

Teaching E-mail

Prophetic Warnings From A Righteous God

50. The Pearl of Great Price

(February 2, 2011)

Dear friends,

Recent conversations with various people have prompted us to stress for you the *deep and abiding love relationship* with our Lord Jesus that His Word calls for and that He so worthily deserves. We grieve that there are those on our mailing list who've spent so long in the religious establishment that they've become desensitized to what wholehearted and grateful loving obedience is in Christ.

Nowhere in His Word do you find obligatory lip service or superficial religious practice pleasing in God's sight—not from the Hebrews in the Older Testament and not from the followers of Jesus in the New Covenant. And sadly, if your heart is not filled with grateful love and appreciation for Him, then you'll have neither the desire nor the will to look to His indwelling Spirit for His guidance (*rhema*) and power in your life.

Let's examine what is keeping so many satisfied with peering at our Lord through "frosted glass" rather than responding to His loving call to cross the threshold into His Presence. In Matthew 13:36-43, Jesus is asked by His disciples to explain the parable of the weeds in the field. The field, He notes, is the world, which is populated by both the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one, the devil.

There's a clear delineation in His sight between those who live to satiate their sin nature and those who respond in obedient trust to His call to follow Him. In God's sight, there's no compromise! As with the parable of the good fish and the bad in verses 47-50, the

"weeds" will weep and gnash their teeth. They'll realize too late that they rejected the only One Who had loved them, died for their sins, and risen in power and glory. The "righteous" — those who turned from their sin and received forgiveness and reconciliation with their Father through Jesus — will joyfully shine in the *kingdom of their Father* (v. 43).

Jesus makes very clear that there are indeed eternal consequences to whether or not we take seriously our relationship with Him. Kingdom living is in no way simply a religious add-on to a life of self-pursuit and self-interest. Rather, living as beloved servants of the King calls for wholehearted, intentional responsiveness to His Spirit. Stop here to look up Matthew 13:44-46 and ponder Jesus' description of the heart determination that's needed to enter His Kingdom. Both the man who found treasure in the field and the merchant seeking fine pearls were responding to an eager hunger within themselves. If there hadn't been a "divine discontent" in their hearts with the way things were in life, they wouldn't have devoted such effort in their pursuit! And when they finally found the treasure they'd been seeking, the "pearl of great value", each man joyfully "*sold everything he had*" to take hold of something of far greater worth.

Do you think either man ever regretted his decision later on in life? Not at all! But this process of eagerly seeking Lord Jesus as the treasure beyond price

and being willing to lay at His feet *everything else* in order to love and serve Him is the hang-up for so many. They refuse to venture past their comfort zone to take hold of our Lord and His Kingdom values. "This far and no more" is their mantra; whether verbalized or not, they hold onto a worldly "insurance policy" of self-will. But what a barrier that way of thinking is to the Kingdom response of total abandon set forth by our Lord: "*THY will be done...*" A far different standard than the self-seeking, "Serve MY interests, God," that feeds so much of contemporary "Christianity."

It isn't that many of the halfhearted haven't been busy in religious activities. In fact, they may be the busiest! But what they're doing doesn't flow from the guidance and power Jesus provides to the sheep who hear His voice. When you ask the busy why they're doing what they do, He never comes up. Instead, they remark that what they're doing needs to be done, or that they feel good about their kind acts. Certainly both motives bring lots of "attaboys" to feed their ego! Yet, Jesus tells His followers of a far higher goal for the kind acts His own do out of love for Him: to "*let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven*" (Matthew 5:16). So, who gets the credit from your good deeds? You as a "good person," or our Father for choosing you as His vessel to be poured out for His praise?

