the great cloud of witnesses were the folks who had gone to heaven before us, who are somewhat leaning over the balcony of heaven watching us finish the race. And they're saying to us, "Run Forest, run." Laughter. I was speaking to Forest Rankin up here. You thought I was talking about Forrest Gump, no, it's Forest Rankin

But that's not what it is. He's saying, 'Since you're surrounded by this compelling list of powerful witnesses who testify by their faith to the grace of God encountered in the midst of suffering, what then should you do?' That's what he's saying. "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses," and each one of them bore testimonial to the grace of God

that sustained them in suffering. Think of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, what kind of suffering did they have? They were put in the fiery furnace, but in the furnace they met the fourth Man. And of Daniel, who for the predictability of his faith, could be entrapped and was thrown into the lion's den. These weren't idiots, these were not fools. These were people who would say such things as, "If I perish I perish but you're not going to change my point of view."

Now I'm not trying to create in you some sort of a tough minded "ra ra ra" response, I'm trying to say to you that it was never uncommon, it was never unusual in the history of the saints for us to be without trial and persecution. Why? Because in the earth we are strangers and foreigners, our loyalty is to heaven. Now it isn't that we are anarchists and go around trying to overthrow governments and so on; it's that our faith is placed first and primarily in the Living God. And if anything challenges our faith we do not give into the challenge, we remain faithful to the Most High.

One of my friends who has spent a lot of time in china, in fact he's a native of mainland China, has said to me that the communists in China are afraid of the Christians. And the reason that they persecute them and try to control them so thoroughly is because they're afraid of them. And I asked him, I said, "I don't understand, the Christians are not a threat to the nation." He said, "No, what they found was during the cultural revolution, the cultural revolution changed 5000 years of Chinese history; Chinese worshiped their culture before the cultural revolution. But the communists found that they could destroy Chinese culture, 5000 year old Chinese culture, but the only group they found that they could not change was the Christians. As deeply entrenched as the culture had been to the Chinese, the Cultural Revolution (that's why it was called the Cultural Revolution) the Cultural Revolution could be overthrown and the nation changed but they found they could not change the belief structure of Christians." I said, "Well what happened?" He said, "Well it was simple. They found that these people were prepared to die for their faith and the people who were under the culture of China were not willing always to die for what they believed. And as a group they could not change the Christians."

The body of Christ was designed to function, optimally, at its optimum capacity, in the midst of trials and persecution. Think of an airplane going down the runway, the design of the craft is such that the moment it hits takeoff speed, where the air moving over the wing is lighter than the air under the wing; the moment the speed moves the air over and causes it and it reaches that place, the aircraft has no option but to lift; its designed to. Christianity, real Christianity, was always designed to function in the optimum way under persecution. You know why, you know why that's true? Because God knew that we had an enemy who would pursue us relentlessly all through the ages. So He designed us to draw forth from us this extraordinary response the more oppressed and persecuted we would be.

And the evidence is this, think of this historical fact. The Roman Empire, in the days of the Flavian emperors would be Thespasian, Titus and Domitian; the father Thespasian and the sons Titus and Domitian, Domitian being the younger. They instituted persecution to prevent Christians from meeting, from assembling, from holding property, from holding public office, from being able to vote. All the incidences of civil citizenship and rights were denied under the rule of

Domitian, it had begun to be denied by Thespacian time but there were institutionalized by Domitian's time. In the year 313, Domitian was about the year 83 AD, by the year 313 there was an edict passed in the Roman Empire, it was called the Edict of Milan and it was passed by Constantine. It was called the Edict of Toleration and it reversed the laws that had been put in place primarily by Domitian almost 250 years earlier.

Now the reason he did that was, Constantine's empire now had encompassed both the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire; so it a huge empire. The single greatest cohesive force in the Roman Empire was Christianity. More people were Christians than there were Roman legions in the empire. More than ten percent of the population was known to be believers and that was the single largest block of people throughout the empire. And many historians believe that was quite conservative to say that there was perhaps only ten percent. But they were throughout the Roman Empire.

