

BULLETIN

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

P.O. BOX 1609
CANYON COUNTRY, CALIFORNIA 91386
www.seedandbread.org
Otis Q. Sellers, Founder

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JANE SELLERS HANCOCK, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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Updates from Rusty Hancock

Prayer is a wonderful thing. I pray daily. During meals I am thankful for the nourishment my body needs to sustain a healthy life. At family gatherings I pray for the opportunity to get together with loved ones and enjoy their company. I pray with fellow Bible students that we have the resources to get together to study God's word. I pray while I take my morning walks, I pray when I'm driving my car, I pray when I'm riding a WaveRunner. I pray when I'm sitting on my porch enjoying a sunset. That's what's so wonderful about prayer; it's opportunities are endless

Some circumstances or events provoke prayers for a specific reason. I attend about fifty sporting events throughout the year. I cannot listen to our National Anthem without praying for our Military and First Responders who place themselves in harm's way so we may live peaceably. During natural disasters or other tragedies throughout the world, I pray for entire regions. While watching the news on TV or reading my morning paper, I will pray for our elected officials to find the wisdom, knowledge, and courage to actively find solutions to our domestic problems, solutions that will move our country forward.

Recently I found myself praying relentlessly. My older brother, Bob, had suffered a massive heart attack. For two days my family did not know if he would survive. And if he did survive, there was a substantial risk of brain damage and paralysis. Oh, how I prayed. I prayed for Bob, I prayed for my family, I prayed for the doctors and nurses who would care for him.

According to the medical experts who treated Bob, it is a "miracle" that he survived. Bob is on his way to making a strong recovery. There are some minor drawbacks, but overall Bob should enjoy good health for years to come.

With Bob on his way to recovery, my emotional balance scale had just about returned to normal when another event upset that balance. A young family with close ties to the Ministry suffered a horrible loss. Their young toddler drowned in a tragic pool accident. Again, I prayed, but no amount of prayer could undo what had

happened. Only God's coming Kingdom can remedy death, so I prayed for a quick beginning of the Kingdom.

I still felt a sense of helplessness. I prayed for the family and loved ones who had endured such a terrible loss. That they could find the strength to continue on with their lives. That those around them could provide the support and comfort to deal with the struggles to come. One of the family decisions that had been made, was to have the young child be an organ donor.

Now, in an odd situation of fate, this horrible drowning accident, had become a prayer answered for some family I will probably never know or meet. A young heart had become available. A young heart that could save the life of another child. Someone else's prayers, for their young child, were being fulfilled. So now I prayed that the impending heart transplant would be successful. The young recipient would respond to their new heart, recover, and grow up to lead a wonderful, blessed life.

You cannot "un-ring" a bell. That is why the vast majority of my prayers are forward thinking. God can effect change in all our lives. It's untraceable, but I know I am touched by His remarkable mercy on a daily basis. And I know you are too. There are many Word of Truth followers that I correspond with consistently. Folks from all fifty states, and across the globe. Some I have never met, some I met when I was a small child as you visited my grandfather in Southern California, and others I have had the honor to meet personally at our annual Bible Conferences.

I have read your letters (e-mails) and followed your journeys. The burdens you bear, health concerns, financial difficulties, or just navigating life during difficult times. You are in my prayers, and the prayers of the Ministry. Sometimes I do feel helpless in that I cannot personally reach out and hold your hand, but I do pray that you are surrounded by those who can hold you tight and be with you during your time of need.

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4 : 7).

The Servant in Matthew

By Nathan C. Johnson

The gospel of Matthew presents the Lord Jesus Christ as “the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.” As the Son of David, it presents the Lord as the King of Israel, their long-awaited Messiah. As the Son of Abraham, it presents Him as connected to the whole nation of Israel in their history and present standing with God.

