

Basics of Discipleship

Book Two

by M. B. Room
www.mirror.net

Chapter One - The Zeal Of The Lord Of Hosts

Chapter Two - The Last Door

Chapter Three - Rainmakers

Chapter Four - The Price Of Unity

Chapter Five - Learning To Ask

Chapter Six - Servants Of The Word

Chapter Seven - Lest The Cross Of Christ
Be Emptied of It's Power

Chapter Eight - A Prophetic Church

THE ZEAL OF THE LORD OF HOSTS

*The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light:
they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.
Thou has multiplied the nation, and increased the joy: they joy before thee according
to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.
For thou has broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of
his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. For every boot stamped with fierceness, and
every cloak rolled in blood, shall even be for burning, for fuel of fire. For unto us a
child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder:
and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The
Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and
peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to
order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for
ever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this.*

Isaiah 9

There is coming a day when the corruption, the lies, and bloodshed that have prevailed in the human race since it was first contaminated with sin will end; and there will be established on this earth a kingdom that will be like heaven, ruled by the Messiah, the Son of God.

This kingdom will be brought about not by human ambition, but by God.

The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this. Everything in this prophecy of Isaiah 9 is being accomplished by God's zeal. It does not hinge on man.

- God causes the people who walked in darkness to see the light.
- God brings joy to that desolate nation.
- God causes the instruments of war to become fuel for the fire.

And God does it by means of the moving of His Holy Spirit.

When Isaiah says, "God's zeal will do it", it's the same as saying, "God's Spirit will do it".

God's Spirit causes the virgin to conceive and bear a son.

God's Spirit anoints Him with the anointing that makes Him the Christ, the Messiah.

God's Spirit guides Him to the Cross where He lays down His innocent life for the sins of the race.

God's Spirit raises Him from the dead.

God's Spirit lifts Him back to the highest heaven - to the right hand of the Father where He is given a name which is above every name.

And, it is God's Spirit who is now, at this moment, all over the earth turning hearts toward the Cross of Jesus Christ, causing them to know that because of that death of the Lamb of God, their sins are forgiven.

The government is already upon the shoulder of the crucified and risen Son of God. And the one who is executing His orders on this earth is the Holy Spirit who is the Zeal of the Lord of Hosts. And we can see it all with our own eyes.

Never has His word been more powerful on this earth than it is today.

Never have there been more glorious signs of His grace.

- People are hearing the voice of Jesus.
- Feeling the touch of His healing hand.

People are turning away from the vanity that they were into including all the religious vanity - and are following Jesus Christ.

These things are being done by the zeal of the Lord of Hosts.

God is doing it. God is saying, "Wake up", and the people
are waking up.
God is saying, "Turn from your sins", and
people are turning.
God is saying, "Be released from your bondage",
and they are shaking off
their chains.
"Follow my Son", and they are
following Him.

No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him, and I will raise him up on the last day.

What you are seeing now, my friend, in your own life and in the lives of those around you, is not the work of man. It is the work of God.

No man can say, "Jesus is Lord", but by the Holy Ghost.

It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing.

Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.

And yet, the zeal of the Lord of Hosts always works through men. God works redemptively on this earth only through flesh-and-blood people. Not through angels.

- Angels are messengers.
- Angels are ministering spirits for those who are being saved.
- Angels are protectors and helpers.

Praise God for the angels that are watching over you as you read these words. But, only men --- flesh-and-blood human beings are channels of redemptive grace.

God raises up men and women through whom His saving zeal moves. Never against their will, of course. If God calls us into the stream of His redemptive power and we refuse, He doesn't force us. He passes us by and raises up others. At the moment, God is calling us into things far more glorious than we've ever seen.

But there is one thing we must understand: for God's zeal to take hold of us and move through us, our lives must be given over to that zeal. There has to be an utter and complete abandonment to God's will.

Lo, I came to do thy will, O Lord.

Now most of us understand well enough that if things get in the way of God's zeal, they have to go. If you've bought a car that you just can't afford, you're going to be in such bondage to that car that you can't do God's will, sell it and get one you can afford.

Who do you love? Jesus or your car?
God or mammon?

That kind of thing is easy enough to deal with.

If you're too wrapped up in your family,

or your money,

or your hobby, or your T.V.

or your midnight snacks, surely

now that God has begun moving with power in your life, you can do what has to be done about these things.

But there is one competitor with divine zeal in our lives that's not so easy to pin-point,

or admit,

or get rid of.

It often looks so much like divine zeal an outsider can't tell the difference. People look at you and say, "There is a person with zeal for God.

He's up early.

He continues late.

Always on the go.

Always at the right place at the right time.

He prays wonderful prayers. Speaks beautiful words."

Yet you know - and God knows - that the thing which is driving you is not holy zeal at all, but ambition. And ambition is flesh. The inspiration behind ambition, especially religious ambition, is Satan. The goal of ambition is not the Kingdom of God, but the kingdom of self. And it's final destination, no matter how much it talks about heaven, is Hell.

Surely we know the difference between ambition and zeal.

- If we want a name on earth

- that's ambition.

- If we're satisfied to have our names written in heaven

- that's zeal.

- If we're concerned about what men think -

- that's ambition.

- If we care only about what God thinks

- that's zeal.

- If the only fruit that brings us joy is fruit that comes out of our ministry

- that's ambition.

- If we rejoice at fruit for the Kingdom, no matter who bears it

- that's zeal.

Ambition - especially religious ambition, spiritual ambition - is the human manifestation of the unholy spirit of the antichrist.

Zeal is the human manifestation of the Holy Spirit of God.

Many a church is a temple, not to the living God, but to the demon of ambition.

Many an evangelistic association is reared, not to the glory of Jesus Christ, but to the demon of ambition, using the gospel of Jesus as a cloak over a rapacious heart.

The only ambitious men in scriptures were evil men.

David's son, Absalom, was an ambitious man.

He wanted to be king. 0, how he wanted to

be king! If it meant the death of his own father, he wanted to be king.

In Judas we see ambition with all its masks off. What it won't do further its own ends. Yes, even in disciples who were very close to Jesus, the spirit of ambition made its appearance.

"Lord, grant that we may sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your kingdom", says James and John.

Jesus tolerated many things in the lives of His disciples. But He always struck down ambition immediately, else the zeal of the Lord of Hosts would not be able to move through their lives.

"Whoever would be great among you must be your servant. Whoever would be first among you must be slave of all."

So, the question to every believer reading these words is:

- What is it that's driving you?

- What is it that moves you when you get up in the morning and step forth into another day?

- Are you being driven from within by the zeal of the Lord of Hosts, by the spirit of the living God, caring for nothing but to do God's will, to manifest God's love to the people you live with and work with?

- Is your heart as set on pleasing Jesus as His heart was and is set on pleasing the Father?

or, is it ambition? The secret desire beneath all the spiritual activity to exalt yourself, to be somebody?

There has to come a point when God puts His finger on this self-lust and we admit it... confess it and bring it to the Cross.

Tell Him, "Lord, you know it but I have to confess it: beneath a veneer of faith and piety I have still been seeking my own glory. Lusting after recognition from men. Striving for that place of honor. Lord, I now bring this ambition to the Cross. Take it down into thy death. Raise me up by the Spirit into pure and holy zeal".

