

**JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE
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Issue 9, October – November 2000

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Captain Curtis Butler lives in Gitwinksihlkw, northern British Columbia, Canada. He and his wife Cindy have served this native village as Salvation Army Corps Officers since 1994. Curtis reports that the fishing is heavenly. This and more by Butler are newly published in Salvationism 301, available now at www.armybarmy.com

NEVER LEAVE - NEVER CLEAVE

Curtis Butler

"Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul" (1 Peter 2:11; and Genesis 22:1-14).

Salvationists "should be trained to know what the bible is, and what the human mind is, and how to make one bear on the other, and should know how to is the truth for the Salvation of men" (Frederick Booth-Tucker).

There is no neutral ground from which to read the scriptures or view the world. Everyone who can read the Bible has a full understanding of how the world works. However, the 'world' that we understand so well is the particular world into which we have been socialized and acculturated. How then do we correctly divide the word of truth in a multi-cultural world?

We must be willing to suspect. God will not hand over the pearls of scripture to swine who are content to wallow in the bumper sticker mentality of 'God said it, I believe it, that settles it'. His requirement is for us to ask, seek, knock. It is ours to wrestle for its blessing into the night as Jacob, and to limp out transformed, bearing the marks of the cost. We are to call the text into question, for it testifies to the reality of Christ in the world. Put the texts on the stand; cross-examine them. Ask of their origin, their purpose, and their fulfillment. Do not let them go until they reveal their message and their power to transform.

We must also suspect our motivation to know. Is it to justify our already entrenched position? Is it to know of its transforming power as we apply

it to our lives or because we want to flaunt the fact that we know? We have to be willing to suspect our interpretation. Why did we settle for a particular interpretation? Is it the most popular? Does it justify our particular position? Is it the least disturbing to the status quo? Do we know of other possible interpretations?

We must be willing to suspect. We are challenged to take our interpretation, our only interpretation, and the interpretation that we love and sacrifice it upon the altar of understanding. Only then will we be ready to hear the voice from heaven that reveals the divine alternative. Only then will the promises of God (Isaac, the promise) be unbound and set free from in-house interpretation and pithy quotes that reveal a deep well of fear and self satisfaction covered by a thin veneer of trumped up courage.

How troubled were Abraham's thoughts, how painful his steps as he made his way to Mount Moriah. Isaac was God's promise to Abraham and Sarah, God's promise to the world. Then the call came to sacrifice the promise of God. So Abraham took those painful steps, and he sacrificed. Not his son, and not only the ram. Abraham sacrificed his own interpretation of God's promise in Isaac upon the altar of obedience. Abraham trusted, not in the promise of God but in the ultimate freedom of God- God's freedom to seemingly contradict His own promise.

For the church to be truly prophetic we must be open to the freedom of God. We may even need to set Him free from the thicket of a dominant cultural prejudice, reckless hermeneutics and systematic theologies that so bind him in His ministry of offering His life as an atoning sacrifice to reconcile the whole world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). We are to free God's alternative and offer it to the world. This is not the alternative of the domesticated, housebroken god of middle class America. Rather this is the alternative of the God of all Nations who is alert to the realities, who does not flinch from taking sides, who sits in the divine council on the edge of His seat attentive to his special interests.

As His prophetic voice, the church is to never leave the world or hide from its pain and shame. The image of Christ pouring Himself out for the world's redemption is a call for us to follow Him and to engage the world.

Yet the fact that we proclaim the alternative of God dictates that we can never cleave to this world's systems. The prophet is to stand firmly in the reality of culture while proclaiming the words of God's freedom as the divine alternative.

The gospel is not a message of personal salvation from the world, but a message of a God who so loves the world that He desires to transform it

right down to its basic structures.

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Shaw Clifton was nominated for General at The Salvation Army's 1999 High Council election. He became an officer of The Salvation Army in 1975. Irish by birth, he served for many years in the UK, on staff at International Headquarters in London, and later as the leader of The Salvation Army in Massachusetts, USA. Educated as a lawyer (L.B.), he also holds the Bachelor of Divinity and Doctorate of Philosophy degrees. He is author of several books including "Who are these Salvationists?" (1999). Currently he is the leader of The Salvation Army in Pakistan and was promoted recently to the Army's highest rank of Commissioner.

INTERVIEW WITH SHAW CLIFTON

JAC: Please tell us a little about your conversion.

SC: At the risk of being misunderstood, I nevertheless need to say that I have always been saved, in this sense: there has never been a time in my life when I did not know about Jesus and that He had died to be my Saviour from sin, and there has never been a time in my life when I did not believe this and accept it fully for myself with much gladness. This I owe to my parents who were faithful in keeping the promises they made to raise me in the Christian faith when I was dedicated under the Army flag in Belfast Citadel hall in Northern Ireland. Growing up through childhood and my teen years there were many times when all this came with a new freshness to me and reconfirmed the simple and innocent, saving faith of a small child.