The connection of Matthew to Israel goes far beyond just the connection of the Lord Jesus Christ to that nation, however. When the Lord teaches about the life and behavior of a disciple in Matthew, what He has in mind is a disciple in Israel. When He talks about what a proper servant of God looks like, He is talking about a servant of God who is a part of Israel. The overall perspective of the book of Matthew is of being “in Israel,” that nation and people whom God chose for Himself.

Perhaps nowhere is the perspective of a servant “in Israel” plainer in the book of Matthew than in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. This parable starts out with the description (NKJV throughout), “*For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.*” This parable compares the kingdom to a man traveling to a far country and leaving his business in the hands of three servants. One thing should be clear to us from this picture: the servants are already a part of their master’s household. They belong to Him. They cannot at all be described as outsiders. They are insiders, within their master’s house. So it was with every baby born into Israel at that time. By being born into Israel, they were born into God’s household. They were born as servants. They were born in relationship with God. Like it or not, they were related to Him simply by the fact that they were born as Israelites.

The parable proceeds to describe the behavior of the servants entrusted with the talents. The one with five trades with his and makes five more, and the one with two trades with his and gains two more. The one with one, however, hides his in the ground until his master’s return. The master then calls his servants to account. He is pleased with the first two servants and promises to increase their responsibility and authority. With the last, however, he is unhappy. He orders the talent removed from him and given to the one with ten talents.

The conclusion of the parable in verses 29 and 30 teaches the lesson. “*For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the*

unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The unprofitable servant is cast out of the household into the outer darkness, greatly to his sorrow and regret. This signifies the loss of his place in the household and ultimately in the kingdom of heaven, which is the subject of the parable.

This makes sense in the context of Israel. When someone is by chance born into the position of a servant of God in Israel, he will after he grows up make a personal choice as to what kind of a servant he will choose to be. The faithful servant maintains his place in the household, whereas the unfaithful servant loses it and is cast out. This makes perfect sense when we keep it in the context of Israelites born into relationship with God. The problem is when we confuse this with those of us who are “in Christ” today.

No believer today is by birth in a relationship with Christ. We come into such a relationship when we believe the gospel of our salvation. Thus, no such situation as prevailed in Matthew is possible. No one is born as a servant and only later makes his decision whether to be a faithful or a wicked and worthless servant. We do not start in the household. Instead we enter the household by faith. Therefore, the matter of our worthiness to be in the household is settled at the time of our salvation. There is no situation that arises later that might cause us to be removed into the outer darkness, as happened with the unfaithful servant in Matthew 25.

Yet a failure to understand this difference causes much confusion among many today. Anyone reading the book of Matthew and asking himself, “Is salvation safe and secure?” will come away from the book thinking that it is not. The unfaithful servant in Matthew clearly loses his place in the household and in the kingdom. There is no security for him. Yet it is a mistake to identify ourselves with this servant. The servant was in Israel. We are in Christ.

The position of the believer “in Christ” today is described in 2 Timothy 2:11: “*For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him.*” Our identification with Christ in His death takes place at the moment we believe. All who enter the household through faith have a permanent position there. Ephesians tells us that the believer in Christ is holy and blameless before Him, predestined to the adoption as a son, and has redemption through His blood and the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:4-7). The believer is seated with Christ (Ephesians 2:8). Failure to serve faithfully might result in shame (2 Timothy 2:15), but it will never result in being cast out. The believer in Christ is privileged far above the servant in Israel in Matthew.

Beyond Me

By Andrew Brown

Have you ever been in the jubilant state known as “cloud nine”? What if you could remain there? I fly there occasionally, and it is addicting. The Lord knows this, which is why He uses a comparison to alcohol: *“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit”* (Eph. 5:18, NIV throughout). No, it’s not found in a bottle. Yes, God desires us to be full and rejoicing. The Lord *supplies* joy but also *directs* me, a believer in Christ, to stir up and practice gladness and rejoicing. Certainly, I see the down-trodden state of our world and experience grief, but looking at Christ, what He has accomplished, and His nearness lifts me up. Right-division provides no excuse to walk around complaining, but demands that if I have been saved and raised with Christ, I come alive and rejoice. Christ’s words often echo in my head: *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (John 10:10). If I compare the desire for a bursting, filled-full life to the experience of eternal life because of limitations in the day in which we live, the thief has stolen; God has more for us NOW too.