Every day take this ambitious spirit to the Cross and exchange it for God's zeal. Every hour, every time it rears its head, renounce it, repent of it, turn from it.

Many professing Christians secretly believe it's perfectly all right to have a little self-seeking ambition mixed in with their zeal for God. What they don't understand is that the day we start tolerating a little ambition in our hearts, the zeal of the Lord of Hosts departs from us. The Spirit is grieved. The presence of God flees from the temple and leaves it to the scribes and Pharisees and the moneymen.

"They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts." Can we honestly say before God that the lust of ambition in our hearts is dead? Crucified?

Maybe it was crucified last week, but is it crucified in you right now?

Jesus says to each of us,

- Are you willing to give up your ambition to Me now?

- Are you willing to surrender it to My death?

- Are you willing this day to deny yourself,
take up your cross and follow me?

Are you willing, friend,

- that the government should be upon His shoulder - not yours.

- That His name, not yours, should be called Wonderful.

- That of the increase of His government and peace there should be no end?

When it's clear to God that you have really denied yourself, that the ambition in your heart has been crucified and that you are truly given to following Jesus Christ.

Then, the zeal of the Lord of Hosts will descend upon you afresh in the power of the Holy Ghost and in ways that bring you

no glory,

no honor,

no fame,

no recognition. The life of God will flow forth from you, bring healing and salvation to many, preparing the earth for the Day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

THE LAST DOOR

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in."

Matt 23:13

It would be nice to be able to think that once we've jumped down from our high horse of pride, taken off our wide mask and gone through the narrow door of the Kingdom, our days of going through narrow places are over. The road may be narrow, but it seems possible to pick up a few bulky goodies along the way and take them with us.

But every so often the road goes through a place so narrow that we find ourselves having to trim down our lives again in order to get through.

The narrow road continues through the Kingdom of Disappointment which we call this world, until at the very border there is one last door cut through sheer rock.

Through this door travelers can see
sunshine,
blue sky,
green grass,
fountains and rivers,
and fruit trees in abundance.

By the time they arrive at this point travelers are moving in clusters. At this door each cluster halts, and the travelers must move through single file. Recently a cluster of travelers arrived at this last door and shouted for joy when they saw their destination on the other side. But when they tried to move through single file strange things started to happen. One man was carrying an automatic rifle. When he got to the door, the rifle flew up and blocked the door as if glued there by a magnet. To go through the door the man would have to leave the rifle behind ... this he didn't seem to want to do.

Two women were pulling a wagonload of gold. The wagon wasn't very big, but it was still too wide for the door. Another couple had a painted pavilion on bicycle wheels and would take turns pushing each other in this pavilion which had no windows but was painted inside with magnificent landscapes giving the inhabitant the feeling of continuously pleasant surroundings ... but the pavilion wouldn't go through.

So the cluster of travelers stood around the doorway and took turns trying to get their equipment through but nothing seemed to work. A messenger appeared.

"Sorry folks, but you can't block the door! Either start filing through without your equipment or move your group away from the door.

See, over there is Hesitation Park. If you don't want to forsake your equipment, you can move your group over there and establish yourselves."

And, sure enough, there must have been at least 750 groups in Hesitation Park gathered in tents, houses, some had even built churches. They were praying, singing, and listening to sermons. Some were holding seminars, some were engaged in spiritual group therapy. There was the church of "God and Mammon" the tabernacle of "Sanctified Racism" the community of "Christian Revenge" the "Spiritual Assembly of the Refined" where people had to demonstrate a thorough acquaintance with the best art, literature, poetry and dance. There was the "Church of Positive Thinking" where no mention was permitted of sin, death or hell.

This particular gathering of people by the door refused to move.

"We don't want to go to Hesitation Park, we want to go through the door. If only we can figure out how to take these few items along."

"I can allow you only one more minute," pleaded the messenger.

The group still refused to move. Suddenly there was an explosion. When the smoke cleared the people were scattered all over the place holding their heads, or sitting bewildered on the ground.

By the next afternoon they were busy establishing themselves in Hesitation Park and the door to freedom was clear again.

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in."

When Jesus died on Calvary and rose on the third day he opened the door in such a way that any one who desires to may enter. But no one is permitted to stand at the door and hesitate and block it for others,

The same Jesus who invites us all so graciously....

"I am the door"

"Come to me all you who labor...."

...this same Jesus has a way of forcing us off to the side if we insist on standing at the door with our rifles, our wagons of gold, our painted pavilions ... blocking the way for others.

Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at it, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you that do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it was that would betray him. And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. John 6:60-66

But a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. Acts 5:1-6

We arrive ever and again at a new door, a new passage into light until we stand at the last door. Through each door we can see the Light of the throne of God and the Lamb and the fountain of the Spirit...new strength and new refreshment waiting for us. But we've picked up something along the way that won't fit the passageway. We want God but we also want this other treasure. Our choice is to either leave the treasure and keep going on into light or step aside and play church in Hesitation Park. **But one thing God will not allow us to do: He will not allow us to block the door by being individuals of compromise, or a church of compromise right on the path others need to take for freedom.**

Our problem, as churches and as individuals, is that while we want no part of Hesitation Park there are things in our lives that simply won't fit the narrow door ...and we want to stop here in front of the door. But God won't let us block the door.

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments; Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother." And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth." And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Mark 10:17-21

The man was standing at the door, Jesus was urging him to let go of the last thing that was holding him back.

*"Don't stand there and hesitate. Come...enter ...follow me."
At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions. Mark 10:22*

Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants, When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. Matthew 18:23-27

Now the man is standing at the door...one step and he's in. To take that one step all he has to do is forgive as he has been forgiven.

But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and ...he turned aside.

On the other hand we have Peter eating breakfast with his Lord after the resurrection.

*"Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me?
Feed my lambs...feed my sheep...follow me."*

...and Peter went in.

Today each of us is standing again at the wonderful door...one step and we're in. But to take that one step means that we have to come in clean, bringing nothing with us, have hearts that are attached to nothing but God... and we seem to be having problems.

Some of us are stuck at the door because our automatic rifle won't go through. That rifle is so much a part of our lives we can't bring ourselves to let go of it. It is the **rifle of anger** ...forever spitting fire at those around us.

"You can't bring that with you," says the messenger. *"The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* Either lay your gun down and come in or go over there in Hesitation Park and shoot everybody in sight, but you can't stand here blocking the door with that rifle."

And some of us are stuck at the door with a **wagonload of gold**. We may be rich or we may be poor but we've fallen into the habit of thinking we can control our situation by means of money and have become slaves to money and the things money can buy.

We love God and we want to be in his Kingdom but we can't bring ourselves to let go of mammon.

"Leave your wagon there by the door and come," says the messenger. "God will take care of you.

You will have the money,

the food,

the clothing,

the shelter you need, all the way to Paradise."

"What if I leave the wagon behind and take only a few little nuggets?"

"Friend, you can keep it all if you just take your wagon over to Hesitation Park. But if you want to clear this door you have to come through clean."

And some of us are holding out for only one thing: **pleasant surroundings**.

"I'll serve God. I'll work hard. I'll pray every day. All I ask is some green grass and blue sky and peace and quiet."

We've been pushing a little painted pavilion all through our lives this far and the thought of exposing our tender spirits to the harsh realities of the raw world scares us to death.

"Surely there must be a way to push my pavilion through."