JAC: You have served in several parts of the world. Please comment on how this has impacted your Salvationism.

SC: We are serving on our fourth continent. We have also been privileged to see the Army at work in many countries. Everywhere the Army is the same, yet distinctive. All one, but different. This is a miracle of God, who alone could bind together an Army of such massive proportions from so many diverging cultures and peoples. Our internationalism is a very precious gift, one that is perhaps not sufficiently prized among us. The recent Congress in Atlanta brought it all before our very eyes in a gloriously God-honouring way. It is important that we never stand in the way of the Army developing at local levels in ways that truly reflect and speak to the local culture.

JAC: You have had a unique role in Salvation Army activity over the last generation. In legal capacities you have impacted High Councils and SA national constitutions and protests and defence of historic rights. You were on the scene for the tragic martyrdoms in Africa. You have written pages that have challenged Salvationists on such issues as marriage, ethics, holiness, and Salvationism. Where do we stand in light of General Booth's prophesy that, "If The Salvation Army will be true to God, (we will reach the world) in the next fifty years" (THE GENERAL'S LETTERS, 1885)?

SC: When we first set out on life's great adventure with God, and when we first say "Yes" to Him when He calls us to a distinctive life of ministry, we can have absolutely no idea of all that will follow. He opens doors and presents challenges that without His grace would be utterly daunting. I cannot pretend to know what Booth had in mind when he wrote these words. However, I do know that his emphasis on being "true to God" was the only one that mattered. It still matters. For me, the Army is "true to God" when it remembers and prioritises the following non-negotiables:

1. The sinfulness of sin. By this I mean that we must never be seduced by arguments and attitudes that would cause us to join those who pretend that sin is OK. We need to hold to the truths of Scripture about those things that grieve God and are entirely incompatible with His righteousness or with a claim to love and serve Him. Hell will laugh loudly on the day the Army fails to do this. Our compromise will be Satan's victory. If we lose our sense of the awfulness and evil of sin and its horrendous hold on human hearts, or if we ever cease to grieve over the damage and hurt it causes to human lives, we shall then have lost our sense of urgency about the need of a Saviour. Linked to this is the fading belief among us as to the reality of Hell or Satan and the forces of evil and darkness. We need to know our enemy, but too many of us no longer think there is an enemy. This makes us dangerously vulnerable to those "fiery darts" of which the Apostle speaks in Ephesians 6:16.

2. The power of the forgiveness of God shown in Jesus Christ our Lord. We are called as an Army to preach the matchless love of God for a sinful human race, a love revealed in the Cross of Calvary. It is our mission to proclaim the blood of Jesus as the only remedy for sin. This message needs to permeate our teaching, preaching and writing. Each Salvationist is called to lead a life that is an eloquent witness to the love of God and the power of the Cross.

3. The life of holiness. We must recapture our nerve about the practicality of living a sanctified life. The Lord is willing to demonstrate through His Army the boundlessness of the salvation to be found

in Christ, to show that He forgives past sin AND wants to keep us clean and pure after we are saved. I am praying that God will raise up among us women and men who will be bold about all this, who will speak of it, write about it, and articulate again for the early 21st century the timeless truths of Scripture. I believe that purity of heart and life is a daily possibility through grace imparted directly from God to the believer. I am not among those officers or soldiers who think it fashionable to denigrate the writings of Samuel Logan Brengle. I do not agree with those who say he got it wrong and did not understand the Scriptures. He still challenges us across the years and spurs us on to higher and better. (I wish dearly that his books were again available from the trade department in the UK. When I want one I have to contact the USA, Canada or Australia. It seems Brengle is read and appreciated more these days outside the Army than in it. Something is wrong.)

4. A refusal to curry the favour of men. Too often we have yielded to the temptation to trim our sails to the winds of human approval. That is no way for an Army of God to go on. We need to plead on our knees for regular cleansing from the care of what men think or say. We shall have friends aplenty by being "true to God". Our best friends will be those who know all about us, warts and all, but who love and admire us for our willingness to be absolutely ourselves under God and respect us for our determination never to waver from His will or from the identity He has given us a distinctive church and community of compassionate carers for the outcast and lost.

5. Practical, compassionate service to the needy. God has endowed us with a marked capacity to serve the under-privileged. We share his bias to the poor. We walk with the outcast. We identify with the rejected. We serve with the basin and towel. We kneel before the lowest of the low and the poorest of the poor. We are to be the voice of the voiceless. All this is hard and costly, but there is grace for it. Every Army social worker needs to be saved, to be a partner in mission, consciously receiving and, in turn, channelling that divine grace to needy souls.

6. Advocacy in the public arena for social action. We are called to be actively, intelligently involved and openly concerned on issues of social justice and human rights. Some parts of the Army world have done better at this than others. We take no political side, save that of the oppressed or downtrodden. We must forever be on our guard about the implications of taking money from secular sources. Sometimes the strings attached represent too high a price. We must never sell our birthright. All the world must know that the Army's silence is something that money cannot buy.

