



Possessions *in Life*

We normally evaluate life on the basis of material possessions, spent the entire life for accumulating them and forget to live. Either all the material possessions will leave a person or he will have to leave all his possessions one day. But there are some possessions which will remain for ever and ever.



Mathews Paul

LIFE is a complex phenomenon. It consists of several factors and environments. The life of a person is graded on the basis of different parameters. Though the abstract and relative parameters make this evaluation very difficult, people easily judge and stamp others on the basis of their own measures and scales. Most of the people consider material possessions as the basis of life. Though this is an essential thing, it is not the sole basis for building up a good life. We normally evaluate life on the basis of material possessions, spent the entire life for accumulating them and forget to live. To live doesn't mean just eating, drinking and making merry. We, human beings, are the most responsible entity in all creations of God and our responsibility does not cease at our personal matters as God expects us to do much more than that.

The modern world is running after material possessions. All kinds of greed grab their life and people become slaves to this master.

Once a person becomes a slave to greed, he becomes blind towards most of the spiritual and ethical parameters. He has no problem to cross all ethical barriers to fulfill their greed for possessions.

The case of so-called born again believers is also not much different. Though they are keen in preaching about the second coming of Jesus Christ and other spiritual values, their deeds reveal that there are living to amass earthly possessions and are least bothered about heavenly possessions. Majority of believers do not have the assurance of salvation and

confirmation of being taken with Lord in His second coming. Such a situation needs to be considered as a grave problem in our spirituality.

Bible says, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:10).

Either all the material possessions will leave a person or he will have to leave all his possessions one day. But there are some possessions which will remain for ever and ever.

A good name is the most important possession which lasts even after our death. Faithfulness, sincerity, love, commitment to God and society, service, integrity, truthfulness, etc. are also the possessions which we need to accumulate in our life, which cannot be robbed from us.

Happiness and Peace are other possessions which we can have in our life. Many people who are very rich in material possessions are very poor in peace and happiness. Many a time, they find all the material riches as useless and the disturbances in personal and family life throw them

to many unpleasant actions like divorce and suicide.

Dear friends, in pursuit of material richness and possessions, we should never ignore the valuable, ethical and spiritual possessions which last for ever. Whatever we invest towards eternity is the only thing which last in the current world and the coming world - the eternity.

Jesus said, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). ■

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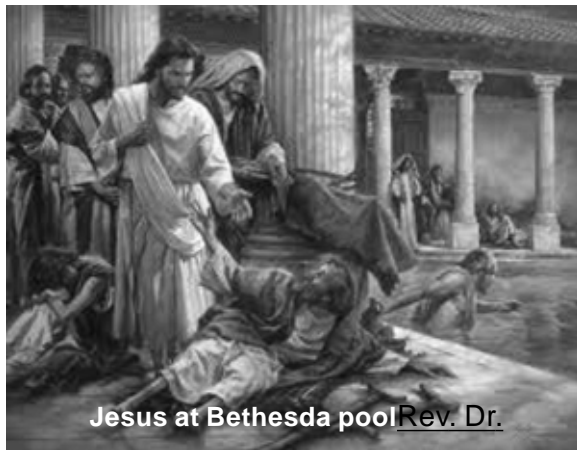
Meet a God who exceeds our expectations!

(Part I)

Introduction

What God can do for us always exceeds what the world can offer us. We need to realize this important fact and respond to God in faith. This is the important lesson that we can draw from the first 15 verses of the fifth chapter of John's Gospel. The story found only in the Gospel of John, is set in Jerusalem in one of the porticoes of the Pool of Bethesda. In the ancient times it was a tank where rainwater was collected and stored. It was here that Prophet Isaiah in the eighth century BC met king Ahaz according to the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 7:3) "the upper pool", near the Washerman's Field. In Jesus' time it is called Bethesda, the Jews might have pronounced in Aramaic as BET-HESDA, meaning, House of Mercy. It got its name for the reputation of the miracle of healing that was going on there. It was built as a Roman Bath during the days of Jesus. In Roman times pools had porticos, and changing rooms and steps leading to the pool. It could have been a swimming bath, similar to the swimming pools of our days. Apostle John tells us that it had five colonnades, that is, it had five porticoes and steps that led to the water where the sick were laid.

The sick were brought there with the hope of being healed. Now and then there would be a stirring in the placid waters of the pool. It could be the eruption of some underground springs in the pool, which fed the pool. People believed that an angel stirs the water and the first person to get into the water after it is stirred will be healed. So, there are many who are waiting for their healing in the porticoes of this pool. We don't know how many times a day or month or year, the angel visited the pool and stirred its waters. However, it seems that there was a big crowd around the pool: the sick and their dear ones who accompanied them and spectators too. The spectators were there to cheer up the lucky person who got into pool first



Jesus at Bethesda pool Rev. Dr.

and came out of it healed or to make fun of those who entered the water but missed it by seconds and got out of it simply wet. There was so much expectation, excitement and fun around the pool. On one Sabbath day Jesus visits this pool and asks a man who had been invalid for 38 years if he would like to be healed. The man thought that Jesus is offering help to get into the pool first, because he had no one to help him to get into the water. He himself cannot do it beating others since he is invalid. However, Jesus commands him to get up, take his mattress and walk. Instantly, the man is healed, he carried his mattress and headed for home.