"My friend," says the messenger, "take a look through that door. Can't you see that the beauty of the Lord himself far exceeds the painted landscapes of your fantasy world?

Come, leave it behind and enter real life. But I must warn you that you can't hesitate here. If you want to keep your pavilion move it over there to Hesitation Park."

Each of us knows what it is that keeps us from getting through the door.

The Spirit pleads with us:

- "It's not worth it!
- Leave it behind and move!
- Do it now!"

Soon there will be a final surge of travelers on the Narrow Road. It will number in the millions. One day the last cluster of travelers will reach the door. And those who choose to do so will enter ... the others will settle in Hesitation Park. Then the door will close and it will never open again in all eternity.

RAINMAKERS

Jesus promised that if we believe in him, rivers of living water will flow out of our hearts into this world.

Jesus promised that if we believe in him, signs of the kingdom will follow us wherever we go. Jesus promised that if we believe in him, we will do the works that he did ... and even greater works than his because he had gone to the Father and sent the Holy Spirit.

So why the discrepancy between those high promises of Jesus and the meager trickle of life which flows from us with hardly enough force to quench the thirst of a mouse?

We're surrounded on all sides by people with heartbreaking needs.

- People who are depressed.
- People who are almost insane with loneliness.
- Families breaking apart.
- The sick.
- The dying.
- Women with children who are caught in the economic squeeze.
- Old folks with no one to take care of them.

And many of these people are reaching out directly to us. We feel like a farmer standing in the middle of 500 acres of crops which are wilting and shriveling under a scorching sun, praying for rain and no rain comes. If I don't get water to these crops they're going to die. So, what do I do? Either I bring down rain from heaven or I carry water from the river in buckets to my 500 acres.

The temptation is to get out our buckets and start hauling water with our bare hands. In fact, the ministries of most of us are pretty much a bucket brigade. But a bucket brigade for 500 acres is absurd. The only thing that will save the crops is a good soaking rain.

When Jesus promised that if we believe in him out of our hearts will come rivers of living water, he made clear that the source of that living water is not earth, but heaven.

Ah, but we're so accustomed to trying to make things happen by ourselves. This is what the movers and the shakers of this world have always done... they make things happen. They figure out a solution to the problem and they work it.

But in the Kingdom of God we don't make things happen. God makes things happen. All we do is put ourselves in the position before God where God's kingdom is able to break through into this withered world through us.

It might have looked on the surface as if Elijah had the power to make the rain stop. And then when he was good and ready, had the power to turn around and make it rain. But all that Elijah was really doing was standing before God ... fitting into God's purpose. When Elijah said,

"There shall be neither dew nor rain these years except by my word,"

he spoke as one who stood before God and spoke what he was given to speak.

And when in the third year of drought, Elijah said to Ahab,

"Go up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of the rushing of rain,"

he spoke not from himself but from God.

Our Lord worked miracles. Every word that flowed from his mouth was prophetic. But Jesus didn't make things happen... the Father made things happen through him. Jesus did nothing out of himself.

- Spoke not one word out of himself.
- He spoke what he was given.
- He did what he was given.

Jesus stood on this earth as the means by which the Kingdom of God was able to break through.

We need to learn to quit trying to be a bucket brigade and to stand before God so totally given up to his will that his kingdom can break through into this world through us. Then,

- we will bring rain,
- living water will flow from heaven through us into this parched world.

It's not as if the Kingdom of God comes to us wringing its hands and saying,

"Gee, things are really going hard these days. Nobody wants to believe in Jesus Christ. I'm looking for volunteers who would be willing to help put Christ back into Christmas. Would you mind getting your bucket and helping out?"

The kingdom comes to us and says,

"The hour has come for me to speak to this world through you. Let me have your body, soul, and spirit, and I'll get the job done."

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you you shall go, and whatever I command you you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord."

Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." Jeremiah 1:4 -10

Jeremiah did not carry buckets, Jeremiah made it rain! Because when the Kingdom of God came to Jeremiah and claimed him, he responded. Jeremiah yielded himself and the word of the living God started flowing through him.

So how do we get beyond carrying buckets to the place where we are able to bring rain? How do we get to the place where the Kingdom of God really breaks through into the world through us?

The first thing we have to do is put down our buckets and hold still before God.

1. The first requirement for any one who is ever to be the means by which God touches this world redemptively, is a yielded life.

- a life that holds still,
- a life that is willing to let God call the shots.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the

Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.”
And Mary said to the angel, “How shall this be, since I have no husband?” And the angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.”
And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word...”
Luke 1:26-38a

“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word...”

It was as if Mary put down her bucket, gave up doing anything her own way, and bowed in stillness and submission to the will of God.

“I am your handmaid...do as you wish with me.”

For all our surrendering and all our decisions and commitments and promises to God, have we ever really come to a complete stop before him, silenced our hearts and our mouths, and yielded our life to him like Mary did? Are we willing to say to him, “Behold, I am your servant; let it be to me according to your word?”

2. If we are going to bring the rain of the kingdom into this dry earth, we also have to be willing, every day, to leave the familiar and enter into the unknown with God.

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.” So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him.
Genesis 12:1-4a

Abraham went out from

his country,
his kindred,
his father’s house, to a land God promised to show him.

At Jesus’ command, Peter launched out into the deep (into the unknown), and let down his nets for a catch. Then he brought his boat to land, forsook everything and followed Jesus into the unknown.

To walk by faith is to constantly walk into the unknown with God.

- It means entering the realm of the Spirit of God every day...which is unknown territory for our flesh.
- It means venturing out among people in the name of the Lord,
- talking to people we’ve always been afraid to talk to,
- listening to people we’ve passed by for years and hardly given them a chance to say, "Good morning."
 - It means exposing our hearts to people,
 - who might make ridiculous demands,
 - who might break our hearts,
 - who might hurt our feelings.

When you carry your own bucket, you can stay in a comfortable rut all your life. But when you draw near enough to God so that he can make it rain through you, you will be following the Lord into the unknown every day.

3. If we're going to bring the rain of the kingdom into this dry earth, we also have to speak what God gives us to speak.

Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.

We've seen so much hypocrisy in our own lives and in the lives of those around us that we're hesitant to open our mouths for fear our words will be so much more religious death.

But if we've yielded to God and if we're following the Lamb into the unknown, the Lord puts forth his hand and touches our mouth and says,

"Behold, I have put words in your mouth. Speak them!"

The life of the kingdom flows out of us through the spoken word.

"It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail. The words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life."

And now, his words flow from our hearts across our mouths as rivers of living water, bringing life to the withered fields of this earth. Granted, the same words that bring life will also bring persecution...as they brought persecution to Elijah and Jeremiah...put our Lord on a cross... caused Peter to die for his Lord. But we need to defy our fears and speak the word God puts in our mouth. For with the persecution there will also be streams flowing in the desert; those parched fields turning green.

Today the Lord is calling everyone who is frustrated by this meager trickle, where there should be a rushing river of life flowing from us, to give up our bucket brigade and draw near to him so that he can make it rain through us.

The source of living water is not earth, but heaven. Heaven will give rain to this desert earth through us,

- **when we give the God of heaven a totally yielded life,**
- **when we are willing to leave our familiar rut and follow Jesus into the unknown every day,**
- **when we open our mouths and speak as the Spirit gives us utterance.**

THE PRICE OF UNITY

When Solomon had ended his prayer fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. When all the children of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord upon the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the earth on the pavement, and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord.