***"Instead, speaking the truth in love,
we will in all things grow up into Him
Who is the Head, that is, Christ.
From Him the whole body,
joined and held together
by every supporting ligament, grows
and builds itself up in love,***

as each part does its work"
(Ephesians 4:15,16)

When God's Word tells you that Jesus is your Head, what does that mean to you? What should it look like in your daily life? If our Lord is really your Head, then He is your incomparable Source of direction so that He can fulfill His purposes through you. This statement may evoke an acquiescent nod from you, but is it really true in your life? Your willful sin nature and any remaining strongholds or unChristlike attitudes and thoughts about anyone else robs your heart of commitment to love and serve the interests of our Lord.

Again, we strongly encourage you to prayerfully take time searching Scripture and discussing with those close to you in Jesus the goals and values that are consistent with an authentic relationship with our Lord and King. Develop a mindset that pleases Him. And if you wonder if you have that kind of mindset, ask Him! He does respond to those who keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking (Matthew 7:7,8).

Our recent Lifebytes have emphasized how important it is for your life journey in Jesus to grow a *Kingdom mindset*. A mindset is a way of thinking that is deeply entrenched in you and in those close to you. Your mindset creates within you a powerful incentive to purposely evaluate everything you encounter, and to respond to those things in a particular manner. In fact, your personal mindset sums up your goals, your values, and the methods you use to achieve what's important to you.

So, how does a Kingdom mindset impact our lives?

1. First, we need such a deep and

abiding love for our Father and Lord Jesus that through His Spirit in us we live to serve Him and please Him as the "pearl of great price" (2Corinthians 5:14; Colossians 1:10).

2. When people ask you *why* you do what you do, you can verbalize how our Lord guided you. It may be a *rhema* of His revealed will for you from the Bible, or through a prophecy, through the counsel of a wise and godly friend, or through a dream or vision. However He guides you, you need to be able to trust that He's leading you as your Head, because with His *rhema* comes His power to accomplish His will. When our Lord tells you what He wants you to do in obedient trust, His power ALWAYS goes with you to accomplish His purpose (Zechariah 4:6). That's why you need *His* will, not yours.

3. When you're fulfilling *His* will, you'll refrain from taking any credit for the outcome. Instead, your heart will be filled with the humble love found in the command of Jesus: "*So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty'*" (Luke 17:10). People should be praising our Father because of your loving obedience to be His heart and hands and feet! But this will happen only as you walk in the same yoke of humility our Lord did (Matthew 11:29). You'll deflect personal praise to the One Who alone is worthy.

4. When your way of life reflects Kingdom-minded goals and values, realize beforehand that these will be tested and attacked by those who don't understand or agree. Kingdom goals and values are not just personal preferences you discard when people ridicule you for

them (John 15:18,19; 1Corinthians 2:14; 1Peter 1:6,7). Your Kingdom goals and values are those which you refuse to give up no matter what the cost, because they emanate from your love-based devotion to Jesus, your Head. When you live according to HIS perspective, you can expect ostracism from those who live according to their worldly goals and values. Lord Jesus was ostracized too! (See Matthew 5:11.)

Read again these four facets of following Jesus as your Lord, your King, your Head. These represent the internalized, love-based motivations of a Kingdom mindset. If you recognize that any or all of these don't fit your present life, cry out to our Lord Jesus for His help. Call upon Him as your own "pearl of great price" Who loves you beyond measure; He's eager to answer your call through His Spirit within you!

"If I have not love, I am nothing"

(1Corinthians 13:2)

A Warning to the Kindly but Cowardly

How frequently during our years of ministry we've encountered the "**kindly but cowardly**." They are kindly through being generous and well meaning—until what is being asked of them takes them outside their comfort zone. Because of their kind actions, you might not recognize that deep inside they're held captive to making sure their own desires are fulfilled before they look to the needs of others. The *cowardly* part? When they're questioned or challenged about their faith, they have in place a ready-made rationalization that will deflect any challenge to their comfort zone. Again, this mindset is the "this far and no more" stopper that keeps the Spirit from pouring them out according

to Father's will and design. *Kindliness can often be the camouflage for cowardice.*