Now wait a minute, for almost 250 years you can't meet legally, you can't own property, you can't hold public office, you're denied the right of Roman citizenship and after this time of virulent persecution you end up conquering the empire to the point where the emperor says, "We welcome you as the empires church"? Well, how do you account for that? It's abundantly clear that the body of Christ was never meant to be institutional, and under persecution it rose to its greatest hour and conquered the conqueror. I want you to understand that we have nothing to fear in the days that are ahead of us. When persecution will surely come in increasing violence against the saints. Because God has designed the body of Christ to arise to its greatest moment in the environment of staunch opposition. What brilliant forethought that God would have planned it this way. "They overcome him by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony and that they did not love their lives even unto death." What brilliance that our God would have set it up from the beginning to be that way.

So we are no strangers to persecution, we are no strangers to trial. Now let's ask ourselves, what is this secret, what does persecution, what does trial, what does hardship do to us? How does it change us, how does it cause us to be quote, "More than conquerors in all these things"? Let's reverse something that has been said to us that's a callow lie by our enemy, and that is that the Christian life, if it has difficulty, means that you are missing the mark or you're off the track. That is simply not true. Let's explore the role of suffering in the life of the believer. We're back in Hebrews 12, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses," all these who died for their faith, "let us throw off everything that hinders us and the sin that so easily entangles us. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross."

Did you see that? "For the joy that was set before Him." What joy? The joy of His Fathers pleasure, doing the will of God, the pleasure of the Father. "For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, scorning the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten the word of encouragement that admonishes you as sons (it addresses you as sons). "My son," now

who's speaking here, who's children are you? Gods children; so God is saying to you, "My son, do not make light of the Lords discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you; because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and punishes (I want to come back and deal with this word here) everyone He accepts as a son."

Sometimes the English words are not the most adequate for conveying a concept, so we need some explanation for, "punishes everyone He accepts as a son," so let's talk about that. "Do not make light of the Lords discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you." You can expect the Father to rebuke you, you can expect the Father to quote "punish" you. hold on. This sounds very much like crime and punishment, it's not, it's not. In athletic terms, there's the idea of the coach who knows the capability of the athlete because he's trained to observe the capability of the athlete. And the coach will put the athlete to various exercises, which exercises press the athlete to the limits of his endurance. You notice it says, "endure hardship," he's speaking in the model of training, as in training for the Olympic games or training for athletic contests because what is his point. He's telling us we are to "run with patience the race that is set before us," the context is one in which he's introduced the metaphor of athletes in training.

Now, when the coach sees the potential of the athlete, classically the athlete is not pursuing at the level of his or her competence at the time; otherwise you don't need a coach, you've already maxed out. It's the coaches duty to observe where the performance of the athlete under his or her care, might be enhanced to the point of optimum performance. Because if you're an athlete, the glory of your athleticism is to reach the top of your game. The difference between the superior athletes and those who are 'OK', often is the difference between those who have been coached to the optimum of their competence and capability. As opposed to those who are good, showed a lot of promise, but were un-coached. So in athletic terms the training process is often summarized in this statement, 'No pain, no gain'.

When the coach puts the athlete to do bench presses or work in the gym or to do work on the field, it is properly said that the coach is punishing the athlete. Because you're pressing the athlete beyond what the athlete would normally go to, it's one of the reasons you need a coach, is you don't know when you've maxed out; you typically cannot coach yourself. You can't observe your own techniques skillfully enough to bring yourself to the peak of performance. So you need someone who knows what you're capable of doing, who knows the sport, who can press you, punish your body in the process, to obtain peak performance. That's the concept here. Now when you look at that, there is no idea of beating up on you because you've messed up. It's carefully, skillfully, observing your capability and training you to peak performance. And that process may be properly described as punishment, but it is not punishment as in crime and punishment, do you see the difference?

Who is your coach? Your Father, He's the one who disciplines you. Now what does your Father know about your capabilities? He made you, your Father is your Maker and your Father knows such things as, "Before you were in your mother's womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart, I appointed you a prophet to the nations. So don't you

come and tell Me that you are afraid of men, I am your peer pressure, I know who you are. You can get by with something less from others but I formed your frame and I know what I put into you. I know everything there is to know about human life and trials and training."

He uses a metaphor of athletic training to speak to us about becoming mature sons of God. And the process is one in which He will unflinchingly discipline us, because He's the only one who can do it. And if He doesn't do it, it will not be done and you will not come to your potential. So He begins by addressing you as sons. "Don't lose heart," He says, "I'm still your Father, when you're doing the 50th sprint, before you can quit, I am still your Father and My hand is on you. My intention is not to kill you but to make you the strongest and most powerful that you can be."