Never have we been as conscious of the need for unity in the Body of Christ as now. It's all very well for someone to come along and say,

"But there is unity in the Body.
Scripture already says, 'We are all one body.'"

And we can sit around and spin little theories and tell ourselves what wonderful things are happening. But truthfully, the saints of God throughout the earth, in any town, in almost any church, are in disarray.

That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

We may be together - but are we one?
We may be in step - but are we really one?
We may have superficial agreement on many things - but unity?

The saints who are not one with each other in the Father and the Son are going to wake up one day, very soon, and find themselves outside the Kingdom with the door shut.

This is not the 16th century. This is the beginning of the End. We are standing at the threshold of a time of judgment this planet hasn't seen since its beginning.

Matthew 24 is unfolding before our eyes.

Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the sufferings. We will be delivered to tribulation ... put to death, hated... There will be false prophets... Because wickedness is multiplied, the love of many

will grow cold. And the gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations. Then the end will come.

What kind of church is going to walk through this tribulation?
What kind of church is going to preach the gospel of the Kingdom throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations? Surely not this torn,
pride infested,
name lusting,
self-centered,
scattered, divided body.

It will be a body of saints who are one.

Now granted only the Spirit of God can bring unity about. We don't sit around and take a vote and decide that from now on we're going to be one, and then have unity.

- God has to do it.

And notice the way God brings his people into unity:

- God brings his people into unity simply by causing his glory to come upon them.

When the glory of God is upon his church, his church is one. When the glory departs from his church, its people are scattered.

***The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them,
that they may be one even as we are one.***

At the moment, we're only seeing flashes of this glory..

- Perhaps it comes to a handful of saints at prayer. You walk into the room and **know** there's a difference in the atmosphere.

- There's a knock on the door just at the moment when you're at your wits end. The visitor steps inside and the glory of God fills the place.

But soon it won't be just odd flashes. There will be fellowships which will be absolutely drenched in God's glory. Glory will follow these people wherever they go.

- It will fill the rooms of their homes.
- It will hover over their dinner tables.
- It will be with them on their jobs.
- It will breathe upon them as they sleep.
- Welcome them to the new day.

And wherever you find this atmosphere of glory you will find unity among the disciples.

The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one.

But notice **when** Jesus prayed this prayer. He prayed it as he was about to be offered up.

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

The glory God has given his Son becomes visible only as the Son is sacrificed. And the glory Jesus gives his disciples becomes actual in their lives only when their lives become one with his sacrifice on the cross

When Solomon had ended his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

First, those offerings and sacrifices were slain, cut and laid open on the altar.

- Then the fire falls and consumes them.
- Then the glory of God fills the temple.

Glory always follows the fire on the sacrifice.

***I have a baptism to be baptized with,
and how I am constrained until it is accomplished.***

The most important thing, the thing on which everything else hinges, is this baptism of fire. Without the baptism of fire there will be no baptism of glory on God's people.

And this baptism of fire which came to the Son of God is either going to touch you, burn you, consume you, change you, or you are still dead in your sins.

I don't care who tells you that you can accept the cross of Jesus on faith and then go on living your delicate,

safe,
sheltered,
smug,
pious little

life and consider yourself saved. That's a lie.

If you really take hold of the cross of Jesus by faith,

- you're never going to be the same,
- you're never going to walk straight again.

You're going to be like Jacob after the angel wounded his thigh. You're going to limp. You're going to be spoiled for the world. You're going to be broken, and broken, and broken for the rest of your life. Your healing is in that brokenness. God's strength is made perfect in **your** weakness.

While there is only one sacrifice for sin - the death of the Lamb - a sacrifice never to be repeated, yet, we cannot come into unity with the Son of God, much less into unity with each other, until we enter into that sacrifice.

The disunity among the people who say they love Jesus is simply evidence that there are a lot of professing Christians walking around who are refusing to put their lives on the altar and let the fire fall.

- They want power.
- They want gifts of the Spirit.
- They want victory.

But they don't want to feel the fire.

- They don't want to share in the sufferings of their Lord.
- They don't want to be reproached for the name of Christ.

"Isn't it enough that I reckon myself dead with you, Lord?
Isn't it enough that I reckon myself crucified?"

Why do I have to feel those flames?

Why do I have to actually have people dislike me,
hurt me,
slander me,
reject me?

"Look, Lord, I'm willing to present my body as a living sacrifice to you by faith, but does this mean I have to go through hunger, thirst, pain, fatigue?"

Listen my friends, if we're going to be touched by real glory then we're also going to be touched by a real cross. We're going to offer ourselves, in deed and in truth, to the fire of God to come down and lick up the sacrifice in order that God's glory may fill the temple.

1. The fire of God means broken pride.

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken
and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

Some of us give the appearance of great humility, but our pride is unbroken. We haven't shed one tear before God for what we are. We go right on holding to our own way, looking down on those around us, and never bending an inch. No wonder we're so dead.

Would we be willing, today, to put our pride on the altar and let it be broken open to the fire of God so that we can begin to do those things that only broken men and women can do?

Like ask for forgiveness?

Like change our course when we know it's wrong?

2. The fire of God means spent bodies.

I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

That's not a religious act. That's a way of life, a daily spending of the body. Amazing how many people are trying to be Christians with their spirits and pagans with their bodies. Floating around on cloud nine with their spirits while their bodies rest at ease, or glut themselves, or endlessly gratify themselves.

Our Lord offered his body to the Father every day.

- That's why he was tired as he sat by the well.
- That's why he slept in the boat.
- That's why he was hungry in the wilderness.
- That's why he was thirsty as he hung on the cross.

Think of all the things you avoid because it might involve a little fatigue. Put your body on the altar and let the Spirit show you how to spend it.

- You'll no longer be living for your table or your bed.

- You'll be joyfully eating and resting so you can go out and spend your body some more.

Your meat and drink will be to do the will of him who sent you and accomplish his work.

3. The fire of God means a forgotten name.

When the officials came to John the Baptist in the wilderness and asked, "Who are you?", he didn't answer, "You mean you never heard of me? I'm John the Baptist!"

He simply said, "I am not the Christ."

"Are you Elijah?" - "No."

"Are you that prophet?" - "No."

"Well then, who are you?"

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'make straight the way of the Lord.'"

I have no name.

I am a voice."

The price of being a voice,
of being able to point men to Jesus, is that we lose our name.

Our name becomes a forgotten thing to all but God. Ask yourself honestly if you are willing to pay that price? If you're not, don't say you are, because God might just take you at your word.

4. The fire of God means a transformed mind.

Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. When the fire of God gets through with your mind it's abnormal as far as the world is concerned because it no longer conforms to the mind of Channel 2, or the Detroit News, or William Buckley, or Bill Bonds, or James Taylor.

It conforms to the mind of him who emptied himself and became a servant. And so your days are spent living in a world that thinks along other lines, causing you to be wrenched and torn by people you work with and live with who want you to come along with them while you follow a Master they can't see. And you go on thinking with a mind which has no choice but to see everything from God's point of view.

And, by the way, when you see things from God's point of view you don't run off and isolate yourself from the world by surrounding yourself with nothing but Christians. You stay in the world and sweat it out. Are you willing?