“I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power . . . to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:17-19). I want to be fixed in the power this verse says that Christ currently has for us! How does one comprehend something which “surpasses knowledge”? An impossible task, if Jesus were not there to help. With His presence it remains a possibility, not a certainty. God puts the opportunity at our feet with the condition you MAY be filled. It’s mind boggling to perceive what “all the fullness of God” looks like today, but it is to be aspired to!

How can we make this dream a reality? It must not lie in our fragile outward circumstances. The Proverbs 31 woman is, *“Clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come”* (Prov. 31:25). **There is something to emulate: laughing at the days to come, a disposition untouched by externals!** There is a battle within to *“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances”* (1 Thess. 5:16-17). The apostles were winning this battle. After they were beaten, they left, *“rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name”* (Acts 5:41). I want to be that immersed in my walk with the Lord so that I can as easily rejoice!

“I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider

your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word” (Psalm 119:14-16). Enjoying the Lord in His Word is vital, a delight that touches our souls (desires) and ought to flow throughout the rest of our days. This spark of rejoicing can burn brighter and ignite more quickly if we choose. David had reason NOT to celebrate as the ark was being brought to Jerusalem; what would people think of their king? *“When she [Michal] saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart”* (2 Sam. 6:16). David could have stayed dignified, calm and serene, but he chose to throw off those shackles.

There are so many chains to break within ourselves. Consider the account of Zacharias. His bloodline had no heir (a tragedy in Israel) and he was of old age. He was given the great privilege to offer incense to God in the temple. Gabriel miraculously appeared to give him something to be received with great exaltation. The news *“your prayers have been answered”* (Luke 1:13), not only that but his son John would *“be a joy and delight . . . and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord”* (Luke 1:14-15). The blessings heaped upon Zacharias were beyond his ability and likely were his deep desire. With the Lord he should have been dancing on cloud nine, **but his response was tragic!** In the presence of this miraculous angelic appearance, Zacharias asked for *another* miracle: *“How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years”* (Luke 1:18). This priest who kept the law perfectly (Luke 1:6) was lacking faith, **his readiness to rejoice dull.** How much better a response would some sort of celebration have been, perhaps King David’s words: *“I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes”* (2 Sam. 6:21-22).

How can we laugh at the days to come? Are we regularly rejoicing? What will my children see in me that will make them want to grow up living passionately for Jesus? When I give a hard stare at what it means to be in Christ, realizing life now is part of a bigger story, I see Jesus is worthy of all glory, honor, and praise and find ample reason to raise a shout of rejoicing. It is the uniting of spirit and soul (mind and desire), the beginning of a filling joy that transcends emotion or circumstance even during suffering or on any regular day. *“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! . . . Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, Rejoice!”* (Philippians 3:1, 4:4). Amen.

Personal Reform

By Robert Juneau

In studying the Bible it is a right thing to acknowledge and build on the work of others. Most of the advancements in Biblical understanding that we enjoy stand on the hard work others have already made. If we do this properly, further truth will emerge. In the spirit of Paul's warning in 1 Cor. 3:10, we must take heed how we build upon the foundations others have laid for us. While we can rest assured that the foundations that the apostle Paul laid were rock solid, many of the things taught in Christendom over the centuries have been built upon less solid footings.

The building that we do, based upon someone else's work, can only be properly done when we are willing to routinely examine and scrutinize former ideas. It is often necessary to alter, or even abandon altogether, something previously thought to be Biblically sound. Sadly, the history of Christendom shows this has rarely been done. Once someone in authority said or wrote something, it became church doctrine, never to be questioned again.