Being kindly and being loving are not synonymous. The kindness which flows out of love is completely sacrificial—totally poured out by the Spirit to meet the needs of another (Luke 10:30-37). But when kindness is enacted without love, it is used to purchase favor (Luke 14:12). In other words, the acts of kindness are intended to make the receiver feel obligated, much like a used car salesman offering you a cup of coffee as you look around. The acts of the kindly without love make them look good in the eyes of others but don't bring Father praise (Matthew 6:1). Rather, the sacrificial love that is willing to lay everything down for another person can only be acquired from Lord Jesus and empowered by His Spirit. Again, if your heart hungers to reflect Him this way, cry out to Him in loving trust.

***"He who has ears to hear,
let him hear"*** (Mark 4:9)

***"Have I now become your enemy by
telling you the truth?"*** (Galatians 4:16)

The Spirit of Christ has chosen to gift us with prophecy and exhortation to serve God's people. For 34 years we've been privileged to see the mercy of our Father as He's used us to strengthen and encourage those whose heart's desire is to be true to Him no matter what the cost. We've also grieved over those who hardened their hearts when we exposed a sinful course they were on and exhorted them to return to our Lord and His ways (Ezekiel 33:7-9; John 3:19; Ephesians 5:7-11). But this reaction is no surprise. Several years ago the Spirit spoke to Mike about the differing responses people would have to the

Spirit speaking through him: *"When people fear God, you are an encouragement to them. When they don't fear God, they fear you."* A holy and reverent fear of our Father prompts people to humble themselves before Him to confess their sin and drink deeply of His mercy. But a hardened heart resists admonition, choosing instead to scorn and deride the messenger.

The Holy Spirit prompted us in writing this e-mail to cite some real-life examples and consequences when people refused to hear what the Spirit had given us to share with them. When people ask us for counsel or include us in planning for cooperative endeavors, we rely on God's promise: *"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, Who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him"* (James 1:5). Don't be shocked when the wisdom He gives is exactly opposite your human inclination! Inclination is man's way to justify why they should stay in their comfort zone. Remember, God's *rhema* is given for your good, and so that He may be glorified by your testimony of obedient trust.

These examples highlight for you the particular wisdom the Holy Spirit gave us to share when various people asked, and the consequences that resulted when His *rhema* was refused. When someone blindly (or with determined self-will) forges ahead without knowing God's will, he's in no position to shake his fist at God or ask where God was when his plans fell apart. Yet many do! Or, if a person intentionally violates His will, he'll experience the just aftermath for his decision. Father allows these painful outcomes so that people will repent in humility and cry out to be restored in loving fellowship in Jesus. As these examples show, many have man-

gled their lives, and that of others, by willfully relying on their own inclination rather than on God's revealed will.

- There's the father who encouraged his about-to-be-married son to partner in his prospective father-in-law's business. All he and his son could see were dollar signs to feed worldly goals. We warned him that his son's wife would never learn to respect him if she saw her father as their source of provision. Now that son is divorced, and the man complains that he hasn't seen his grandchildren in years.

- There's the father who never took a biblical stand to confront his fornicating children that they were violating God. Years later his adult children are still struggling to genuinely love their spouses, and he's never asked their forgiveness for having shrunk back from representing righteousness to them.

- There's men and women who couldn't hold a job for long because they never humbled themselves to let go of bitterness toward their father and forgive from their heart. (Many of the clergy we ministered to over the years were plagued by an arrogant refusal to forgive.) That unforgiveness only hardened their heart against the wisdom they needed to hear from others later in life.

A reminder: Nearly every father and mother does the best they can in parenting with what they have going for themselves from their own past experiences. If you refuse to recognize that they chose life for you and tried to raise you in spite of their frailties, you're dishonoring them. And true to His Word, God will not let it go well for you until you repent.