How vastly different, from the use of this scripture, to suggest that if you mess up you have it coming. Quite the opposite of a boarish, aggressive God who can hardly ever be appeased. You have your Trainer who is your Father watching every nuance of your performance, not performance to please Him, but that on you and in you the glory of God might appear in the earth, that men might see the goodness of God in your face.

Part 1B

Justifies this degree of training is this: God put you here to be like God. Now I know when I say that, immediately something in you wants to draw back because we've been taught the model of performing to please God. When I say to you God put us here to be like God, what you're hearing is God put us here to do things which only God can do, like create universes and so on. No, that's not it and this is why it's not it: You can only perform, in terms of power, what God enables you to perform because He's the one who has all power. So He's never going to be impressed with your demonstrations of power because whatever you demonstrate He is the one who does it through you. So forget that notion, take it off the table. You are not here to perform like God because God doesn't need you to perform like God, but you're here to be like God. Really, to be like God.

The one thing in which you may be like God, is that you may have exactly His responses to everything. Because, yousee, He has given you His nature and what He is training you to do is to respond as He would respond. Now you don't know how to respond as God would respond, only God knows how God would respond as God would respond. That's why He's your trainer, He knows what He put in you, He knows what you're capable of being. God knows that every one of you can respond in every situation in the same way that He would respond. That's why He says, "You are the light of the world."

But if you try to DO the light of the world thing, we're not in the same frame. Gods training of us is not about DOING, not to DO. His training of us is about BEING. If you will believe this you will see heaven open, if you will believe this God Himself will show you the goodness of God. God gave us His own nature when He deposited in us a spirit and then saved

us by giving us the impartation of the Holy Spirit. What do you think that arrangement is about? That you might be led by your spirit in fellowship with His Spirit. And the intention in that arrangement is to conform you to the very essence of Christ. God is not interested in what you could do for Him, He could do anything and doesn't need for you to help Him. What God is interested in is your BEING like Him. Do you know why? Because you are His son, that's why; that's why. Because you are a son of God.

Do you understand now why this morning when we talked about the covenant that preexisted and we spoke about how God swore on oath to God, creating a covenant, the purpose of which is to have sons, why this is so bedrock to the Christian faith? It is the foundation upon which our natures are meant to be transformed. God sees that there is nothing greater in the earth than someone who responds to every situation as He would. There is nothing greater in the earth than that. He was saying to us (I know you're getting this Doug) that we are in a long line of those who understood this. Why would Daniel go up to his room every day at the hour of prayer and pray with his window open toward Jerusalem knowing that they were scheming to catch him, knowing what the law that said, "For thirty days, if we find anybody in the kingdom praying to any other God but you, O'Nebuchanezzar; then we will arrest him and throw him into the den of lions,"? Do you think that Daniel didn't know what the law was? Do you think that Daniel didn't know what the intention was behind those who purposed the law?

They appealed to the vanity of the king, but their intention was to overthrow Daniel, and he knew it, absolutely knew it. What did he do, did he change his routine? He had a very good excuse for changing his routine but he went up nevertheless and prayed with his window open toward Jerusalem. That meant, if you understood how they prayed in those days, that meant they could hear him all the way down the hall. And what was the penalty for that? Be lunch for lions. But did it change him? Who are these tough minded people? The ones of whom the world was not worthy; sons of God, uncompromising in their faith.

"Jesus, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross despising the shame." He didn't like the shame of being stripped of His clothing and nailed to a cross, especially since it was also said, "Cursed is he who hangs upon a tree." But it was what the Father required. And it says, "For the joy that was set before Him." I am not talking to you about just being tough minded and arrogant an 'ra ra ra'. I'm saying to you that there is nothing, nothing, more valuable in the whole earth to the Lord than someone who will behave like God would in every situation. To God, the earth is not more valuable than one person like that.

That's what Gods trying to create in the earth. Do you want to know something? Before Jesus comes there'll be a whole bunch of them, not one or two, but an entire population of people like this. And the Spirit of God will testify with the Bride that this has come about, "Those who do not love their lives even unto death." What about Daniel, did he love his life? It's not like you want to walk out and get hit by a truck, it's not that kind of thing. It is that you love God more than

you love anything else. It's not that you don't love life, it's not that you're cavalier about life; it is that you love God more than you love your own life. And when you come to that place God says the earth that you're walking on is not worthy of you.