7. Our belief in the directness and immediacy of divine grace to the human heart. This brings me to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers

and also to our historic, divinely inspired stance concerning the sacramental life. We are called to bear witness to the daily, hourly reality of God's grace in our lives without the help of the (by now myriad) outward forms of sacramental ceremony found useful by many others. This is a hard, even lonely, calling. So was our Lord's.

8. Claiming new ground for Christ. I am with Booth in his vision to take the gospel to all the world. Opportunities to open the work in new lands will still present themselves. The Spirit must guide us. There are voices calling for a moratorium on new national openings because of the financial costs involved. I understand clearly the need to count the fiscal cost before venturing further across yet another national boundary, but the cost of ignoring the prompting of the Holy Spirit is higher still. Where He leads with a clear vision and call, like Booth I would follow, trusting God implicitly for the resources we need. He has never let us down and is not about to start doing so. Here in Pakistan we have ventured forward time and again into bold and unlikely ventures, taking new ground for Christ. The money has always come to hand. Our faith has been strengthened and is growing ever bolder.

JAC: You served in Africa during some challenging times (recounted most recently in MOBILIZED FOR GOD). What is the secret to the fast Salvation Army growth in parts of Africa?

SC: Our four years in Africa (1975-79) hardly make me an expert! But it is notable that in East Africa and in Zimbabwe we have the two largest territories in the world when it comes to the number of soldiers. Then we look to India and to Pakistan also to see high numbers. Only 25% of our soldier strength is to be found outside Africa and South Asia. Many cultural factors are at work in these places. We do not encounter western scepticism about God or about organised religion. We are free from the inordinate individualism of the west with its emphasis on pleasing one's self and the need for self-sufficiency. In Africa and Asia we find a recognition that we are basically social animals with a need for one another. I think this willingness to see our personal need is helpful to evangelism. Another factor is the faithfulness of the early pioneers who are still openly remembered and spoken of in revered tones. Their lives still inspire.

Next, I would mention the willingness of modern "missionaries" to work themselves out of a job and hand over to indigenous staff. This way the church, the Army, can more easily reflect the culture of the place where it is found. Indigenisation and inculturation are the key ingredients.

JAC: You bring a unique combination of educational accomplishment to the warfare. There are various schools of thought as to the proper place of

formal education in the Army. What is the proper role?

SC: Get all the formal education you can get, then hand it all back to God for Him to use at will, never thinking for a moment that you did it all in your own strength. However, education is no substitute for godliness. Also, we need sanctified "thinkers" and this is not quite the same as "educated folk". I suppose in the end I would want to be an advocate for an evangelicalism backed up by sound education and scholarship. But I would never accept that lack of formal education is automatically a handicap to ministry in the Army. There is a place for all of us, and we must humbly learn from each other regardless of our backgrounds. We all need to remain forever teachable.

JAC: Pakistan has experienced significant growth in the last couple of years. How do you see the Army strategising towards reaching the other predominantly Muslim nations of the world?

SC: Yes, God has given us growth in our soldiers' rolls of 30% in the last three years. We have witnessed a net growth of over 10,000 senior soldiers in that time. God is good. Pakistan is a Moslem state. We find it very hard to reach Moslems with the gospel. Our converts come from the unchurched, unsaved ethnic "Christians". Recent research shows that in Pakistan there are perhaps at most only a dozen or so true cases of conversion from Islam to Christ in any year (from a population of 140 million Moslems). The impact of the gospel is seriously hampered by what are perceived by devout Moslems as low moral standards in the west and these are assumed to be "Christian" - immodesty of dress, excess of drugs and alcohol, marital infidelity, family breakdown, pornography, abortion and so on. We see it as our role to prove that the Army can, by God's grace, not only hold its own in Pakistan but grow and flourish. We are the last frontier of Salvationism between Europe and Asia. Indonesia, Nigeria and Russia/CIS also work in Moslem settings. I am not aware of any thought-through strategy by the Army to reach the world's Moslems. I think perhaps there is widespread ignorance about Islam - its beliefs and its potential for influencing world and national events. In Pakistan we have many Moslem friends and the Army is free to worship and serve, despite the volatile nature of life here.

JAC: What books have had the greatest impact on you over the years? Why?

SC: Richard Collier's "The General Next to God" - for its inspirational account of Booth; the 1945 Handbook of Doctrine - for its simplicity and directness (each section seems to call for a verdict from the reader, not least the section on our Tenth Doctrine); the Journals of Bramwell Booth - for what they have taught me about spiritual leadership in the Army and

single-mindedness for the cause of Christ; anything from the pens of Brengle or Ed Read, whose recent promotion to glory has taken from us an irreplaceable man; the latest volume of Army history by Henry Garipey, "Mobilised for God" - for its fine research and willingness not to hide the truth (we need, as an Army, to mature still further in giving the people all the facts, uncomfortable or not, in works of this kind); my little book of collected prayers - for its daily help to my soul (I thank God for the written prayers of others that help me say to God the things I need to say); "God in Pain - Teaching Sermons on Suffering" by Barbara Brown Taylor - for its sensitivity to the human lot and for the courage and skill of its author who stands out as a preacher of God's word.