It's the saints who are willing to feel the fire - who, as the fire falls, will also taste glory. And in that glory will have unity with each other. Are we willing to be joined to the sacrifice on the altar in order that, as the fire of God falls on the sacrifice, the glory of God may fill the temple? Then let's do it.

Let's put our pride, our bodies,
our names,
our minds on the altar with the Lamb

and let the fire fall.

LEARNING TO ASK

Jesus says that the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. This is certainly true when it comes to knowing how to ask for help from God.

Again and again we see the children of this world lifting up their voices without shame, crying out to God for help, while the children of light keep limping along somehow unable, or unwilling, or too timid to pray a real prayer.

The children of this world never turn to God except when they're in trouble. As long as life is running smooth, the money is coming in, their health is good, the thought of God never enters their mind. Then along comes a crisis, sickness, death, a layoff, a family problem - now it's "Please dear God help me!"
And God helps them.

God knows very well that when the crisis is past they will forget him until the next crisis - but he answers their cry. The pity is that even though they ask only in a crisis the children of this world do more real, definite, believing asking than many people who have met and known the living Christ.

What is it?

Is it laziness?

Is it shoddy thinking?

Or is it this abominable pride that keeps believers walking through this world with their drooping heads and drooping hearts and never asking for the blessings the Father is just waiting to give them?

Why is it that when people become religious they know less about asking God for the things they need than they did before.

In our Lord's parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, the Pharisee is praying up a storm with his these and thous but he doesn't ask for one thing. He thinks he has it all.

God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are ---

God, I thank thee that I am so much more
righteous than other men ---

I fast twice a week ---

I do such marvelous things ---

And all the while this pompous Pharisee is, in fact, wretched, pitiable, prior, blind, and naked. This man ought to be asking for help. He ought to be on his face pleading.

But to break down and ask for something he'd have to give up his front.

The Publican, on the other hand, does nothing but ask.

He doesn't go through that goody goody routine. It's just,

"God be merciful to me a sinner."

And the mercy comes. God visits that man's heart with holy peace. And all heaven breaks forth into singing. In our Lord's parable of the Prodigal Son we see the older brother, the good boy who stays home and does everything right, in the same condition - he doesn't know how to ask. He complains that the father has killed the fatted calf for his no-good brother.

***"You never even gave me a little goat
that I might make merry with my friends."***

"Son, you're always with me. All that is mine is yours."

But it didn't do that young man any good because he never asked.

*"Lo, these many years I have served you
and I never disobeyed your command."
"But did you ever ask me for anything?"*

What a picture of so many believers. They're so good and proper, but they bore you to death! Because they have never learned to ask the Father for one of those promised blessings **that their joy may be full.**

The prodigal son came home with one thing on his heart, a request. He just wants his father to hire him. He's not claiming any rights... He does not say - "I'm your son you ought to do something for me."

*"Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you; I am no longer
worthy to be called your son, just hire me",*

and before he can get another word out, *"Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. And bring the fatted calf and kill it. And let us eat and make merry".*

Blessings the young man never dreamed of come pouring down over his penitent head. The father was just waiting for him to come and ask.

That's the kind of God we have. A God who is a thousand times more ready to give than we to ask. He sent his only-begotten into this world to show us just that.

He gave his only-begotten son.

He gives his crucified and risen Son to every soul who asks.

Jesus is God's 'yes' to every cry a human heart could ever raise.

Never once did Jesus turn to a sick man crying for healing and say "No". Not once did Jesus ever answer a penitent sinner pleading for forgiveness with a "No".
Always "Yes".

"If you want to Lord - you can make me clean."

"Of course I want to. Be clean." And the leper was healed.

And how Jesus labored with his disciples trying to teach them to ask!

Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one who asks receives; and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened.

If you ask your father for bread you're not going to get a stone!

If you ask him for fish you're not going to get a scorpion!

Truly, truly I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, He will give it to you in my name. Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive that your joy may be full. If two of you agree on earth touching anything they shall ask, it shall be done for them by my Father who is in Heaven.

Every redemptive miracle, every healing, every unbinding of a human life is tied directly to some child of God lifting up his heart to the Father and asking. Two believers over here or two believers over there coming together in unity and asking.

The Father has those blessings all lined up, ready to fall like showers upon the dry ground but somebody has to ask. It won't happen until somebody does ask.

If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.

Our churches have seen blessings. Stream of living water has been flowing in our midst. Many have been quickened - many have been healed. But we haven't seen anything compared with the blessings that will be flowing out of our lives into that dry thirsty world when the children of the Father start taking the Master at his word and really asking - not just in a crisis but day after day.

"Oh, but I tried that, nothing ever happened.
I prayed and prayed and nothing happened:"

Sometimes people think they're asking, but in truth they aren't doing anything but mumbling to themselves. It's a monologue - not a prayer. The heart is fixed, not on God but on itself. Their spirit is clothed not with the name of Jesus, but with its own phony righteousness.

Complaining is not asking.

The older brother of the prodigal was a complainer. "Lo, I've done this and this and this - and you've never done anything for me." "I've worked so hard in the church all these years - and look at the thanks I get."

A complaining spirit cannot pray, all it can do is complain. Don't think that because you've done a lot of complaining and nothing happened, God failed you. Repent of your complaining spirit and draw near to the Father with a heart that has been to the Cross and seen the Father's love and ask, and you will receive.

Brooding is not asking.

There are people who go into their room and shut the door and get down on their knees and brood for half an hour. They wonder why their prayers are never answered - they never prayed.

Envy is not asking.

You see power moving in another man's life and instead of rejoicing at what God is doing in that man you envy him - you begrudge him those blessings.

..."when my no-good brother comes home, you kill the fatted calf."

You may get a raise out of the boss that way but you'll never get blessings out of God with envy.

Self-pity is not asking.

We all sympathize with the man who is married to a woman who is forever moaning about her aches and pains, her incisions, and shots and pills and trips to the doctor. But this is the kind of whimpering the heavenly Father hears in our hearts day in and day out.

Not cries for help -- Not cries for mercy, but an incessant spewing forth of self-pity. What a joy it is to the Father when this self-pity stops and he hears one decent prayer!

Asking is more than saying the words.

Sometimes we say all the right words. but our hearts are miles away and the words fall to the ground like stones.

Asking is more than shedding tears.

We can become deeply emotional about Brother Jack's drinking problem and shed real tears, but our hearts aren't there.

Asking begins with finding out from your heart what it really wants -

not what you think it ought to want - but what your heart deeply and truly is crying out for. If you have to sit still in a chair for 10 hours and unwind your tangled thoughts, (or 10 days), it's worth it.

Do you really want to be set free from that bondage? Do you really want the fullness of the Holy Spirit, even though fire comes with it? Do you really want that child of yours brought into the Kingdom, even though he never becomes Valedictorian of Michigan State? Do you really want God to make you a more effective laborer in his vineyard? Do you want to see a harvest of multitudes coming under the living Word?

When you have that clear then take your request to the Father. Lift up your heart to God, whose eye is upon you and whose love for you is deep beyond words, who sent his own Son to the Cross so that you could lift up your heart like this and ask.

Here, O Father, is my need.
Here is the cry of my heart.
Help me! Give me these people for your Kingdom!

O God, open up those windows of Heaven upon us all.