So what's the next step? Behold, He'll come for you, because you're not of this world. Far from it being that God punishes us because we've upset Him. We come to the state of not loving our lives because He disciplines us to peak performance. How do you know that you don't love your life more than you love the Lord? Because He will give you a series of experiences in your life that allows you to choose between what He wants to do and what you want to do. He'll start out small, it'll be a career move, everything will look good on one side and on the other side you just don't have peace. And people will look at you and say, "Are you stupid or just plain crazy?" It's all stacked up on one hand, it's all good over here and you're telling me what again, you don't have peace? That's how you learn to lay down your life.

It's not that one day Daniel just decided, "You know, I think I'll go and pray where they can hear me and if they put me in the lion's den that's OK." No, you look at the life of Daniel and from early he was taken as a young man as a captive; early on, he won't eat the food that they had in the palace of the king. This guys going to the beat of a different drum. And you know, they offered to pay him for his prophecies and he said, "No, keep your gold necklaces and your changes of clothing and I'll tell you what God says, I'll tell you for free." You begin to see this tough minded commitment early on. And then eventually he was put to the test. The same thing is true of Jesus, "I only do what I see the Father doing." Early on, He begins to make the decisions that position Him in the way of the Lord.

Now the process is designed to change us from our addiction to our own provision and our own protection, to coming to rely on the Lord. It's why God assaults us in this place, the place of desiring our own provision and protection, desiring control over our circumstances. There is not a believer who will not be put to the test in these areas. Because the first god that has to be overthrown in your life, is the one god that the soul recognizes as god, apart from God, and that is the necessity of you providing for yourself and protecting yourself. Every believer will go through the upheaval on these points. Because this is the first giant that needs to fall in your life on the road to being able to not value your own life more than your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm saying there's a progression and God, when you're young, disciplines you in the manner of the discipline applied to a young one. As you get older He disciplines you with other things, and other things; and eventually you're ready to lay down your life. And the goal and the beauty of that is, at that point, the world is not worthy of you because you've come to be like your Father. Your responses cannot be co-opted by the pressure of the urgent or by the expediency of the need to supply. See, if we had not fallen, none of this would be necessary. But because we fell, God rehabilitates us and by this process of discipline and training, He restores the fellowship that we had with God where we truly are the sons of God.

The Holy Spirit given to us is the strength, the backbone of our responses. He's also the one who orchestrates the path that we are to walk on and creates for us the opportunities for change. So there's an intimate working out of these things with and within the Spirit of God. Now, in the administration of the Holy Spirit there are three forms that these "punishments", if you like, take; these trainings take. And they go back to something we read in the book of Genesis. I'll tell you what the three are and then we'll look at them in the scriptures. The first is: God squeezes you. The second is: God gets so close up into your face that He blows into your nostrils. And the third is: God releases the circumstances of your life to check and measure your response.

And the Bible says in the book of Genesis, "God formed man from the dust of the ground and He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being." I'm told that in the Hebrew, the term that says 'God formed man' is literally 'God squeezed man' together out of the dust of the ground. It's a picture that's easy enough for you to see, God didn't just heap up a bunch of loose dirt out on the mesa, underneath some mesquite tree. God compacted the dirt; He squeezed it together, in the fashion of molding clay. There is a certain pressure that you put on it to create its shape. When God receives us as new children of God, He's making a new creation and part of that process is to squeeze the soul into conformity with the mold of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one that God employs. So you often will feel the pressure of God on your life. One of the ways you feel the pressure of God on your life is He begins to cut off options that you've long entertained. He begins to direct your path in ways that you don't especially want to go in. And that's all the matter of squeezing you. And when He's doing that you don't typically say, "O goodie, I really like this, I can see that I'm being squeezed into my destiny." No. You say, "O' God, why me? What did I ever do to You? I worked hard for this, I'm entitled; all my life I've prepared for this and You love me and say You want to help me and this thing dries up. I mean, I had the deal all lined up, nothing could go wrong and it went south. Where are You?"