JAC: Who are your heroes? Why?

SC St. Francis - because he was not in love with this world or its honours; Martin Luther - because he knew where he stood and could not be intimidated by powerful persons, religious or secular; John Wesley - for showing me what Christ can do for me in the blessing of a clean heart; William Booth - for role-modelling what it means to let God have all there is of me; Samuel Logan Brengle - for not letting his wealth or legal education stop him from preaching and writing as a prophet of holiness; my Dad, Major Albert Clifton (R) - for being the nicest, most humble man I have ever known and for showing me how to both love the Army and also stand back from it from time to time.

JAC: General Catherine Booth went on record, stating, "The great fundamental principle of The Salvation Army is? the law of adaptation." This comment has been used by many salvos at many times toward diverse ends. You are on record in various places, including WHO ARE THESE SALVATIONISTS?, commenting on change in various areas of The Salvation Army.

What is the proper understanding of this fundamental principle for us today, in light of tensions between priestly v. prophetic roles?

SC: "Adapt or die!" is still as true today for us as ever it was. Adaptability, without compromising our non-negotiables, is a gift we have been given but which we are often slow to exercise. I sense a new stirring toward good, wise change. The best change comes from the grassroots up. We must never forget to measure our methods ruthlessly against their effectiveness in winning souls and building saints. Our social, compassionate services need also to be constantly reviewed in the creative light of the Spirit's illumination, so that we never find ourselves offering answers to questions that no one is asking any more. Any tension between the priestly and the prophetic must always be creative. It is not

"either / or", but "both/and".

JAC: What is the most significant part of your ministry today?

SC: Striving daily to be a spiritual leader in a manner that pleases God. It is vital that I encourage my people (yes, I know they are first and foremost God's people, but I unashamedly think of them as "mine", given to me in high and sacred trust by God to shepherd and pastor in His Name). Leadership involves also the setting of standards, the creating of a climate in which others can excel for Christ and be stretched beyond what they believed possible. I am always excited to see others discern that they have gifts long undiscovered. I am grateful to God also for opportunities to travel in ministry, to teach and preach for Him. I am called also to minister to my family. Helen, my wife, and I pastor one another as we both seek jointly to pastor our three children, scattered on three continents at present! I feel also called to write for Christ. The USA National HQ have generously published my last two books. I feel the stirrings of another - something about "Pakistan - the Final Frontier", but that sounds too much like an episode of "Star Trek"!!

JAC: What are your dreams for The Salvation Army?

SC: The response given above where I list my understanding of the non-negotiables covers this. Because I am a radical, progressive traditionalist my dream is of an Army rediscovering the richness of its roots, its first purposes, its first bold obedience to the Spirit, its passion for souls and for holiness while all the time staying crucially relevant to the needs of the age, sensitively in touch with changing social trends but never being seduced by them because we are in Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

JAC: What is God teaching you these days?

SC: 1. To trust Him in matters large and small. That He will win through for me, for my family, for my Territory, for God's Army.
2. That I need Him more than He needs me.
3. That I have no answers, except those that are God's.

JAC: Can you tell us of any memorable preaching you have heard, and what made it outstanding?

SC: I think of two starkly contrasting experiences:

a) I listened to the preaching of the Rev. Dr. Bernice King at the Congress in Atlanta this summer. It was rooted in the Scriptures (the fourth Gospel's account of the raising of Lazarus), it was articulate, passionate, persuasive, powerful, professional in the very best sense. God was in it and we heard His voice.

b) A few years ago we were on furlough and visiting a corps on the south coast of England. The corps officers were away on leave and so one of the local officers was taking the Sunday evening meeting. He was inexperienced and hesitant, almost apologetic. His whole approach was amateurish. Yet his words were simple and unpretentious. He spoke to us about the sacrifice of Jesus at Calvary and our need of a Saviour. It came from his heart. As I listened I knew that had I not been saved already I would have accepted Christ as my Saviour that night.

JAC: How are you a different person and a different Salvationist from when you were commissioned?

SC: God is more central in my life. My calling to be an officer in the Army has been confirmed over and over again. I am more sure that I am in His will. I am living out a marvellous adventure with God, for Christ, in the power of the Spirit.

JAC: What is your most memorable spiritual experience?

SC: Impossible to answer! But I do find myself looking back upon (and looking forward to) those quiet moments when, on leave with Helen, we can sit in a lonely church sanctuary somewhere in the English countryside, or kneel together at an Army Mercy Seat, renewing our vows to God as officers and recommitting our futures to Him.

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A TITANIC DANGER

Steve Court

The Titanic wasn't the only ship engulfed in the drama made even more famous by the movie. Rick Joyner, in his book, LEADERSHIP, describes the role of the Californian and the Carpathia.