This creates problems. The Jews interpret this as work done on Sabbath, which is traditionally considered as a day of rest. No one is allowed to work on Sabbath. They believed that on the Seventh day, God rested from all His work of creating this world so every pious Jew should also observe it as day of rest and set it apart for worship. Jesus has violated the Sabbath laws by healing on that Holy Day. Jesus also has violated the Sabbath by making the sick man carry his mattress and walk. So they started persecuting him to the extent of plotting to kill him.

Jesus uses the argument that ensues to explain what is Sabbath, who is Father God, and why healing a person on Sabbath is not a violation of Sabbath.

I feel the Holy Spirit is guiding us to compare what the world can offer us with what He offers us and to examine our attitude and response to God's offer. So let us proceed by looking at three important aspects: **What the world can offer a person in need; what Jesus can offer; and thirdly how we respond to Jesus' offer.**

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If we take Bethesda as a model of what the world could offer to a person in need, the first thing we find is that the offer depends on human effort. An ordinary pool for washing clothes was turned into an elaborate system that promised miracles on a conditional basis.

What the world could offer

The world has something to offer to everyone who seeks help. However, what the world offers depends on various factors. If we take Bethesda as a model of what the world could offer to person in need, the first thing we find here is that, all that it can offer depends on human effort. The world turned an ordinary pool where clothes were washed, to an elaborate system that offered miracles. However, all that it could offer was a promise of miracles with conditions.

Your healing depends on your efforts

The pool of Bethesda did heal people. I don't want to question that fact. Or at least the people believed that they were healed. However, in order to be healed at Bethesda, the patients had to meet some conditions. The foremost of these conditions was that you got to be the first person to enter the water. It is a miracle that depends on your with athletic performance. Only the best sprinter in the crowd of the sick people lying there could be healed. You need to out run others in order to be healed. If you are not able to run fast, you need the help of an able-bodied person who can carry you to the water and be the first to be in the water when the water is stirred. If you do not have strength, and if you do not have an strong relative on your side, the pool of Bethesda is of no use to you. That explains why this man has been there waiting for his healing for many years. He was invalid; he is not going to make it to the pool by himself. He doesn't have anyone to carry him to the water. He will have to wait for that day, when there will be no one other than himself left at the porticoes of the pool when the angel stirs the waters. That day is not going to come. It is a pool that heals the sick, but only those sick who has the strength to run faster than others.

Your healing depends on your luck

To be healed you need to be the first. If you miss by a split second, then you only got wet not healed. I would imagine that the sick people sat as close as they can to the edge of the water. The competition was tough. Apostle John tells us in verse 3 that, "There was a great number of people" (5:3) there. Many of them had able bodied relatives determined to get their sick to the water first! So, it all depended on your luck! The fact is that the majority of the sick gathered there have no chance of making it to the pool without sheer luck or with the help of the most talented companion. Apostle John gives us a sample of the

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1. Your healing depends on your efforts.
 2. Your healing depends on your luck.
 3. Your healing is controlled by legalism.
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people who were gathered at the pool. They were the blind, the lame and the paralysed (verse 3). The blind may not make it to the water because a sighted person will spot the stirring first and get into the water before a blind can do it. The lame has less chance of making it into the pool first, because the dumb sprinter may make it to the water before him. Same is the case with the paralyzed. A paralyzed person, is less likely run to the water first. So it is a game of luck where the contestants were unable to see, unable to walk and unable to move parts of their body. Bethesda pool healed; that is what the people believed; and they would say, "Go and try your luck!"

Your healing is controlled by legalism

Thirdly, the healing miracles at the Pool of Bethesda was limited by the legalism of the Jews. First of all, you cannot be healed on a Saturday even if you are the only person around that day and there was a higher chance of getting into the water before anyone because, on Sabbath you are not allowed to work. Now, even if you are healed by some chance on a Saturday, then you cannot walk out of the place. You are not supposed to work on a Sabbath day. Carrying your mattress will be considered as work. You have to make a choice: either be healed on a Sabbath day and thus invite the anger of the pious Jews they. may even kill you or respect the legal restriction and remain sick for another day. The culture of the Jews thus worked against those who wanted a miracle of healing that might happen in their life. Because for the world, rules and regulations are foremost, and human need has lesser priority.

Conclusion of Part I

Bound by the limits of your physical strength, left for your luck, and bound by the cruel law, here is a man who has been invalid for 38 years! We don't know for sure whether he has been there at the pool for 38 years or not! It is a picture of you and me without the touch of Jesus. We are trying our best, using all our efforts, taking all chances, but still without success. It is Jesus who makes a difference in the life of this man. A new life after 38 long years of suffering.

