

Rom. 14:19
So then let
us follow
after things
which make
for peace,
and things
whereby
we may
edify one
another.

John 8:32 And
ye shall know
the truth and
the truth shall
make you free.

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Seeing Through The Fire by Thomas Keese

The following article was written by Thomas not too long before his death from the disease he fought so valiantly. Those who knew him recognize his personification of all we hope to be in the service of the Lord.

Although it was more than 30 years ago, I still remember distinctly our Driver's Ed teacher's instructions about how to conquer our fear (among inexperienced drivers) of a bridge near Comfort, TX. Although there are few of them around anymore, this bridge was half a mile long and had two very narrow lanes framed by steel girders. His advice to us was to focus on the caution light on the other side of the bridge. It made no sense to us at the time, but when I actually took his advice, it worked. The principle, looking past our current circumstances to what the future holds also works.

Now I want to deal with my present circumstances. I have been dealing with excruciating pain a result of having MS for the last 28 years and the resulting immobility. In the midst of that pain there have been very few things that will bring me comfort for my mind to dwell on. When you find yourself in the midst of this type of adversity, my advice to you is to focus on the other side of the bridge, look through the fire. One of the things I consider is to look forward to the period of time after the pain medication has taken effect. I will recite to myself Paul's words from **Romans 8:18**, *"the sufferings of this present world are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."*

Another passage which brings me comfort is **1 Peter 1:6, 7**: *"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory*

at the revelation of Jesus Christ..."

The trial of our faith, i.e. adversity, is many times painful. We should view it as burning away those impurities in our lives that will only hinder us from reaching our goal. Those impurities in the gold must be burned away. One way to look at this when I endure this pain is that it helps me like no other experience to see more clearly the things in my life that do not matter.

• **Preparing for Trial**

I have encountered and continue to encounter brothers and sisters in Christ who deal with adversities far greater than mine. I recently heard it said that physical pain is easier to endure than emotional pain. I firmly believe that's true. You may be dealing with the death of a loved one or the unfaithfulness of children who have turned their back on the Lord. The best time to prepare for adversity is before it occurs. If you have not dealt with severe trials like this it's only a matter of time.

• **Memorize Scripture.**

The best way to receive comfort from God's word is to have it stored up in your heart. Just listening to the Scriptures being read or to sermons has brought me great comfort during my darkest hours.

• **Develop a Habitual Life of Prayer**

It should be of great comfort to us that God has encouraged us to bring our problems before his throne. **Philippians 4:6, 7** with many other passages urge us to pray about those things that are causing us worry. To me it is so humbling to realize our God who has created universes and solved problems so much more complex than what we are dealing with wants us to bring our

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problems to Him.

Conclusion:

In **Daniel chapter 3**, Daniel's three friends had every confidence that God, if he so chose, could deliver them from their fiery trial (**Daniel 3:6-30**). Yet, they also realized that He might not choose to deliver them. Facing the prospect of a very painful death, they saw through the fire. Likewise, we also must look past our trials of this earth which are so minuscule in comparison to our reward in heaven.

Taken from cocwestside.com

THE PARABLES OF JESUS

"On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow" (Matthew 13:1-3).

Commitment time is drawing closer. The miracles Jesus performed would convince some, but not all, that He was indeed *"God with us."* An invitation to the kingdom provokes some questions. What does the kingdom look like? Who really belongs to Jesus' spiritual family? Separation time is coming. To answer, Matthew groups seven parables in one large discourse that Jesus delivered to the multitudes who had gathered by the sea. The Teacher's parables will perplex many; some will inquire further; some will turn away. Who will have ears to hear?

The goal of a parable is to teach. Two subjects, one common and one not so common or as easily understood, are laid side by side. By comparing what is often an everyday occurrence, a greater lesson, a spiritual lesson, can be learned. Every detail does not receive the same attention; most often, there is *one main point* to a parable. Because every day, well-known situations are used in the parable, they can hold great interest for who hear.

In answer to the disciple's question, *"Why do you speak to them in parables?"* Jesus answered, *"Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given."* The disciples are asking about *them*—the great crowds; Jesus points to *them*—His disciples in His answer. The mysteries of the kingdom were revealed by revelation from God; that is the only way this message could be known. The disciples needed to know and could now know as they listened to and accepted Jesus' teaching. The multitudes could know, too. *"Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand."* Jesus taught in parables to help people see what the kingdom was all about;

obscuring truth was not His goal; He wanted people to have ears that really heard what He was saying. Jesus said: *"I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world."*

God's people in Isaiah's day refused to listen. Jesus continued that teaching by saying: *"The prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."* Israel could have listened and understood; they could have accepted and applied God's message to their rebellious lives. Yet, they refused to let the message of hope shine in their hearts. They refused to stand before the mirror of God's word and see needed changes. The parables of Jesus are not theoretical. They are meant to be understood and applied in our lives as Christians, as kingdom citizens. It can be painful to stand in front of a mirror. What kind of an ear do you have?

Randy Harshbarger

Did You Notice Something Missing?

There was something missing in last week's article. I have received several compliments from others about the article, the first from my nephew who did my father's funeral. He said he remembered most of the things I noted with a smile. There was, however, one important thing that was completely absent from the article. If you are a regular or long-time reader it ought to have stuck out like a sore thumb. Did you notice it?