The Californian encountered ice in its path, stopped til morning, and warned via wireless (radio) other ships in the area of the danger. The Titanic received and logged this warning at 7:30 PM. This was the first of 6 warnings the Titanic disregarded. After all, this was an unsinkable ship!

The crew of the Californian actually saw the Titanic stop dead in the water. They figured the Titanic was taking the same precautions they were! The Titanic fired a distress signal, a rocket. The Californian Captain guessed incorrectly that the Titanic was contacting a sister ship. He didn't even awaken the radio operator to contact the Titanic to check. The Californian crew watched the Titanic sink, fooling themselves that the fading lights were indicative of a retreating ship.

The complacency of the Titanic and the Californian is almost unbelievable. In the middle of the North Atlantic, they both sat by as the disaster rushed on. The Titanic had never done a proper lifeboat drill. They lacked a plan for the orderly movement of passengers to the boats. Most of the crew didn't even know how to lower the boats! Complacency is the Titanic danger.

The other ship, the Carpathian, captained by a godly man named Arthur Rostron, modelled courageous behaviour in the midst of crisis. Upon receiving news at

12:35 AM that the Titanic hit an iceberg, Rostron ordered the Carpathian to turn and head full speed to the Titanic's location. Only then did he confirm the accuracy of the message.

Rostron then prepared his crew for the emergency. He set up the English doctor in the first class dining room, the Italian doctor in the second class dining room, the Hungarian doctor in the third class dining room, fitted with every supply and resource available. He readied gangways for easy conveyance and lines for the securing of life boats. He organised

food preparation for survivors, supervision of the current passengers, and had officers at every entry point to wire the names of survivors as they embarked.

However, Rostron was heading full speed into the same iceberg field that had stopped the Titanic. He added a man in the crow's nest, two more on the bow, one on each wing of the bridge, and stayed there himself. He did not slow down. But he did pray.

They steered around 6 icebergs that they saw on the way to picking up the lifeboats. The morning's dawn revealed icebergs as far as the eye could see! Rostron was decisive and courageous.

The Californian and the Titanic were complacent. The Titanic danger for all of us is complacency - that we will sit by smugly during our crisis moments. The greatest danger facing all of us is that we sit complacently by spiritually, thinking that nothing could sink our moral bulwark! Only Jesus can guide us through the iceberg field. Take a lesson from the Carpathian. Don't be complacent. Turn to Him today.

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Elaine Gillingham: Along with her husband Ian, Elaine serves as Corps Officer of the Brockville Community Church of The Salvation Army, in Ontario, Canada. Elaine is developing biblical and practical knowledge in the understanding of prophecy. This article is an excerpt from her chapter in the forthcoming SALVATIONISM 301, available at armybarmy.com. It is hoped that this emphasis will increase awareness, and more importantly the practice, of biblical prophecy in today's generation.

Prophecy: Part 2

Receiving God's Secrets

Psalm 25:14 Amos 3:7 Luke 1:39-45

Life for Mary was getting a little tense, she just needed to escape. She decided to go visit Elizabeth, a relative. She was tired of all of the glares that were shot her way; the friends who passed her in the market place without even saying a word. And if she heard one more person whisper just a little bit too loudly as she passed by she was afraid she would really lose it. Getting away was the best thing to do.

Upon arriving at Elizabeth's house, Mary shouted at the gate to let them know she was there. The words of greeting were enough to stir up the wind. All of a sudden the baby in Elizabeth's womb was literally leaping and in turn Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She raced out to see Mary and out of her mouth spewed streams of living water refreshing the weather beaten and bruised Mary.

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord."

Elizabeth speaks forth prophetically over Mary as she brings to light something that has been hidden. The mother of the Messiah is in her midst and by the Spirit of God she is able to proclaim the truth over Mary and reaffirm what the angel Gabriel has already spoken to her. Elizabeth has been given the secret of the Lord and the honor of making it known.

God longs to share His heart with His people. He wants to let us know what He is doing and he wants to entrust us with His secrets.

Many of us long to know the heart of God. We want to bring to light the hidden things of God. We want to proclaim divinely imparted messages and foretell what is to come. We desire to teach, admonish and comfort and give authoritative direction. We want to prophesy. So how do we tap into the heart of God? How do we walk like Elizabeth, Elijah, Elisha, Simeon, Paul and the others?

The answer is simple - relationship! I don't know about you but I don't share the deep things of my heart with just anyone. I pour out my heart to people who have loved me and cared for me, those who have poured themselves into my life and who have stood by me in good and bad times. I tell my secrets to the people who truly love me.

The Lord says that "he who has my commands and obeys them is the one who loves me." Our obedience to Daddy is a sign of our love for Him. Obedience is also a sign of the needed "fear of the Lord" in our lives.