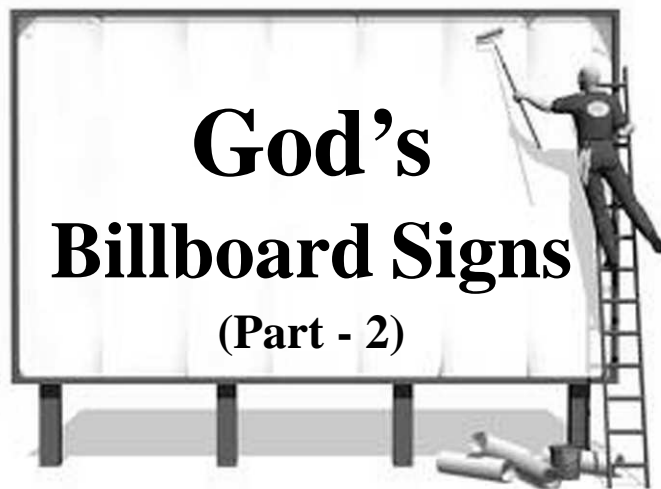
of God who exceeds our expectations is to come to him in humble faith. Not to pity ourselves, nor to blame others, but to trust in the unlimited wisdom and power of our God. Because God exceeds our expectations.

Application:

What God has to offer always exceeds what the world can offer.

What God can do for you is not limited by your strength, your circumstances, nor the strength of the people around you.

- To be continued



God's Billboard Signs (Part - 2)

Failure of peace movements

"While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape" (1 Thess. 5:3)

We often hear about peace negotiations all over the world. World leaders get together to create peace. Negotiations have taken place between America and Russia, the French and British, India and China, and many other nations. Olympics is supposed to be a symbol of peace, but as we have seen, there is no peace around it. Pope acts as a man of peace, but there is much hatred against him. The Dalai Lama of Tibet preaches the peace of Buddhism, but we know there is no peace in Tibet. We hear so much talk about peace, but realistically there is no peace. The world is waiting for the Prince of Peace to arrive. Only He can give true peace to this world. Saints, let us prepare for the coming of the Lord.

The outbreak of various sicknesses

The outbreak of various sicknesses and diseases are rampaging all over the world. Cancer has reached a new level in human history. Diabetes has been attacking millions of people. Heart ailment and related deaths are in everyday news. AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases are killing millions of people all over the world. There had been outbreaks of mosquito-borne dengue fever that infected more than 75 thousand people in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and killed many. This infection spread to parts of India, Africa, and other parts of the world. New diseases and sicknesses are emerging every day. Even though medical science has improved, it has been struggling to fight against all of the major, new diseases. Saints, all of this tells us that man's ability has a limitation and the true healer, our Lord Jesus, is going to come back. He has given a sign for the saints to get ready for His coming.

Increase of transportation

"The chariots storm through the streets, rushing back and forth through the squares. They look like flaming torches; they dart about like lightning" (Nahum 2:4)

The increase of transportation is also a sign of God's coming. It is leading into a final war-field. In a moment of time, men can reach anywhere in the world. He has already reached other planets and the moon. He is now conquering space again and again. Remember, although they have tried, man is incapable of reaching heaven. The increase of transportation has allowed man to have an easy life, and one concept of the universe. The Bible tells us that this is a sign of the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Break-down of marriage and family life

Breaking down of marriage and families has become an every day event. In the Western world, more than 70% of marriages end up in divorce or break down. Single-family life-style have become a popular behavior. The media and Hollywood have secularized marriage, which is supposed to be the sacred union between a man and a woman. The sacredness of marriage and family has been attacked. Godly marriages have been disappearing with the emergence of non-Christian materialistic life-styles. The role of the church and the ministries is limited to influence the fashions and styles of the world. Preaching the Word of God has become "boring" and unnecessary in marriage functions. Instead, importance is given to displaying financial statuses and family structures. Homosexuality and gay and lesbian marriages are increasing rapidly. The civil union and civil marriages are getting wider attention and approval. All these speak of the most important event: a sign of the coming of the Lord.



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Jesus said,
"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man".
Here is the second part of the 2-part series in which the various signs pointing clearly to the coming of our Lord are discussed.

Topics discussed in Part 1:

Moral decline
Increase of life problems
Political unrest
Natural calamities
Increase in violence
Increase of knowledge



The second coming of the Lord is going to be the greatest event that takes place in human history at any time. The Holy Bible clearly and vividly describes this event. Unfortunately, it has been rejected and neglected by many Christian churches, while being doubted and debated by others.

Polygamous marriage

Polygamous marriage is when one man marries many wives. In Texas and other parts of the country, we have heard of the tragedies that have been taking place related to polygamous marriages. 416 children have been taken from their families by the state because of child abuse or neglect. They attest to the fact that polygamous life-style has entered into a church setup and its worship. The temple has become the center of this life-style. Before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, all of these evil patterns of life-styles will increase.

Rise of Papacy

The Pope and papal institutions have been playing a major role in the religious history of the world. It has become the most popular institution and office in the world. When Pope Benedict XVI visited America on April 16, 2008, he was greeted by the then President of the United States, George Bush. The entire nation gave a state of welcome to the Pope. He was given time to address the UN assembly, which is the largest organization of world nations. The popularity and role of the Pope as a world leader is going to increase in the days to come. The rise of papacy leads to deviation from the truth of the Word of God. He doesn't preach or teach the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Idolizing the Pope and Virgin Mary with all the wrong doctrines stands as a hindrance to the progress of the gospel.

Famine and food shortage

All over the world, people are lacking food and starving to their deaths. Prices have increased. Since the price of petroleum has risen, wheat fields have turned into gas fields. The fields that have been producing wheat and corn are now producing products that can substitute gasoline. The United States was once known for its food surplus. However, even here in this nation we will have food shortages. Heavy rains often come down in Kerala and cause the loss of many crops. This is an example of the coming famine. Before the coming of the Lord, the whole world will see a great famine.