***Truly, truly I say to you, if
you ask anything of the Father
he will give it to you in my name.***

So now you believe that in Jesus name you have this thing you asked for. You believe before you see it. You believe because you know your heavenly Father has heard you, and it's done.

The message of the Spirit is one word: **ASK**.

Don't sit around and brood and complain
and feel sorry for yourself.

Lift up your heart to the Father and ask
and in the name of Jesus you shall receive.

SERVANTS OF THE WORD

When the risen Jesus departed this world and returned to the Father, he left his disciples with only one thing to hold onto and promised that that one thing would be enough.

He left them no funds,
no organization,
no headquarters building.

All he left them were his words;

“For I have given them the words which thou gavest me.”

*“It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail;
the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”*

Now there are words that Jesus speaks which fill our hearts with comfort.

*“Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden
and I will give you rest.”*

And words that Jesus speaks which scare us to death.

*“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure
to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give
alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old,
with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail...”*

For years of our lives these words have been resting in our hearts.
We know who is speaking them and know he’s talking to us when he says;

*”You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost its
taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer
good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden
under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A
city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a
lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and
it gives light to all the house. Let your light so shine
before men, that they may see your good works and
give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”*

Jesus knows these words that he speaks are anointed with power. He knows that these words are the door to the life of faith. Once we’ve heard these words of his, our innocence is gone. We have been addressed by the Spirit of the Living God and what we do with these words determines our destiny.

*“Every one then who hears these words of mine and
does them will be like the wise man, who built his
house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods
came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it
did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.
And every one who hears these words of mine and
does not do them will be like a foolish man who built
his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the
floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that
house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.”*

Sometimes these words of Jesus are like time bombs.
They lie there in our hearts like they’re asleep.
Then suddenly, one day they explode

and you know that the Lord Jesus is speaking personally to you. Now you either submit to the word or turn your back on it with a deliberate act of the will. But you can no longer half-believe it or half-obey it.

“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.”

Whether it’s Moses at the burning bush,
or Peter in the fishing boat,
or Mary standing before the angel Gabriel,
or you or I,
the door to life or death has now been opened by that word which is speaking to me and I either submit to it or I don’t.

“Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord let it be to me according to your word.”

“Here I am, send me.”

And for the rest of our lives, we serve God by submitting to that word which is always there.

You don’t serve God by deciding what you’d like to do for God.
You don’t serve God by building a church which he never asked you to build.

“Except the Lord build the house, he labors in vain who builds it.”

You don’t serve God by offering your body to be burned in a sacrifice he never asked you to make.

You serve God by submitting to the Word which is always there.
Our job is to quiet down and listen.
Our job is to set our hearts to obey.

But what if I can’t hear anything? What if I’ve lost touch?
Maybe God is speaking, but I’m so weary,
confused, and
discouraged

all I draw is a blank.

When our soul is dry, and all we seem to hear is the noise of this world and nothing from God, there is only one place to go.

The place we should have been all the time.
The place where every follower of Christ
is given ears to hear and eyes to see:
The cross of Christ.

“When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”
(1 Cor. 2: 1-5)

The power of God is in his Word.

And the source of every word God has ever spoken to the human heart is that cross.

That cross where Jeshua made intercession for the transgressors.
Where he bore our sicknesses and carried our pains.
Where he was wounded for our transgressions
and bruised for our iniquities
and shed his lifeblood for our sin.

If you're having trouble hearing, that's the place to go.

Calvary. The place where God speaks to broken hearts.

Until we learn to live there!
Until our hearts learn to cling to nothing except Jesus Christ.
That's all we have. That's all we need.

We may be busy with our jobs.
We may be out on the highway,
or at the supermarket,
or drinking coffee with friends,
or home reading a book,
but inwardly our heart remains centered at the cross.

This is our one shelter in a weary land where the Living Word of God keeps us alive.

But that's only half the story.

Yes, the Word keeps us alive!

*"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of God."*

*"It is the Spirit that gives life. The flesh is of no avail.
The words that I have spoken to you, they are Spirit
and they are life."*

The Word keeps us alive, but for what?

If the Word of God has come alive in you...
If the Word of God is transforming you into a new creation...
This makes you a servant of the Word --- a prophet,
whether you like it or not.

Now you're not only going to obey the Word of God, you're going to speak it.

The Word inside us has to find a door of utterance.

God starts sending people into our lives that need to hear this Word.

Some are believers that need to hear a sustaining word.
Some are wounded souls who need to hear a healing word.
Some are self-righteous Pharisees
who need to hear the shocking truth.

"The Word is near -- on your lips and in your heart."

So let it come forth!
Speak it!

And we don't need to dress it up with some fancy talk.
And we had better not water it down and coat it with sugar.
And we better not pad it with too many words of our own.

“When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” (1 Cor. 2: 1-5)

When Paul got to Corinth, he left the poetry and philosophy behind.

“I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

His experience was weakness, much fear, and trembling. But in his heart, this man knew the power of the cross. And he knew the Spirit's power was made perfect in his weakness...

So he opened his mouth
and he let his heart speak what God had put there
and people were moved.

This man was a servant of the Word.
God spoke through him.
Jesus, the Messiah, spoke through this weak, trembling, little man.
And just as Jesus promised,
people were brought from darkness into light and
from the power of Satan to God through the words that he spoke.

**There is no such thing as being a servant of the Word
and never speaking the Word.**

If the Spirit makes you a servant of the Word, (which is what **every** follower of Jesus is called to be) you are going to speak.

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the word of God with boldness.”

There may be times when God instructs us to keep silent for a season.

It happened to Ezekiel.
It happened to Zechariah.

But even these times of silence are for the purpose of purifying and strengthening the Word within us.

This one gift Jesus gave us,
the only thing he left behind when he returned to the Father, the Word is meant to rule not only our hearts, but our tongues.

“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses”...

You are going to speak of me.
You're going to break the chains of evil.

You're going to set the captives free.
You're going to tear down those strongholds of Satan.
You're going to force open the gates of death itself.

You're going to do these things by a power which is not your own.
A power this world knows nothing about.

The power of the Word...
as you submit to it.

"I have given them the words which thou gavest me."

I have given them thy Word.

God help us to keep that Word...
Jesus Christ and him crucified.

God help us to live that Word.

God help us to speak that Word.

"And when they had prayed, the place where they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness."

LEST THE CROSS OF CHRIST BE EMPTIED OF IT'S POWER

The events of recent days have focused our attention on the fact that the nations of this world deal with each other in terms of power. When the power is in balance, we have peace. And when the balance is disturbed, we have war.

Sooner or later the balance is always disturbed.

It's like a giant poker game when the time comes and everyone at the table has to show their hand and this nation seems to suddenly discover that the nations around this table are playing for high stakes. And the only card in any hand that counts at all is one that represents power.

When our Lord told us that we would hear of wars, and rumors of wars, and not to be alarmed, that nation would rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, that there would be famine, earthquakes, false Christs, hatred, tribulation, growing bitterness, he was describing the final rounds of the giant poker game of this age.

And as it moves toward its end, all the nations, and
all the multitudes of the nations,
almost everybody will be obsessed with power.

The beast that has the most power will be the beast that is worshipped.

The Kingdom of God is concerned with a power of a very different kind. In order to be part of the Kingdom of God and to function in the Kingdom it is essential that we are able to distinguish in our minds and hearts between the power of this world and the power of God.