If we want to hear from the Lord we need to keep close to His chest to hear His heart beat. It means being still and knowing that He is God. It means resting and abiding in Him. It means to cease striving and to learn how to follow. Hearing from the Lord is no microwave meal. It requires an on-going love relationship. If we walk with Him like Enoch did we will never be far from hearing His heart beat. In fact we may be like Elizabeth - just going about our daily business when all of a sudden all heaven breaks loose in the house, even when you're doing mundane housework.

Elizabeth had obviously been walking close to daddy because all of a sudden the secrets of God were downloaded into her by the Spirit. She didn't have a moment to think before she was carried away by Him into His purposes and plans.

If we abide in Him He will give us His words at any time. He who has ears to hear will hear what the Spirit is saying and will be able to pass the word along.

1. What does it mean to abide in Christ?
 2. Is abiding in Christ limited to the amount of "quiet time" you spend with Jesus each day?
- If not, in what ways is Jesus showing you the abundant possibilities of abiding?
3. What seemingly insignificant responsibilities has the Lord given you lately that you have disobeyed?
 4. Elizabeth received a notable manifestation of the Spirit due to the

leaping baby. What danger is there if you only speak when the Holy Spirit visibly manifests Himself in or through you?

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Paul Henderson, an officer in The Salvation Army, is known for his skills as a golfer, preacher, and evangelist. The Holy Spirit has gifted him in all these areas of his ministry. You can find his writings in Salvationism 301, available at www.armybarmy.com

Preaching Series: Jonah - Part II "Titanic - The Untold Story"

by Paul Henderson

Jonah 1:4-16

Two men were in the jungle on a trip and got to talking about what they would do if certain situations were to arise. They were pondering every possible outcome. One of them said to the other, "I've got one for you. We are told that we have three minutes before a Lion will be released to where we are. You've got three minutes to decide what you're going to do. What is the one thing you would do in a situation like that?" His friend says, "I would put on my Nike Air running shoes. Yup, that's what I'd do!" The first guy says, "What would you do that for? You can't outrun a lion!" "I don't need to outrun a lion. I only need to outrun you!"

It's not very exciting, thinking about running away from a lion. But I want to tell you something that is even less exciting to think about: running away from the Lion of the tribe of Judah. And that's exactly what this book is about. About a prophet of God, who decided that he didn't want to do what God told him and therefore went on a journey that has become one of the most famous fugitive stories in all history.

As I contemplate the book of Jonah it appears to me that it's really a book about a contest. It's a contest between Jehovah and Jonah. It's kind of silly to say something like that because who in the world would want to get into a contest with Jehovah God? But that's exactly what Jonah did. He thought that there was some way that he could get away from the pursuing will of God.

The Psalmist reminds us that there isn't any place you can go to flee from God. Wherever you go God is already there. He is one step ahead of you as you flee from his presence. **"If I go to the highest heavens he's there. If I go to the**

lowest pit he's there! I wish Jonah would have understood this. But that was what he was trying to do, flee!

I wouldn't be surprised if someone today, maybe more than one, is on that journey. Oh you wouldn't put it in those words. But in your heart you know, God has been talking to you about some things, and you have just decided not to do what you know He's asked you to do! And you're trying to run away from Him and hide. I hope that before we're finished here this lesson will help you see what a long and hard journey that really is.

Let's follow our fugitive and see what God has in store for him as well as us. First of all, I think this part of our story is about **#1) “Commitment of God”**. The commitment of God to you and to me.

And this is seen in the most unlikely way. Notice carefully.

“But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.” Verse four marks the beginnings of the dealings of an almighty God with His wayward prophet. When the storm began, if you read the story carefully you discover both the sailors and Jonah interpreted this as God's wrath upon them. What I want to point out if this had been the case, if this was an incident of the wrath of God, the Lord could have just as easily crushed the ship, and destroyed everyone on board! Remember, Wwwwwww!

This was not God's wrath being poured out upon one ship filled with sailors and a disobedient prophet. This was God displaying His displeasure with His prophet. But His displeasure stemmed from a heart of love for Jonah. The storm was designed to instruct Jonah not destroy him. How many of you know that God has a purpose in the storms.

And storms are often the way God can get our attention. Now when ever you have a storm, that doesn't mean that you're under the judgement of God. Sometimes storms are the natural response of having a pulse, being alive, in this world of ours. But sometimes God does send the storm. The writer of Hebrews says, one of the things God does to those He loves is disciplines them.

Hebrews 12:5,6 “have you forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: ‘My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son’”.

Please understand from the very beginning, that this whole thing that's going on in Jonah's life, is about God's love for Jonah not about His anger with him. Oh

God was displeased with Jonah for what he did. But He wanted the best for Jonah. And he saw Jonah going down a path of destruction. So a plan of restoration was put into effect.

I want to point out something just so we don't miss it. Everything that is going on is God caused, it's God ordained, it's God originated, it's God orchestrated, God is everywhere in this process. I went through Jonah again last night and marked out some places:

Notice in verse 4, **“But the Lord sent out a great wind”**. Verse 17 **“Now the Lord had prepared a great fish”**. Chapter 2:10 **“So the Lord spoke to the fish”**. Chapter 4:6 **“And the Lord prepared a plant”**. Verse 7 **“But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm”**.