God uses circumstances to order your steps, so that your destiny is not missed. And that's something I get out of the metaphor that God squeezed man out of the dust of the ground, put pressure on you to conform to a particular shape; the natural teaching the spiritual. You have a destiny in God and He will often disappoint you when you want to go in another way. I watch some of the young people today, that we're raising, and I have to tell you I am so pleased with them, I am so pleased with them. I was talking to your brother Matt and he was saying, you know in that voice they have when they are in their early twenties, "Well you know, I just want to do what God wants me to do." And I was thinking, man I was 35 before that idea crossed my mind. That God actually has something for me to do. You know Cliff, we were so far back in the hole they had to pump sunshine to us. But they step up and say, "Man, I just want to do what God wants me to do."

You know, I talked to Nick, he's in law school and I said, "Has the Lord shown you what to do?" and he said, "No, all I know is that the Lord shown me that I need to get my legal education. After that, He can do what He wants." And I'm thinking, "Man, I was sending applications to the SCC when I was your age." What do you mean, "Whatever God wants me to do"? Totally different breed is being raised at our knees and I thank God for that. We're going to see a mighty

generation, as June would say, "Y'all, I'm excited about you." We're going to see a mighty generation arise among the young people. I believe that, I believe that. And I would ask those of us who are older to really be sensitive, not to try to shape them in the ways of our own errors and unbelief. You know, it's nice if they have degrees that require perhaps certification. As fathers I think we think well that will guarantee them a better job. Teach them to hear the Lord and let the Lord squeeze them into His mold, that's the best they can be. And lets pray that one day they'll come to the place where they so run their races that the earth is not worthy of them.

What a different view of reality. You know I sometimes wonder why God didn't show use these things when we were young. Maybe He was trying to, maybe we were so far back, Cliff and I were, back in the cave; we were just so far back that we couldn't be talked to that way. But I have the sense that it was not all together ????. I believe there is a generation for whom some things are meant. And I believe that the generation that we're raising is that generation, I see it in such a wide spread way. They don't all want to be doctors and lawyers and such, and most of them don't want to be cowboys either. You remember the song, you know you can quote satra and Willie Nelson. Now that's truly existential.

So one of the ways that the Holy Spirit works in us is to squeeze us into conformity with our destiny, known in the mind of the Lord. Another way that the Holy Spirit works to produce this mature son of God, of whom the world is not worthy; is that God gets up close enough into our faces to blow His breath, as it were, into our nostrils. Think about when it says, "And God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." If you are going to breathe in someone's nostrils, I assure you it will not be a gentle wind coming across the plain. You'd get right down into his face and blow into his nose, that's what God did. And the scriptures say we are changed in exactly such a fashion as that. I Corinthians chapter 3 says, "And we who with unveiled faces all behold the Lord's glory are being changed (or transformed) from glory to glory." We who with unveiled faces, face to face, behold the Lords glory are being transformed from glory to glory.

The presence of the Lord will show all of the darkness in any of us. And we have the option of choosing at that moment in time. When the thing that offends the purposes of God in us is disclosed by the light of His presence, we have the joy of changing. The best time to change is when God shows you it's time to change, don't ever try to play catch-up, it's harder, it's harder by far. Believe me, I know. But there will be times in your life (and you know that this is true) when God makes it so plain, you know how sometimes you'll be in a crowded room and people will be talking then all of a sudden for an instant all the noise stops and it's as calm and quiet. Many times when God speaks to you He causes all the noise to stop and He talks to you. When He does, do not resist Him who calls you, say, "Yes Lord," say, "Whatever You want to, I'm your man."

Now He'll put up with all your stuff until that moment because He's not angry at you, He's not disappointed in you. He knows the way you're going and He'll bring you right to that place and He'll cause all the noise to stop. When He does, be

honest with God, say, "I give up." When He brings you to that place, you throw down, be done with it. And you'll find He'll take the thing out of your life like that. But if He's not worried about, don't you be worried about it. See how easy that is? If He's not upset at the stuff that you're upset about, don't you be upset, He's got your back. Because the brothers would say, "It's all good." When He stops the noise and it's you and Him, He talks to you don't resist. And He'll open the door. That's when He's up close, face to face, and He's breathing life into you.