I didn't use a single scripture in the article. I didn't even allude to one! I did pull at everyone's heart strings, including, of course, my own. It is distressing to me that the one article which has garnered so many compliments is the one without scriptural exposition. By the way, one could say that it was loosely based on **Exodus 20:12** and **Ephesians 6:2**, but I am going on record as saying that is stretching it a bit. Gospel preaching and teaching ought to have scripture in it. Paul quoted scripture, **Romans 2:6; 3:10-18**, etc. Jesus quoted scripture in **Matthew 11:4-6** and other places. Certainly any preacher worth that description ought to use scripture, and use it rightly, in their lessons. Too much of what passes for preaching today was like last week's article: Emotionally touching but utterly without the power which comes from the Word of God. Too many speakers try to fill their pews by following the three-fold modern precepts for preaching: Make 'em laugh. Make 'em cry. Make 'em feel religious. That is not the way Paul approached the subject. He told the Ephesian elders, *"For I*

shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God.” (Acts 20:27) His charge to Timothy reflects this attitude, **2 Tim. 4:1-5**. We should do the same today!

Cleveland Reddinger

Editor’s note: Mr. Reddinger has reference to the article in July 9, 2017 titled In Honor of My Earthly Father

Character Matters

In the midst of a trial, when pressure squeezes us from all sides, only our character can testify on our behalf. By character we mean our moral, ethical and spiritual undergirding that rests on truth, reinforces life and resists the temptation to compromise.

Think of the people who have influenced you with the silent strength of their character — perhaps a parent, a teacher, a coach, a neighbor or an elder in the Lord’s church. We recall how their integrity and ideals spoke for them during hardships (**James 1:2-4**). In many ways, they were the ones who set the mold into which we have poured our own life. Consider these observations about those who leave a lasting legacy of character greatness.

First, greatness of character is **found only in people**. Of all God’s creation, only mankind bears the stamp of His image – a stamp that separates us from the animal world and gives us a built-in moral capacity (**Gen. 1:26-27**). Into that character reservoir God pours glimpses of His own character in such forms as justice, honesty and virtue. We will not find virtue in nature, technology or material wealth. Character is the product of the human soul, as God made us.

Second, character is **developed and proven in the crucible of pain and difficulty** (**1 Peter 1: 6-7**).

Hardship, not comfort, tempers character. We tend to run from pain as soon as it strikes. But can we really escape to some hidden island where adversities will not find us? No, as one of Job’s counselors observed, *“For man is born of trouble, as sparks fly upward”* (**Job 5:7**). There is no golden ticket to a trouble-free life.

Third, character is **not quickly acquired**. Great character is not a mail order commodity, shipped by overnight express. We can’t expect it to arrive on our doorstep, neatly packaged with no assembly required. It takes time and individual effort. Each person must take the reins of responsibility for his or her own character development.

Fourth, character is **not necessarily a permanent possession**. Our Bible is filled with men and women whose character wilted. The reasons for their lapses are many: moral compromise, greed, fear and stress. But the results are the same: embarrassment, loss of respect and wasted potential. That is why it is so important to till God’s values into the soil during our children’s formative years. We want to make sure we have done all we can to help them have their roots deep enough to last a lifetime.

It is so important that we give them more than facts and figures. It is so important we do more than drive them to be on

a winning team. We must build character! Who we are is so much more important than how we look. Wardrobe and words will not guarantee success. Integrity and courage are more important than image and position.

by Rickie Jenkins; rickiej08@gmail.com
focusmagazine.org

WHAT DO FALSE TEACHERS OF TODAY TEACH THAT MIGHT WELL OVERTHROW THE FAITH OF OTHERS?

2 Tim. 2:15 *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. 16 But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, 17 and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18 men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some.*

It just might be that there are some among us today who *broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments*, as Jesus accused some of His day who sought to appear righteous.

It just might be there would be some who lead men astray as Paul told Timothy; *But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, 3 men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.* (**1 Tim. 4:1-3**)

Indeed we have been warned that there will be false prophets and we are to be on guard against them. **1 John 4:1** *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

I understand many are put off when one person challenges the truth of another regarding any religious matter. After all, none of us is perfect and who are we to say a thing is right or wrong? Well, if we cannot challenge the truth of a statement, how shall we *..contend earnestly for the faith, once for all delivered to the saints.?*

An interesting fact is the high percentage of people who claim to believe in God. That percentage still is large when you specify the God as Jehovah of the Bible. Yet with all those claiming faith in Him, Jesus says, *“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. “For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Mat. 7:13,14)*

Interesting how we are continually warned about following the truth diligently and that religious men will lead many astray.

by Jim Stauffer

Eph. 2:19 *So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, 20 being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone; 21 in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord;*

1Pet. 2:9 *But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:*

Psa. 1:1 *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.*

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Sunday A.M. 10:20 Assembled Worship

Sunday P.M. 5:00 Assembled Worship

Wednesday P.M. 7:00 Bible Study and Worship

Visitors welcome

We conduct in home Bible Studies

We offer Correspondence Courses

Evangelist and Editor Jim Stauffer

Elders: Ron Peck and Jim Stauffer

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JIM STAUFFER

SUNDAY SERMON: WE SHOULD
CRY FOR JUSTICE



What Must I Do To Be Saved?

Hear the gospel - Romans 10:17

Believe in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6

Repent of sins - Acts 17:30

Confess Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10

Be Baptized for remission of sins - Acts 2:38

Be Faithful unto death - Revelation 2:10