You got God preparing everything in this story. And He was doing it all because of his incredible love for Jonah, **“who the Lord loves, He disciplines”**.

Some of you may be going through some storms right now, and you probably know why God has had to get your attention. But let me just remind you, that when you feel the sting of God's dealings with you and the discipline that comes upon you, it is a reminder to you that you are His child and that He loves you very much!

God loves us in such a way that it is hard for us to fathom it with our small minds. That He would disturb the atmosphere, create a storm, all because He is motivated by His love for one lone prophet. That's the kind of commitment has to you and to me! If He would send His own son to the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, He will not let us go into disobedience without doing everything within His power to bring us back.

And sometimes when we are feeling the frustration and the pressure of the pursuing God we think it's because He's angry with us, and we need to recognize that His desire is to recover us. And that's born out of His love for us.

Friends if God is putting you through a storm, if He's got you in a pressure cooker, if you're in the ringer, if you're in His vice, it could very well be that He is demonstrating to you, in a way that He has never done before, that He loves you with an everlasting love. And He will absolutely not let you go. The pursuing God.

The second thing I would like to point out is #2) the **“Compassion of Jonah”**.

Now maybe I should say His lack of compassion because that's more accurate. I want you to notice something here that to me is profound. What was this all about, this running prophet. It was all about God telling him to go Nineveh and

preach the Gospel to the Assyrians. God said, "Jonah I want you to go to Nineveh and I want you to pronounce to them judgement, tell them they got 40 days to get their act together and if they don't I'm going to rain down judgement on them. And Jonah didn't want to go!

Why? Well in chapter 4:2 we discovered that he didn't want to go because he knew what God was like! That he would go and preach judgment, and God would let them people get saved, and Jonah didn't want them to get saved. He wanted them to get judged! He wanted God to nuke them right now.

Now watch this, here's Jonah, God's person, in a ship with a bunch of pagan sailors, who won't quit until they have exhausted every resource at their disposal. They try and save Jonah from certain death. Isn't that what this is about. God's giving Jonah an object lesson. If the "**Thus Saith the Lord**" doesn't work...God's going to draw him a picture.

Follow along with me beginning with the fourth verse and notice what happens. Verses 4 and 5. **"...the ship was about to be broken up. Then the mariners were afraid, and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down and was fast asleep."**

Notice what's happening. Jonah is on board, God sends a wind, And the storm begins to rage, and the waves begin to get bigger and bigger, and the ship is starting to break up. And the sailors are terrified. They don't know what to do, so the first thing they do is try and lighten the load, so they throw everything that is alive overboard. Then the Bible says they started to pray! Every one of them was praying to their own god. Remember, these were not Hebrews, they were pagan unbelievers. Each of them had his own god. They didn't know what else to do. So when all else failed they started to pray.

How many of you know there are no atheists in the fox hole. People you wouldn't believe, pray when things get tough. They may not know how to pray, they may not even know who to pray to, but there is something within man that says, "**when you come to the end of your own resources there is someone outside of you who is available to help you.**" And we know who that someone is, don't we!

But did you notice what they did? The bible said they went back and started rowing all the more. They said we don't want to do this to you Jonah. So they began to row. You know how the bible says, "**watch and pray**"...these guys motto was row and pray. I don't know about you but if I had been one of those sailors, when I found out that Jonah was the cause of all this grief, it would have been heave hoe, you're out of here. You know what I mean.

And here's what they did. **“Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring the ship to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. Therefore they cried out to the Lord (Capital L) and said “We pray, O Lord, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood, for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You.”**

Somehow in the context of their discussion with Jonah they have now come to believe at least in some fashion in the true Jehovah God. Now they're praying to Jonah's God. This is a great testimony to their compassion for Jonah. They didn't have to do this, they had every right to just throw him over. Yet they rowed and prayed.

Isn't this about Jonah's lack of compassion. And God teaching him, God's showing him a picture, that He can even touch pagan sailors and give them a greater heart of compassion for someone in trouble than Jonah had for 600,000 Ninevites.

I'm reminded as we look out at our world today, sometimes it's embarrassing when those two people come and knock at your door in the afternoon. They've been up and down the street all day long, banging at the doors. With a message that's not the message of God at all. But they have a passion and a zeal for what they think is right, and they put us to shame because of our lack of zeal to do what we need to do to rescue the perishing.

What an incredible picture this is of how easy it is for our hearts to become so callused that we forget that every person God ever created is a soul for whom Christ died, and a candidate for heaven. God has called us to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. Not just to the creatures we like or the creature we identify with, but to every person. And sometimes the world puts us to shame with their zeal to do what they think is right while we're asleep in the bottom of the boat.

That spoke to me powerfully. How could Jonah be asleep. It never once says that Jonah spoke to the sailors about God. It wasn't until he was confronted that he gave his testimony. I wonder if sometimes we should just ask ourselves, have we become so hard hearted that there's a world around us that's dying without Christ, and we go on doing our own little things, and not really reaching out?