I am so amazed at the ways that God helps me. You know where I get this stuff from, I've walked in it. Now I'm not preaching theory, I know this stuff, I've walked it out. Times when I was worried and anxious and concerned, 'what if' and 'is God'. He wouldn't touch my stuff; I wouldn't give it to Him. I found out that self induced turmoil has no real value, I could have just as readily slept under the blanket of my sins and God would have loved me anyway. Now don't get religious on me, I am not saying that sin is OK, I am saying that God is OK with you even when you're in sin. But there'll come a time when He'll stop the noise and He'll say, "OK, now I want to deal with it." And the reason is, we want to deal with the thing that bothers us, we don't want to deal with the structure that produced the thing.

If you cut off a branch but you don't kill the root, guess what? The branch will grow back. It'll grow in another place. Often, we want to just look good, we don't really want to change. And if we're caught in something we want that to go away but we don't want the motivation that caused the thing to arise in the first place, we don't want that touched. And when God gives you what is called 'the grace to repent', it's because He has done all the super structure work in you, so that now when He cuts off the branch it won't grow back because the root was cut at the same time, or was cut before. So you're not in trouble with that anymore, you see. Don't be bothered by the fruit on the tree; be bothered by where the roots are.

God is always working on the deeper thing and He'll show you the deeper thing when it's the right time and when He kills the deeper thing, the fruit will die. And it'll never come back. Why? Because He cut the root of it. He deals with it differently than the way we do. He gets up in our faces, when it's time for this thing to be dealt with, He will get in our faces and He'll blow life into us. And I'm just admonishing you and exhorting you, when He comes to those places and brings you to those places, give up. That's a good place in which to die. You see, you carry around a cross every day in the hope that some days you'll actually be crucified. And He will crucify that lust, the root of it, on that day of His choosing. When He does, you're done with it. The enemy will come around and remind you and in spite of the fact that he reminds you of it, it won't arise again in your life. When God deals with it, you're done with it. That's a fact. He intends to progress us from glory to glory.

And then finally God brings trials in our lives. Now, the beauty of trials (you heard me correctly, the beauty of trials) is sometimes this. You see, God is always working in you but you don't always see that He's working in you. So there come times when God brings trials on your life to show you what you've already done, what has already happened.

Part 1C

When you were a new believer, certain things would cause certain responses. Somebody cut you off in traffic, you had a predictable response. Now in the days when you were young, your response was spontaneous and it wouldn't bother you. In fact, your response wouldn't be whole lot different from what it would have been when you were lost. But sometimes God will cause that trial to come back to you to show you that you don't respond like that anymore. Now I used a simple and almost irrelevant example, we could use far more complicated examples. You used to be bound up with various trials that seemed to have so enmeshed you that there seemed no possible hope of escape. And you would go to those things and you'd hate it. And while you were engaged in those particular sinful activities you would be regretting it before you were done. And you'd hear your enemy saying, and you'd promise God you'd never do this again. And you'll hear your enemy say, "Ah, but you'll be back." And you'd say, "No, no, no, I won't be," but while you're denying you would be you'd already known that you'd be back.

But then God works in you and digs around the root and shows you the thing and gives you the grace to repent and restructures your life. Does all of that. He's not going to allow you to be kept in bondage to that fear. Because your enemy will say to you, "You can't go on in your purposes in God because what if this old thing kicks back up?" And God will allow you, God will actually arrange a trial for you that has all the elements of what used to ensnare you just like it used to before. And you will find, in the midst of that trial, that you have overcome. And you'll walk away from it and God will arrange it so that you will know the extent to which you are already victorious.

One of the best schemes of our enemy against us is to constantly try to hook us, today, to the definition of who we were yesterday. Because if he succeeds in that, you see, we have not moved an inch from where we were before. And if he can convince us that that's the truth, then he can frustrate everything that the Holy Spirit has been doing in our lives, in these areas. So your God will never allow you to escape the confrontation of the things you fear. God will arrange for you to face your fears because in that He will show you the victory that you've already had in Him. Then you can take your enemy's head off and go on. And there are a series of these things that will crop up during the course of your life.

The purpose of God is to bring you to maturity as a son because the intention of God is to live through you, and live as He would live through you. When there arises in the earth, someone whose responses to the problems, responses to people, responses to circumstances, are the same as what the Lord Himself would do, then you have in the earth a mature son of God. That's the goal, that's what He's doing, that's the prize, that's what we are pursuing, that's what He's pursuing us for. And listen, everyone of you, everyone of us, is destined to come to maturity. In the common church perspective nobody is expected to ever grow up. Everybody's expected to always be infants. And we see these few, who largely because they've gone to Bible school, stand up and give us information. Their lives are no different or no better than the

rest of the folk.