The power of God manifests itself in healing,
setting people free from their bondage,
overcoming evil,
conveying life.

The power of this world manifests itself in wealth,
influence,
angry mobs - not only overseas,
but here
and weapons that can kill.

Rarely do both kinds of power exist in any one individual together for very long.

If we happen to be rich in the power of this world, then we will find it extremely difficult to take hold of and stay under the power of God.

And if we happen to be rich in the power of God, generally we will be very weak and vulnerable as far as the world is concerned.

Example: from 2 Kings 5

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the lord had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little maid from the land of Israel, and she waited on Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Naaman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the maiden from the land of Israel." And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel."

So here, we see the contrast between Naaman this very powerful man, high ranking under the king, controlling the destiny of tens of thousands of people, but he's a leper.

On the other hand, here is this little Jewish girl, who was picked up in a raid, and is utterly weak and vulnerable and yet, in her burns the flame of the presence of the Living God. She's not embittered. She's concerned for this man.

Continuing from 2 Kings;

So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten festal garments. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy." And when the king of Israel read the letter, he rent his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me." But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you rent your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean."

Again we see the power of Naaman.

So powerful that the king of Israel is shaking in his boots.

Now he finally arrives, parking his chariots and horses and everybody who came with him in front of the little old dumpy house of Elisha the prophet.

Now Elisha has no silver, no gold, no chariots, no festal garments, no horses, but he has one thing Naaman does not have. He has the power of God.

But Naaman was angry and went away saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me, and stand, and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much rather, then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean?'" So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like that of a little child, and he was clean. Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him; and he said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will receive none." And he urged him to take it, but he refused.

Naaman wants to show his appreciation and he does it in the only way he knows.

"Let me give you some of my power. Take some of this gold. How about some silver, festal garment, anything you want." And Elisha says, "No way. Keep it." Why?

Why? Because Elisha does not want to lose the power of God in his life by reaching out for the power of this world.

But when Naaman had gone from him a short distance, Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "See, my master has spared this Naaman the Syrian, in not accepting from his hand what he brought. As the Lord lives, I will run after him, and get something from him." So Gehazi followed Naaman. And when Naaman saw some one running after him, he alighted from the chariot to meet him, and said, "Is all well?" And he said, "All is well. My master has sent me to say, "There have just now come to me from the hill country of Ephraim two young men of the sons of prophets; pray give to them a talent of silver and two festal garments.'" And Naaman said, "Be pleased to accept two talents." And he urged him, and tied up two talents of silver in two bags, with two festal garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they carried them before Gehazi. And when he came to the hill, he took them from their hand, and put them in the house; and he sent the men away, and they departed. He went in and stood before his master, and Elisha said to him,

“Where have you been, Gehazi?” And he said, “Your servant went nowhere.” But he said to him, “Did I not go with you in spirit when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Was it a time to accept money and garments, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, menservants and maidservants? Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cleave to you, and to your descendants for ever.” So he went out from his presence a leper, as white as snow.

Gehazi yielded to the temptation that comes to us all -- to try to get the power of the world along with the power of God. “My master’s a fool. Why shouldn’t I get some of that stuff?”

But as he reaches out to take hold of the power of this world, he loses the power of God.

Now all of us have working in us the spirit of Gehazi all too much. We want the power of God, but we also want the power of this world. And very often we do it in very subtle ways. We tell ourselves, “What I’m after is spiritual power.”

But the spiritual power that we are after, is the spiritual power of the order that is unholy - of the prince of this world.

And the proof that all too often we are in the role of Gehazi is that, when we look down and see where we are going, and think about it, we discover what is happening is that we are moving farther,

and farther,
and farther from the cross
of Jesus.

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel and not with eloquent wisdom lest the cross be emptied of its power.”

The fountainhead of the power of God in this world, the place of God’s extreme weakness, the place where God in fact dies, in His Son, in a shameful way, is the cross.

Every healing of mind and body, every deliverance from darkness into light, and from bondage into liberty, owes itself, its liberty and its life to that cross.

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lama sabach-tha’ni?” that is, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” And some of the bystanders hearing it said, “This man is calling on Elijah.” And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink. But others said, “Wait, let us see if Elijah will come to save him.” And Jesus cried again in a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe, and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

You want to receive the power of God into your life -- you go to the cross. You want to see the power of God moving on another life and blessing it -- you proclaim the cross.

And you’ll notice if you read the book of Acts how the cross is at the center of every message that got any results.

Starting at Pentecost, Peter proclaims,

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know -- this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and

foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up...

Peter and John go up to the temple sometime later, heal a man, a crowd gathers. Peter preaches again and the burden of his sermon again,

“Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.”

Peter and John are arrested and the next day they are brought out of jail and brought before the authorities. Same thing.

“Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well.”

They preached the cross.

They lived in the shadow of the cross.

The Jesus with whom they walked and talked was the Jesus of the cross, the Lamb of God.

Whenever anybody came along and wanted in any way to add something to the cross, like human eloquence, lofty wisdom, some new set of rules and regulations..... whenever believers began to put their trust in something in addition to the cross,

their message was drained of its power,

they ended up, like Gehazi, with their two little bags of silver, but bereft of the power of God.

Paul learned the hard way. Remember, Paul went to Athens and preached an eloquent sermon. It was marvelous. He quoted Greek poetry. Referred to the writings of the philosophers.

But in that sermon, not one mention of the cross. And very, very meager results. He learned the hard way that human eloquence and human wisdom is the power of the world. The cross is the power of God.

He left Athens and went on to Corinth a broken man who had found once again the source of his power is the cross.

And we read in the book of First Corinthians exactly how he arrived;

When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Lest the cross be emptied of its power.

This has to be the major concern of all of us at this critical time.

At this time of fantastic opportunity.

We have to be sure that we guard the power of the cross in our personal lives. Because the source of our life, the source of the life we live every day is the cross. Nothing else. ***"I am crucified with***

Christ it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

"But far be it for me to glory except in the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world."

Am I glorying in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world?

Or am I chasing after Naaman to get some more silver, get a little more influence, establish my name?

The cross is not something we just put up with. "Oh, that's the cross I have to bear." We glory in the cross!

The cross of Jesus is the place where I was set free from my delusions, healed of my sin sickness, my soul sickness, where the heart of rock was made into something of flesh. Where our eyes open and we begin to see God and man in a new way.

God help us to get near and stay near the cross of his Son for only there do we find life and only there do we get the strength to fulfill the calling which he has put on us.

We also need to guard the power of the cross in our corporate life;

"But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better, but for worse. For, in the first place, as you assemble together as a church, I hear there are divisions among you; and I partly believe it, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Jesus put his cross at the center of our corporate life. The center of our worship week by week is not the sermon.

"Oh, I didn't get anything today."

"Oh, I couldn't get anything out of the message."

If you walk away from any service, I don't care how lousy the sermon is, with nothing, it's your own fault because the center of our worship -- **the center**--- is the broken body and the shed blood of the Lamb of God. And that is always the same.

How can you say, "I didn't get anything. It was stale today"?

Come on.

This is the feast of victory for our God. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

The center of our ministry is the cross.

As we go out the door, we go out as bread and wine for the world. And the power of God will move out of us only to the extent that we are willing to be broken bread and poured out wine with Jesus

for that world. The Son of man came also not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. As the Father has sent me so send I you... to do the same thing.