Tragedies of the rich

"Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes" (James 5:1-5)

Financial institutions have been breaking down. We hear the news of recession and economic regressions. The value of money has been decreasing. The finest financial planners are not able to fix this problem. The markets are going down and man is wondering what is going to

happen next. The Bible very clearly states that this is a sign of the coming of the Lord.

Rise of the 'Hip-Hop' culture

The rise of hip-hop culture has increased in a new dimension. Hip-hop as well as many other genres with filthy language and content have become the style of the modern youth. It is truly attacking the moral content of human society. The increase of modern technology and the vigorous marketing of the hip-hop and media culture have reached minds of most of the youth. It has been attacking holiness and righteous behavior.

Popularity of magic and witchcraft

The Harry Potter series by J.K Rowling has impacted and reached an entire generation. Through books, movies, and video games, it became one of the most popular entertainments of this generation. This is just an example of the new dimension of magic and witchcraft in human minds. The Bible clearly warns against this as a sign of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The second coming of the Lord is going to be the greatest event that takes place in human history at any time. The Holy Bible clearly and vividly describes this event. Unfortunately, it has been rejected and neglected by many Christian churches, while being doubted and debated by others. The charismatic Pentecostal churches seldom teach and preach about the second coming. We are not seeing the readiness or eagerness of waiting for the coming of the Lord. The church is sleeping. We have become so lazy and remain content with the simple, easy tasks. Some people are very active with church activities, but in essence have forgotten the reality of the coming of the Lord. It is nice to have big churches, good pews, and good material things. However, we should never forget what is important: preparing our own bodies as temples of Christ and watching earnestly for the coming of the Lord. Throughout the centuries, the greatest question has been when Jesus would return. No one knows when this great event will occur for it has not been revealed to any human mind. Jesus told His disciples and followers to be careful and to not let the temptations and worries of this life distract them from watching and being ready for his return. As we read about the events of the day in newspapers, the events that are going to take place before the coming of Jesus Christ are clearly stated in the Bible.

The Holy Spirit speaks through Luke 21:34: "Be careful!" This is a warning for every saint of God on how we should keep our life on alert. Do not follow the pattern of the majority culture. We should not be trapped into the situation that the enemy creates around us. Saints need to watch and pray. The coming of the Lord is at hand. ■

TRUST in the *WISDOM* and *SOVEREIGNTY* of GOD

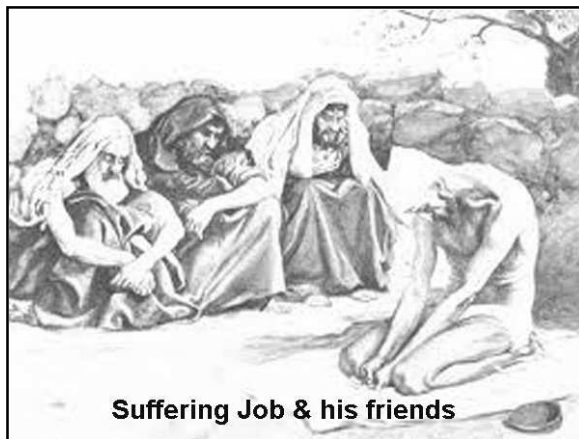
*Meditations from the
Book of Job - 2*

"But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will explain to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this, in whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind? Does not the ear test words and the mouth taste its food? Wisdom is with aged men, and with length of days, understanding. With Him are wisdom and strength, He has counsel and understanding" (Job 12:7-13)



**Dr. Shibu
Cherian**

In Job chapter 11, Zophar launched a personal attack on Job himself by calling him a hypocrite for protesting his innocence in the face of contrary evidence (vv. 1–6). Without any sympathy, Zophar tried to convince Job that his troubles stemmed from hidden sin, and God was punishing Job as a result of his sin. He also contended that Job lacked a healthy respect for the wisdom of God, the omniscient One who knows all about human wickedness despite efforts to conceal it (vv. 7–12).



Suffering Job & his friends

As a rejoinder, Job wishes his miserable friends could understand that disaster often comes on those least prepared and least deserving of it (Job 12:4–6). Then Job reflected on the sovereign ways of God that are manifest in nature (vv. 7–9) and in man's very existence (v. 10). In the light of this lofty concept, the arguments of Job's friends appeared to be shallow (vv. 11–12). The only way Job could explain his condition was that God's

omniscience and omnipotence were incomprehensible with respect to nature (vv. 13–15), individuals (vv. 16–21), the mysteries of the unseen (v. 22), and the affairs of whole nations (vv. 23–25).

God Himself tells us this unchanging reality: *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways", says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your*

thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Let us trust in the wisdom and sovereignty of God – in the fact that He is working behind the scenes on our behalf and preparing us to be effective tools in His kingdom! ■

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A call to "Return to the Father"!

"For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. - - - But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Pet. 2:20-22)

People in Christian faith have escaped from the attractions of this perishing world and are living in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And in Peter's language, they are expecting "new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:13). Peter points towards a possibility for such people to be entangled again in the world and turning away from holy life. This is what we call 'backsliding'. The word 'backslide' is to be used very carefully because no backslider will agree that he or she is a backslider. Any one who advises or preaches this will have to face terrible enmity from such people. Prophets of the Bible like Isaiah were not accepted or rewarded during their period because they spoke against the people living at that time. But we know they were sent by God before the destruction of the people of Israel. Israel never expected that they will be thrown away from their land.