We clearly are preaching a different gospel. We're saying this truth is meant to transform everybody's life. It does not matter what you got yourself into, or what you were just born into when you were young. God knew the end of your life from the beginning and He saw you when you were into all of that stuff. But it didn't change His mind about who He made you to be. And He will still discipline you, He will still train you, He will still pressure you, so that you will become a mature son capable of handling the affairs of your Father's house. If the church has failed colossally in anything, I believe it's failed in this: To hold before the people of God a vision of them becoming mature and taking their places in the divine order of things.

I rejoice when I see men and women rise to their places, I'm happy to make room for them even if it means that I need to move on. If I'm standing in the way of your functioning, then the answers very simple, I went to prepare a place for you. So that when it's your time, I'll give it to you; I'm supposed to. Everyone is meant to move on and move up to glory to glory. Where do you think the people come from who are examples to us? They were all sinners at one point, all failing the grade, all messing up. God is not more impressed with those who speak a certain kind of English, or who have a certain level of education; that's meaningless to God. Most of the early apostles were described as ignorant and unlearned men, they were unschooled. And God chose the ordinary of the earth precisely to show us that you don't have to be extraordinary in order to be great in the kingdom of God.

I would to God that as you rise in your maturity, that you try more things. As the Spirit moves you, give place to the things of God. Because one of the things that's consistent with your maturing is that you are ready to take up what is yours. Will you fail sometimes? I promise you that you will fail more times than you think you will. But you're under the hand of your Father who is your coach. And you will learn more from your failure and you can agree more with God, at the times when you've failed, then at the times when you've succeeded.

I want to tell you that in the process of all of this, as you come to a place of being able to handle the things of God with maturity, God takes you into His counsel and He talks with you as a friend would to a friend. And He tells you things, just for the pleasure of conversation. I had an interesting example recently, if you'll indulge me I'll tell you, and it's the sweetest thing. The subject matter isn't what matters, it was the whole conversation. I actually believe I saw the Lord smile. I was in Cuba and of course the brethren in Cuba have very, very little, they're very poor. Ten dollars, US, a month is the average wage of a Cuban, so they have very little. And they have no substantial means of making more. So when you go you fully expect to give them what you have, in all ways; The Word and material things and so on. Well I knew that because it was my third trip there, so I took two suitcases one with the clothing I intended to wear and the other with clothing for certain people I would like to give these things to. We took that, we took extra money, more than what we would have needed for our own. In fact I said to Eric Yabo when he asked me about it going and how much he should

take. I said, "Take as much as you can because you'll wish that you had when you are there."

So anyway, we were there and doing all of that. Now the clothing I took had to do with things I knew I was going to be part of. And I was due to speak in a convention and they specifically said you need to wear a suit. So I took a suit and I took a sport jacket even though it was you know 80 degree weather; I didn't think anybody else would wear this stuff. So I took clothing I knew that they would wear. Well while we were there, one night the Lord said to me, "What would you give Me?" And I understood what He meant; He was just kind of talking to me, almost playing with me. "What would you give Me?" And I literally saw myself taking my best coat and putting it around His shoulders, in my mind. Because I wouldn't hesitate to do that, and neither would you if the Lord showed up. And He said to me, "You can't give Me anything because I don't need anything." And I said, "Yes Lord, I know that." He said, "But I will allow you to give Me things and I will receive them. I will just direct you who I want you to give what to. And I said, "Well of course Lord." All of a sudden then I had two suitcases of clothes, or I had clothes in two suitcases. And so for example, on one occasion I had this nice, new, Italian, silk tie that I had no intention of giving that to anybody. Laughter. The first thought that went through my mind was, "I knew I shouldn't have brought that tie." Laughter. But I quickly recovered.