While most of us acknowledge that this was the *modus operandi* of the Catholic Church, it is not acknowledged widely enough concerning Christendom during the five hundred years since the Reformation. Why has so little advancement in the understanding of Scripture taken place in mainstream Protestantism? What discoveries, what vast understanding of Scripture transpired at the time of the Reformation that would make anyone think that everything the Catholic Church had gotten wrong had been corrected? Martin Luther's ninety-five theses were not broad enough a stroke to erase fifteen hundred years of religious dogma. The official title of Luther's theses was "Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences." Luther's initial motivation was to bring about a debate among the academic minds of his day. The majority of the ninety-five individual points of contention Luther had centered on the abuse of power the church was wielding concerning indulgences. This debate never occurred, and instead, Luther found himself before the unyielding authorities of the establishment, who demanded he recant every one of his ninety-five points of contention. The theses were promptly translated from Latin into German and distributed among the populous, which spawned the uproar that led to the Reformation.

The Reformation brought us some much-needed clarification concerning some very important doctrines. This clarity was delineated in the five Latin *solas*. Three came immediately: *sola Scriptura* – by Scripture alone, *sola fide* – by faith alone, and *sola gratia* – by grace alone. Two more, *Solus Christus* – through Christ alone, and *soli Deo gloria* – glory to God alone, came years later.

Most Protestants like to think that all of the wrongs of the Catholic Church had been corrected at the Reformation. Nothing could be further from the truth. While it profoundly changed the world culturally and religiously, very little

changed theologically. The sad truth is that this is still true today in the majority of Protestantism. The overwhelming majority of all of the theological principles brought over from the Catholic Church went unchallenged, unscrutinized, and unquestioned. That is to say, until dispensational theology began to emerge in the early to mid-nineteenth century.

Even among Dispensationalists, there is usually an unwillingness to re-examine long-held beliefs and explore further truth, but if this willingness is going to be found, it will usually be among dispensationalists. I have a friend who has recently become aware of the further truths to be found in the advanced dispensational understanding. One day he said something profound. When coming to grips with the things pertaining to the Acts 28:28 divide being true, he said, "This is huge . . . this is Reformation huge!" When I had come to understand these truths, also later in life, I had never put it in those words, but I immediately identified with his proclamation. This *is* Reformation huge! In fact, theologically speaking, it is huger than anything that came out of the Reformation. Don't get me wrong. Luther stood on some very important tenets of Scripture that absolutely needed correction and clarification. The five *solas* are fundamental to our relationship with God and to any meaningful understanding of Scripture. But again, the majority of Luther's ninety-five points of contention were over the abuse of power in the Catholic Church. Theologically, not much else was challenged. I have always questioned why more reform did not continue over the centuries following Luther's bold stand.

All true believers desire to know God. In the Dispensation of Grace, the only way to know God is through the knowledge of God's word. The battle cry of The Word of Truth Ministry is 2 Timothy 2:15. "*Be diligent (study) to present yourselves approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" Before Paul's proclamation in Acts 28:28, there was little to no need to divide God's word. Afterward, it became imperative that we rightly divide God's word. 2 Timothy 2:15 is found exactly where it belongs. Chronologically, these are the closing words to the believers in the Dispensation of Grace.

Studying God's word will produce the knowledge of God. Among many other wonderful blessings, the knowledge of God will spawn personal reform. Believers have two options. Option one only requires us to sit in the pews of our established systems never questioning, never challenging, never studying, and never knowing God beyond that which is spoon-fed to us. This is the option the majority in Christendom has chosen. Option two requires us to navigate the labyrinth of misguided, confusing, and non-congruent doctrine that is put forth from all quadrants in the effort to find truth. It should be obvious that option one is the easy but fruitless and unrewarding path; option two is the difficult but fruitful and rewarding path. Option two is for truth seekers. Let us all seek for more truth in our lives, which will result in personal reform.