Backsliding is happening very much these days. Jesus Christ had mentioned about it: "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). A true preacher of the word of God has to stand up against backsliding. This message is not for judging anyone as we have no right to do so. But we can discern a person. Similarly one who listens or reads this can judge himself or herself and know whether he or she is a backslider or not. If it helps them to come back from their backslidden condition, that is well and good.

How do we know whether a person is a backslider or not? Solomon says: "The backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways, but a good man will be satisfied from above" (Prov. 14:14). He will not be happy in God's way. He will not find joy in participating in spiritual meetings. He will not be satisfied



Rev. Dr. P M Johnson,
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increasing occurrence of
backsliding among members
of the church and calls for a
return to the Father who is
ready to restore His children
into His home.

with heavenly messages. He will not be filled in with God's spirit but will be filled with his own ways. He will be fed up with the fellowship with spiritual people and will find joy in hearing unsound messages from unknown preachers. As there is the possibility that a backslider will be found out by his own congregation, so he may choose safety by following an unknown preacher. The pastor who is appointed as shepherd of the flock by God will try to restore members from their backsliding ways because of his responsibility about their souls before God (Heb. 13:17). But a stranger

The local church is the basic unit of the Universal Church. If someone says that he has direct contact with God and at the same time has no fellowship with his local church, he is a liar. Listen to what John says: "If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar "

preacher on the TV screen will not have this problem as he has no responsibility about the hearers. God's ordained way is found in Book of Acts: "Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). The local church is the basic unit of the Universal Church. If someone says that he has direct contact with God and at the same time has no fellowship with his local church, he is a liar. Listen to what John says: "If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also" (1 John 4:20, 21). Purification in our inner man will take place only if we have fellowship with the church which is the body of Jesus Christ. Listen to what John says further about fellowship: "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

What does fellowship with the brethren have to do with cleansing from sin? As we know, the Bible says "the life is in the blood" (Lev. 17:11). This is a fact, both biologically and spiritually. The blood in our body is a cleansing agent which purges the toxins and bacteria in our system, and supplies oxygen to vital areas necessary for our survival. However, in the event that a part of our body were to be severed from the flow of blood, the absence of blood circulation would cause that part to become infected - it would die. Survival is not possible without continual circulation of the blood. So it is within the body of Christ, the Church (1 Cor. 12:27). For the blood of Jesus Christ to have its continual cleansing effect over

our sins, we must remain attached to Christ's body. If we sever (break off) fellowship with His body, we risk cutting off the circulation of the cleansing blood!

I agree with the fact that salvation is based on "faith," and is not earned by performing "works" such as attending church (Eph. 2:8-9). But fellowship with Christ's body, the church, is critical in sustaining your faith by providing ministry, encouragement, and an atmosphere of spiritual "cleansing" and growth. I further admit our relationship with Jesus Christ is obviously the basis for the forgiveness of our sins, but the Bible indicates that we cannot have a proper relationship with Christ without a proper relationship with His body. For instance, the scriptures indicate that our worship to God is unacceptable unless we make things right with our brethren in the church: *"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and - - - First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift"* (Matt. 5:23-24).

Backsliding is foolishness and abomination in the scripture: *"As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly"* (Pro. 26:11).

God's will about us is to continue here in the church and grow. See what Peter said: *"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"* (2 Pet. 3:18). Breaking this wonderful fellowship and going away is against the counsel of God and it will surely invite bitter things in our life. Listen to what the scripture says: *"And now why take the road to Egypt, To drink the waters of Sihor? - - - That you have forsaken the LORD your God, And the fear of Me is not in you," says the Lord GOD of hosts* (Jer. 2:18-19). Prophet Jeremiah further prophesied to the backsliding people: *"Therefore a lion from the forest shall slay them, A wolf of the deserts shall destroy them; A leopard will watch over their cities. Everyone who goes out from there shall be torn in pieces, Because their transgressions are many; Their backslidings have increased"* (Jer. 5:6). These are unnatural things. Is there any other people group in the history who went through persecutions like Israel faced? Unnatural things are waiting on the way of a backslider. The New Testament underlines that. Read what the Apostle had to say to the Hebrew Christians who had a desire to return to Judaism: *"For if*

we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. - - - Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? - - - It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:26-31).

A backslider is not an ignorant person. He is going back from fellowship and faith willfully after knowing the truth. It was terrible sin in the Old Testament:

Backsliding is foolishness and abomination in the scripture: *"As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly"* (Pro. 26:11).

"But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the LORD, and he shall be cut off from among his people" (Num. 15:30). We all had received entry in the church by Holy Spirit by His grace. Leaving this grace and fellowship is insulting the Holy Spirit. This is unpardonable. Our Lord has taught this in advance: *"Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men"* (Matt. 12:31-32).