So I was sitting, we were up in a place called Ciego de Avila, and I was speaking in a meeting on Saturday night and there were these young men in their late 20's sitting pretty much all around me. And I was wearing this tropical weight sport jacket and this nice tie that went right with it. And it also happened to be that I was running out of clothes, so I was down to those things; obviously overdressed for the occasion. So I took the tie off and folded it up and I handed it to this very nicely dressed young man, dressed in the very best that his circumstances... and the spirit of excellence was in him. So I handed him the tie. Well he thought that I had just taken my tie off because I was too hot and I was going up to preach. So after I was finished, of course, he discreetly came around and found me and handed me what he thought was still my tie. So I said, "No, that's your tie." he said, "Ce?" So he said, "Buenos Dias, muchos gracious amigo." And I could see that it had just impacted him in a very deep way. So I hugged him and said, "el señor te bendice." which is the Lord bless you.

I went to some other places and the Lord showed me various ones to give my things to. One of them said to me as I was leaving, "I don't know how to respond to you. You come and you bring us the Word and you give us financial resources and you even give us your clothes. I think I see Jesus when I see you." And I tell you, I couldn't hardly stand it. And he said because God had done something while I was still thinking about it. I was in the home, they don't have many hotels there, you stay in what they call "casas alquiladas", rented houses. Among the things I had taken was a relatively old silk robe that I have had for some time because sometimes you don't know what the situations will be and you may need to cover up quickly and go talk to somebody. Anyway, I had this old silk robe with me and the people in whose house we were staying were clearly unbelievers but they took such good care of us and the Lord showed me to give a nice shirt to the man; I gave some cash to an older woman who helped us, she worked somewhat like a waitress. And the only thing that I had that a woman could have was this silk robe because it was not so masculine that it was a man's robe. Something

like that they don't hardly ever have the chance to get there so I apologized for the fact that it was not pressed and washed and she waved that aside and was just extremely grateful.

So anyway, all of that happened, I got back to Albuquerque. The Lord hadn't said anything to me about all of this except what that one man said. I was back in Albuquerque and was home for a couple of days and Lucy wanted me to go and run errands with her so I did. One of the things we had to do was take some things back to a store where she had bought these things. So while she was doing the exchange I sort of wandered over into the men's section and just sort of looking at things. And on the sale rack there was this valore robe, I think it was the only robe in the store, men's section; that was originally 400 dollars. Now there's no way I would spend 400 dollars on a robe. But it was marked down to 80 dollars. And the Lord said, "Here's your robe back." Laughter. Just as plain as day He said, "Here's your robe back, thanks for the use of it." He used it for a couple of weeks. Those are the sorts of, like you can see, very, very sweet. Quite obviously the Lord was just speaking to me and we had this conversation. Most of it went on in my head with the Lord.

And I'm just telling you that God intends to fellowship with us, to take us deeply into His presence and to talk with us about things great and small. You know, I value that experience as much as I value any great revelation God gave me. I shared it with you just in part to share it with you but also to say this is very real you know, these things are very real. The greatest delight of the Lord is to visit with man again. Do you know how Gods heart was broken when He came to the garden and couldn't fellowship with Adam because Adam had sinned and was hiding. And from that time on God planned to restore fellowship with man and did it at the cross and does it today by the Spirit. This is what the Christian faith is deeply about. It's not the performance, it's not being beaten, it's not that stuff; that's on the road TO something else. It's about the sweet fellowship with the Father.

Once you see that, what really can separate you from the love of God, hardship? You know, I mentioned to you a little bit about the trip and how hard it was on a number of us while we were over there. But you don't think that, "Well it was hard so I can't do this anymore." The next time, you get up and you go. Not because anyone is pushing you to but because God gave you a life and made it clear to you that His preference would be that that life would be consumed in the purposes of God. And you just go, you go to it. And you don't do it because there is a reward waiting for you, though there is; you did it because you love the Lord.

I hope that in this weekend we touched some things that renewed us and we looked forward to the future, boldly and aggressively without any sense that we will shrink back. Understanding how God is preparing us for the times that are ahead and being determined that we will allow Him to finish this work that He has started in us, the end of which might be that we'll see the glory of God.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I commend you to God and to the word of

His grace that is able to build you up and to establish you among the sanctified. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you always. Corbet, once again I thank you and Judy for the excellent work you've done in arranging this time. We're all greatly in your debt. John, thank you so much always for just standing with me. Bill, thank you for coming down and recording these. All of these will be up on the web probably before the night is over. Doug and Nancy, I'm always honored to be in your presence and to labor with you. Brothers and sister, God bless you until next time. Amen.