We have to guard the power of the cross in our witness.

Once more;

***For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel,
and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross be emptied of its power.***

The world is full of many, many gospels, but there is only one gospel of a crucified God.

A god who comes down,
 who suffers,
 who bears our sins,
 our grief,
 our sickness, and our death.

We don't have to worry about how it's being taken. Whether people will like it if we do nothing but proclaim the cross all the time. Whether it will do any good. Whether there will be results. All we have to worry about is that we are faithful to make it simple and clear.

The gospel of the cross:

***For the word of the cross is foolishness for those who are perishing,
but for those who are being saved it is the power of God.***

While the nations and most of Christendom go chasing after the power of this world, God help us to stay back there with Elijah and not go with Gahazi pursuing Naaman to get some of his gold, or snitch one of his swords. And if we find we have drifted from the cross in our personal life, may God help us to get back.

May the power of the Living God be restored to us, individually and corporately, this day as we come back once more to the cross of his Son, Jesus.

A PROPHETIC CHURCH

And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are true words of God." Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Revelation 19:9-10

.....**F** or the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

When the Spirit of God fell upon the gathered believers on the day of Pentecost,

- the outside world did not hear that mighty rushing wind filling the house where they were gathered....
- the outside world did not see those tongues of flame dancing over their heads.

One sign brought the impact of this miracle of Pentecost to the outside world: **words coming from their mouths.**

- Words that burned like fire,
- Words that were able to draw multitudes and change lives.

"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth," (Acts).....

In Acts 4 when the Spirit visited the believers afresh, the same thing happened....

"They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness."

The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy, meaning: the power that enables us to make Jesus real to that world out there is the spirit of prophecy, the spirit that gives us a living word from God.

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of prophecy. When the Holy Spirit visits the Body of Christ, he galvanizes the people into a prophetic church...a church in which every member of the Body, whatever their gifts, --whatever their function, has a prophetic word, a word from God, a word that can heal the sick and raise the dead and pull down strongholds of evil.

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Who are these blessed ones? They are the prophets of the Kingdom.

"Oh, but Jesus doesn't call them prophets." He doesn't?.....

“Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Matthew 5:11—12

They persecuted the prophets who were before you and they will persecute you too...for you too are prophets. If there is anything the Spirit of God is showing us about the kind of church he is forming, it is that this is to be a prophetic church...a church which is anointed with a word from God all through! Every member a prophet.

What is a prophet? A prophet has two characteristics:

- 1. A prophet is a person who listens with a tender heart.**
- 2. A prophet is a person who speaks with thick-skinned boldness.**

- 1. A prophet is a person who listens with a tender heart for a word from God.**

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,”

...the poor in spirit have tender, listening hearts.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted,”

...the mourners of the kingdom have tender, listening hearts.

...the meek of the kingdom have tender, listening hearts.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied,”

...they are hungering and thirsting for a word from God with tender, listening hearts.

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary.

Isaiah 50:4a

The Lord God is giving us the tongue of a prophet.

Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I turned not backward.

Isaiah 50:4b-5

A listening ear...a tender heart...listening for a fresh word from God.

It's not that God doesn't speak to us, it's that our hearts are hard and our minds are busy with our own plans and our own judgments. Oh how we need to learn to listen! To be still. To take off our shoes and wait for God to speak to us.

A prophet is a person who also listens with a tender heart to the cries of the bruised reeds.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

The merciful are the prophets listening to the cries of the widows and the orphans, the oppressed and the poor, the blind, the hungry, and the naked.

“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” Matthew 25:35-36

“Thousands walked by, they did not hear my cry....but you heard my cry.”

That’s the tender side of the prophet. But the prophet of God also has a hard side.

2. **A prophet is a person who speaks the word they’ve been given by God with thick-skinned boldness.**

And he said to me, “Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak with you.” And when he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me upon my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. And he said to me, “Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. The people also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them; and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that there has been a prophet among them. And you, son of man, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you sit upon scorpions; be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. And you shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear.”

Ezekiel 2:1-7a

Ezekiel’s going to speak the word to them and they’re not going to put him on T.V.....they’re not going to give him a Cadillac as a love offering.... they’re going to spit in his face!

“Don’t be afraid of them. Don’t be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you sit upon scorpions.”

In other words, have thick skin. (Don’t try to sit on scorpions unless your skin is thick.)

“Don’t be afraid of their words. Don’t be dismayed at their looks. Speak what I give you with boldness.”

This picture people have of Jesus...so sweet and tender. “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,” is an evil distortion. Jesus didn’t get nailed to that cross for being sweet and tender. He got nailed to that cross because he spoke burning words from God that shocked and offended the religious establishment to the point where they couldn’t take it any more.

“Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Why will they revile us and persecute us and utter all kinds of evil against us falsely on Jesus’ account? Because we’re sweet and tender, meek and mild?

No, because we speak a bold word which will **bring life to some and death to others...because it will offend.** And we will not speak that word with integrity unless our skin is thick and our hearts are bold.

Just as assemblies of believers around the city and around the world worship God in different ways....

- some use piano,
- some use pipe organ,
- some use drums and trumpets,
- some are quiet,
- some are loud,

so you could say that congregations take on certain characteristics as they fulfill their function--- earthly or divine.

There's the friendly church,
the busy church,
the therapeutic church,
the prosperity church,
the self-esteem church.

What's becoming clear to many of us is that to make an impact for the Kingdom of God we have no choice under God but to be a prophetic church—simple and clear. We are to be a church that has a prophetic word...make a prophetic impact...

- as congregations,
- in small groups,
- in our individual ministries where we live and work..

It's as if the Lord is saying to us all, "Don't try to hold people together by anything other than a strong, clear word from me. If it offends, let it offend, as long as it's my word and not yours. For, if it is my word it also will draw, edify, equip and send forth prophets of the Kingdom."

And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are true words of God." Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

And the spirit of prophecy has a twofold message for us this day of Pentecost:

1. **Listen with tender hearts.**
2. **Speak with thick-skinned boldness.**

1. **Listen with tender hearts for a word from God....** daily, when we withdraw in solitude and seek the face of God and cry out,

"Speak to me, O God! Your word is Spirit, and it is life. I live not by bread alone, but by words from your mouth. Be not silent unto me, lest, if thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit."

Listen for a word from God when we gather in small groups to pray. Listen for a word from God week-by-week here as the assembly comes together to break bread, and translate what we hear into action. Let's do it! Let's build our house upon the rock.

Listen also to the cries of the bruised reeds and lost sheep, the oppressed and the sick and the troubled.... listen....listen with a tender heart. And as we listen, a living word from God begins to burn like fire in our hearts.

2. **Now it's time to speak with thick-skinned boldness...**

of the One who is already Lord of this earth, before whose name every knee shall bow, whose lordship every tongue will have to confess....speak of him.

As we speak this word we will be maligned and slandered... don't be upset...have a thick skin. Do not be afraid of them or of their words.

....though briars and thorns are with you and you sit upon scorpions; be not afraid of their words, or of their looks....

Speak of the Lord Jesus!...Speak of him, and there will be fruit...there will be fruit...fruit of judgment and fruit of grace. The word that goes forth from your mouth will not come back empty...it will do the job....

...for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.