Dear child of God, in which way you are going now? Are you in God's way and growing in the grace or in your own way which results in backsliding? You may be going back from faith and fellowship because of your present circumstances. The world is not at all suitable for a child of God. But if you stand firm in faith, God will help you to come out of your circumstances. He has done it in the history. When the three boys stood in their faith by honoring their God before the strong government of Nebuchadnezzar, their God came down in the burning fire. He will surely come for you, if you stand for Him without running from the face of fire. Daniel was very old when he was thrown in the cave of lions because of his strong faith during the persecution in a foreign land. But he stood for the Almighty without fearing death. What happened then? The Lord sent His army

to shut the mouths of the lions in the den for His beloved. The same God is still there for you, child of God, if you stand for Him. God will honor those who honor Him (1 Sam. 2:30).

Once we admit our backsliderness, then the next step is to come back. The scripture encourages that: *"Come, and let us return to the LORD; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up."* (Hos. 6:1-2). We have a God who will heal us, who will bind us up, who will revive and raise up. Hosea further explained the blessed nature of our loving Lord: *"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, For My anger has turned away from him"* (Hos 14:4). A backslider should not expect God to go to him with all these blessings. Instead he must repent and return to Him. Once we were lost sheep. Then He came in search of us and found us (Luke 15:4, 5). But when the son left the father after knowing

the kindness and love of his father, it was for him to return to the loving father. He had to repent. *"But when he came to himself, he said, - - - 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son". --- But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him"* (Luke 15:17-20).

Dear child of God, are you like the prodigal son? Are you away from the loving God today? If so, it was you who simply separated yourself just for your selfishness. You had everything in the Father's house. But you were filled with your own ways as a fool (Prov. 14:14). The prodigal son had to come to his senses and return. Many blessings are waiting if we return - healing, health, abundance of peace, change from captivity, rebuilding what is lost, cleansing from iniquity, etc. *"Behold, I will bring it health and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them the abundance of peace and truth. --- I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned and by which they have transgressed against Me"* (Jer. 33:6-8). Let us leave our ways. Let us stand firm in faith. Let us honor our God in our all circumstances. This is what Lord expects from us.

Afflictions in the lives of God's children

(Psalms 119:153-160)

How do we handle affliction when it comes? What are the first thoughts to enter our minds? Usually, we just want it to be over. We cry out for deliverance.

This section of Psalm 119 shows us the heart of the psalmist as he pleads with God for deliverance, revival and strengthening. Earlier in the psalm he has spoken concerning his affliction: "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word" (Psa. 119:67), "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Psa. 119:71), "I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Psa. 119:75). Now he says, "Consider mine affliction, and deliver me..."

Affliction brought the psalmist to focus on his relationship with God and His Word. Rather than feeling sorry for himself, he realized how blessed he was to know God and to rest upon His promises.

What about us today? Where are we in our relationship with our Lord? Do the trials and tribulations move us away from our faith, or do they reaffirm where we stand? As children of God, we have the advantage of calling out to the Lord for His help in the time of trouble. We have the advantage of leaving all our burdens at His feet when we go to the throne of grace in prayer. As the Psalmist is asking the Lord to save him during his sufferings, we can do likewise. He asks God to save him because he hasn't forgotten the laws of God. He asks the Lord to stand up for him and set him free. He knows he's going through some difficulties in his life. But he knows also that God has given us promises as well to keep us alive during hard times. For those things to be fulfilled in our lives, we need to be faithful and obedient children in our Father's eyes.

The Psalmist had a real thirst and a real zeal for the Lord. He sincerely loved



Koshy 'Siju' John

the Lord. He knew the Lord loved him, and because of that, He will bring justice and prosperity in his life.

God wants good things for us today also. He doesn't want us to go after the desires of our flesh or the desires of the world because those things are momentary or temporary. They will be

Affliction brought the psalmist to focus on his relationship with God and His Word. Rather than feeling sorry for himself, he realized how blessed he was to know God and to rest upon His promises. --- Do the trials and tribulations move us away from our faith, or do they reaffirm where we stand?

here today and gone tomorrow. If we follow after those things, so will be our end or circumstances. We were created to be eternal creatures. So do not sell ourselves short by chasing things that are momentary and ungodly. God has better plans for us (Jeremiah 29:11-14). God wants to bless us. "I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. I want you to enjoy success. I do not plan to harm you. I will give you hope for the years to come. Then you will call out to Me. You will come and pray to Me. And I will listen to you. When you look for Me with all your heart, you will find Me. I will be found by you, announces the Lord".

God did not want us to be stagnant and going through the motions of a routine life. God's plan and will is good things for us. He wants us to be obedient to His guidelines and commandments written in His word. We need to search for the Lord with all our heart. We need to get on the winning side. That side is with God. Amen!!

We need to follow the commandments of God. Jesus summed up all the commandments into two great commandments. One is to "love the Lord with all your heart, your entire mind, and all your soul". The second greatest commandment is to "love your neighbor as you love yourself." (Matthew 22:35-40)

Have you ever wondered why the cross is the way it is - one horizontal piece of wood and the other vertical? God sent His Son to mend relationships. He came to mend our relationship with God the Father. That is the vertical line.

Once we rectify that relationship we can go ahead and fix our relationship with our fellow brothers and sisters seen in the horizontal level. If we look closely at the 10 commandments, we see that the first 4 commandments deal with our relationship with God, the vertical relationship. Once we are able to straighten that out,

we should work on the latter 6 commandments that deal with our relationship with our fellow humans, which is the horizontal relationship.