- There are the fathers of divorced daughters. They had grave doubts about the man their daughter was about to marry. We warned them that their silence would lead to pain, but they were more afraid of their wife and her concern

about the wedding arrangements than about what the marriage would be like afterward. How does it feel for them to face their disheartened daughters now? How painful is the emotional wall between father and daughter because they shirked their biblical role to protect her?

- There are the mothers who kept cajoling their children to try to get them to obey. Unless they bribed or coaxed or even threatened their offspring, obedience was unlikely. Guess who was in control! They ignored our warning that they were inspiring rebellion in her children by putting them in charge and yielding to their demands. We encouraged them, as did so many others who had God's view of the situation, "Calmly but firmly take the food away and put it in the refrigerator until your child is really hungry. And don't give way to whining later." Perhaps the mothers perceived this counsel as too harsh, and damaging to her child's self-esteem.

But sadly, many who indulged their children's sin nature are now taking them to professional counselors. The grievous repercussion of numerous child-dominated homes has been divorce, both by the parents and by their now-grown offspring who discovered that their own partners refused to cater to their selfish control. Unchecked pursuit of selfish demands may bring "self-esteem," but know this sad fact: The highest self-esteem that researchers have found flaunts itself among those imprisoned on death row. Nobody could tell these men and women what to do.

- There are the younger couples with children; we cautioned them, "Don't raise your child(ren) intending to show your parents that you're a better mother or father than they were. Your child(ren) will become projects to earn you acclaim." But now your child(ren) despise you because they realize they were the means to your goal of approval from others.

- There are those we advised against attending a wedding when the intended bride or groom's own parents refused to bless the marriage because of ongoing sin in the younger couple. Coming between a parent and an unrepentant adult child supports dishonor and champions sin. Has it gone well with them since? Pressure from "on high" is intended to turn those who have sinned around so they can be restored to their Lord in holiness (see Hebrews 12:9-11).

- There are the men we admonished because they weren't working, but their wives were sweating the finances and went to work instead. These guys wonder why they feel so alone now, because their wives see no need for them. The women acknowledge that while they still love their husbands, they sure don't like or respect them.

- There's the businessman whose goal was to "make a profit and spread the gospel at the same time." We warned him that these two goals are mutually exclusive—you can't serve both God and money. When his business failed, he blamed God. In his bitterness, he also lost his close friends and was barely able to keep his marriage together.

- There's the head of a mission agency of which 85% of their married missionaries failed in their first term on the field. Most of those who went forth had unresolved bitterness with their parents, especially their fathers. We counseled him to help these prospective missionaries resolve their relational tensions first. His reply? "If we do that, we'll lose financial support from our donors." Yet what pain has come to those who left the mission field defeated, still bitter, and angry at the God they blame for their misery.

- There's the board of another mission agency whose own study deemed their efforts among the Native American as "fruitless." The

missionaries we talked with wept when they heard how the Hebraic foundations worked so effectively cross-culturally, especially in starting businesses so that people could become self-supportive. But the agency board decided to stay with the old "fruitless" methods, again because they declared, "If we do it your way, we will lose our donors."

- There are the young people who want to go into full-time ministry but are carrying a heavy load of past debt they incurred by choice. They feel they can use the donations of people who want to support their ministry to pay off their old debt. In God's sight, though, that's misrepresentation and theft.

Remember, we didn't go looking for problems in these people's lives! We were asked for biblical counsel either by those directly involved or by those in the person's chain of counsel. We're grateful that not all our interaction has turned out so painful! In fact, compared to these examples we cited, far more listened and tested the counsel for themselves in prayer. These went on in obedient trust in their Lord's will and strength, praising Him for His faithful guidance and empowerment. Our Lord will always give guidance; He only needs a listening and obedient heart.

We've written this e-mail mindful of our Lord's concern that His followers today love Him wholly and respond with joy in fulfilling His purpose: *"And [they] will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord"* (Luke 1:17).

To our Lord, and Him alone, be all the glory,

Mike & Sue