Let us start seeking the Lord earnestly and sincerely with humility, with all our hearts. God thinks of each and every single one of us. The Creator of the universe wants something to do with us. He considers us and thinks about us on a daily basis. Don't be fooled by what the devil is saying. God listens to our prayers. He wants to turn us away from captivity. He wants to restore us and bless us.

Children's

CORNER



Contentment



Neetha was a teenager and she had wealthy parents. She never lacked anything and therefore she did not know the value of the things that she had. She sometimes felt that she still lacked many things that her rich friends had. She always pestered her parents to buy those things for her. One day she met a girl named Vini at the college function. Vini was an orphan and she studied in that college with the little help she got from some charitable organisation. She lived in a slum with her aunt who was poor. She had only few pairs of clothing to wear to college. But she was grateful for the old clothes that somebody gave her every year.

Certain days she would be hungry due to lack of food. Neetha was surprised to see that Vini was happy with her life even though she lacked many things. She became friends with Vini. Neetha's friendship with Vini changed her attitude towards life. She started to value the things that she had in life. She realised that she was very much privileged than many

people around her. Therefore she stopped complaining about food or clothes or the things that she lacked. She happened to read the verse from 1Tim 6:6-8 which says "Godliness with contentment is great gain.....if we have food and clothing we will be content with that".

Dear children, we should be happy in what God has provided us. There are many children around the world who are starving and who do not have parents to take care of them. We should thank God for all the good things that He has given us. *May God bless you.*

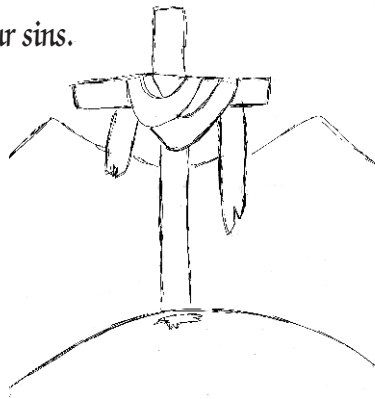


Shiny Aunty

Jesus Christ died for our sins.



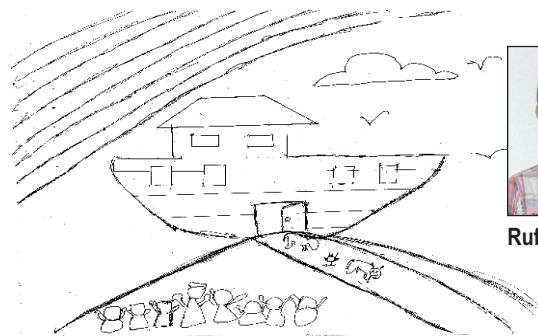
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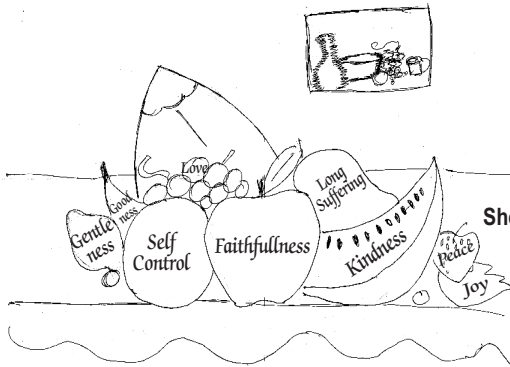
The Ark rest on Mount Ararat and the people rejoiced



Rufos Roymon
Kerala



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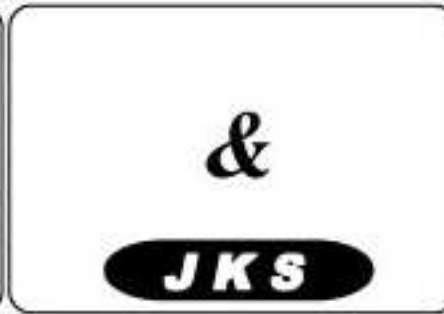
Sheba Mary Roymon
Kerala

Prodigal Son



Pheba Susan Sam
Kerala





Indian Jews from 'lost tribe' move to Israel

The Bnei Menashe (children of Manasseh) Jews living in Churachandpur, in Manipur claim they are descended from Jews of the tribe of Manasseh, banished from ancient Israel the eighth century BC. An Israeli chief rabbi recognized them in 2005 as a lost tribe and about 1,700 moved to Israel before the Israeli government stopped giving them visas. Israel recently reversed that policy, agreeing to let the remaining 7,200 Bnei Menashe immigrate and fifty-three of them arrived



A Manasseh group from India arriving at airport

in the country in December 2012 who were ecstatic: "after waiting for thousands of years, our dream came true". The immigration will continue in the coming days.

The return of the Jews to their home land is in fulfillment of God's promise as seen in the Bible. A vast exodus is still to happen!

Prison for four Iranian Christian leaders

An Iranian Assembly of God pastor, his wife and two other church ministers were arrested in a church raid and sentenced to one year in prison. Their homes were searched and a number of personal items, including their

computers, books, cell phones and DVDs, as well as sound equipment and musical instruments used at their church were confiscated. They were charged for "converting to Christianity". They have an opportunity to appeal the sentencing.

Persecution of Christians is on the rise in many countries. Blessed are those who endure till the end.

Nigeria moves up on list of terror-affected nations

Nigeria has been pushed into seventh place in annual ranking of countries impacted by terrorism. Nigeria's ranking in the latest Global Terrorism Index, marked a shift from 12th place a year ago, from 16th place in 2008 and from 30th place in 2005. Produced by the Institute for Economics



and Peace, the index is calculated based on the number of terrorist incidents, the number of deaths, the number of casualties and the level of property damage. 168 terror attacks were recorded in Nigeria in 2011, accounting for 437 deaths and 614 injuries.

This west African nation is roughly split half and half between Muslims in the North and Christians in the South. Since 2002 there have been a spate of clashes, particularly in the North of the country, between government forces and the Islamists who seek to establish sharia law.

Removing God from class room: reason for violence in schools

In response to the deadly mass shooting recently in a Connecticut school, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee is reported to have said: "We ask why there's violence in our school but we've systematically removed God from our schools. We have made the class room a place where we don't want to talk about eternity, life, what responsibility means and accountability. We're not just going to have to be accountable to the police, but one day we will have to stand before a holy God in judgment. If we don't believe that, then we don't fear that. This is a heart issue - -- laws don't change this kind of thing".

Well said! The violence occurring in public places in USA is certainly because the fear of God has been banished from the minds of people!

Christianity in Britain losing ground to Islam and atheism!

New figures from the 2011 Census show that the number of people who identify as Christians in England and Wales has fallen by 4 million over the last 10 years - from 37.3 million in 2001 to 33 million last year. Meanwhile, the number of people declaring themselves to be atheists rose by more than 6 million, to 14.1 million. Barely a quarter of young people identify themselves as religious. The new figures also show that Islam is U.K.'s second-largest religion, at 2.7 million.

It should serve as a warning to the churches that they are failing in their responsibility to show the light of the gospel to the public at large.

A generous police officer

When a Texas driver was stopped by police because he had an expired registration, he told the officer that he was struggling financially: "I don't have the money. It was either feed my kids or get



this registration done". The officer then handed him a traffic ticket and drove away. When the driver opened the paper, he saw a \$100 bill in addition to the ticket! He was able to renew both his and his wife's registrations with the money. The officer did not want to be identified! The police department spokesman says he has done such good deeds in the past also and his coworkers are planning on honoring him for his generosity.

The officer certainly belongs to a rare species!

An educator threatened!

39-year old Kamran Gill in Lahore, Pakistan, has been working with various human rights organizations and denominations for development of youth and marginalized communities, emphasizing the importance of education. However, the locals are not in favor of educating the youth and are threatening Gill. Christian leaders say that, unfortunately, a few people in Pakistan want to keep the youth covered with illiteracy because they fear that they will start asking questions and start thinking on their own. It is a violation of basic human rights. Gill has lodged a complaint with the police for fear that extremists may target his family.

Satan tries his best to keep the eyes of people blinded so that in no way they will see the light of the gospel.

Unbelief:

World's third largest 'Religion'!!

A new report on global religious identity shows that while Christians and Muslims make up the two largest groups, those with no religious affiliation - including atheists and agnostics - are now the third largest "religious" group in the world. The study by the 'Pew Forum

on Religion & Public Life' found that more than eight in 10 (84 percent) of the world's 7 billion people adheres to some form of religion. Christians make up the largest group, with 2.2 billion adherents, or 23 percent worldwide, followed by Muslims, with 1.6 billion adherents, or 23 percent worldwide. Close behind are those who say they have no religious affiliation or say they do not believe in God at 1.1 billion, or 16 percent. It means that one out of six people does not have a religious identity. The next largest groups are Hindus (1 billion people, or 15 percent), Buddhists (500 million people, or 7 percent) and Jews (14 million people, or 0.2 percent). More than 400 million people - 6 percent - practice folk traditions from African, Chinese, Native American or Australian aboriginal cultures. The religiously unaffiliated are in the majority in six nations: China, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hong Kong, Japan and North Korea. The report covers 230 countries and is drawn from more than 2,500 censuses, surveys and population records accrued through 2010.

Christians in the above report include all denominations. Imagine how much smaller will be the number of true believers!! When the Son of Man comes, will we be among those whom He finds faithful?

"Prayer Quotes"

Prof. Zacharias Tane Fomum, Scientist from Cameroon

Unless the prayer life of an individual is revived and kept vigorous, all that may be happening in his spiritual life may be just activities of the soul life, which are bound to be short-lived before man and of no consequence at all before God.

** Prayer is the most important work on earth.

** Prayer is very hard work.

** Prayer is the greatest thing that anyone can do on earth to advance the interest of God, the Church, man, and himself.

** Prayer is the rail on which the locomotive of God's power moves.

** A man is only as spiritual and only as important before God as his prayer life is.

** Prayer is the greatest power in all the world.

** Prayer has more power locked up in it than the atomic bomb.

** Prayer is the one thing that puts the devil's kingdom into confusion.

** God's ablest soldiers are those who pray.

** Prayer is the priority of spiritual people.

** Prayer is the way to God's heart.

** God has committed Himself to answer all prayers that are in His will and that flow forth from pure hearts.

** Praying people have more power over nations than heads of states.

** The world is controlled by praying believers.



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