Last but not least **#3)** I want to just say a word about the **“Complicity of Sin.”**

I want to make sure I get across to you today that sin is not something you do in isolation. I hear people say, “If I want to do this what difference does it make, I'm my own person, I can do what ever I want, it's just me.” But do you know what, it's almost never just you, is it? It's never just you! Sin complicates your life and

the life of others. Those mariners would never have been in a storm had it not been for Jonah. And think about all the other boats that were in the vicinity, that we don't even know about. One man's disobedience messed up the lives of people all around him.

Let me show you the dynamics of sin at work in a man's life. As the storm rages, and the winds begin to blow the captain starts to notice that someone's not there with the rest. I can see him start to think this through. **"Didn't we pick up someone in Joppa, where is he? Did he go over board?"** Then one of the sailors says, **"you know what? I think I saw the guy down in the bottom of the ship sleeping!"** The captain says, "You got to be kidding me?" So he goes down to where Jonah is and we read in verse 6 **"So the captain came to him, and said to him, 'What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on you God, perhaps your god will consider us, so that we may not perish.'" They said to one another, 'Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for sure whose cause this trouble has come upon us.'** **So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah."** This is the discovery of sin. Jonah's sin. He was identified as the person responsible.

Now I know some of you are saying, that's a coincidence? How did that happen? Could I ask you a question? If God prepared the wind, and God prepared the fish, and God prepared the plant, and God prepared the worm, don't you think he could make the lot come out the way He wants it to? I think so. Now Jonah is singled out as the one who is responsible for all this trouble. The lot fell on Jonah.

The Bible says, **"Be sure your sin will find you out!"** One of the most amazing things I have seen over the years with people in spiritual leadership is that many times the detection of the sin comes years after the sin was committed. The Lord never said he will discover us for others to see immediately but he does say **"be sure your sin will find you out"**.

And when your caught, you confess right? Look at verse 9, we see the **Confession** of Jonah. In fact if it stood alone in the text you would think this guys got his act together. Unfortunately it's only a confession of truth, not of his disobedience. **"He said to them, 'I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.'"** Jonah was thinking a lot about the dry land right then.

Isn't it interesting that Jonah could say such a thing in midst of his disobedience and rebellion. "I am a Hebrew and I fear the Lord!" Well Jonah you don't fear Him enough! If you fear Him like you should, you would do what he said! Please note this important thing. Jonah's theology was correct but he was still disobedient. People can have their theology absolutely impeccable and still decide not to do what God tells you to do! People can have the head knowledge, but still be disobedient!

It's one thing to sin against God in ignorance. It's another thing to be presumptuous as Jonah was. To know the truth, to know God, to know what he said about God in verse 9, to fear God and still be disobedient. So Jonah confessed, but only what he knew about God, he still hasn't confessed His disobedience.

Let me make one other observation about the complicity of sin. Because I believe we often never think about this. Whenever we step out of the will of God we carry people with us, don't we. We take people down with us when we go, we don't often mean to, we don't think we're going to, but we do! I read and hear about the tales of brokenness and hurt and devastation that comes to good and godly people because somebody they love took a right turn when God told them to go straight. The complicity of sin.

Think about it. God's prophet in the midst of a gentile environment with pagan sailors and because of Jonah they almost die! Jonah's complicity is so great that his disobedience is just about to destroy everybody around him if God doesn't intervene.

You know what? You may think one person isn't all that much. One person is a lot! Let me tell you on the authority of God's word, one person can be a agent of blessing or destruction!

Did you realize that because of one person God sanctifies a home. That's what the New Testament teaches. The bible says that a **"Godly wife sanctifies her home."** That doesn't mean it makes her husband a Christian, but it means that God puts His umbrella of blessing over that home because of one single person in that family who belongs to God. It might be a little child who got saved in Sunday school, and comes home knowing Jesus, and the rest of that family doesn't have anything to do with God, but because of that little child, god blesses that home. What an influence one person can make. Guys, want to do something for your kids?

It's also true on the other side of the ledger. One rebellious Christian who walks away from the will of God, may be surrounded by Christians and those who know God, but because of his rebellion that family can never be what it ought to be until God begins to deals with that person and brings him back to repentance.

Let me close on a high note. In verse 12 we see a brief look at **#4) The Courage of Jonah.** **"...he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea, then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me."** That last statement is a pretty good start for Jonah getting right with God. "I know this problem is because of me." Who many of you know how hard it is to voice those words? I AM THE ONE AT FAULT! The Problem is because of me!

I tell people now more than ever before because I believe it at the very depth of my heart. That until we come to the truth we have no place to go. Then when we come to the truth that's a starting place. A starting place for, recovery for restoration but until we can get to the truth **about ourselves**, as long as we keep trying to deflect our problems on others. Saying things to other people like, **"I wouldn't be in this situation if it wasn't for... or...I did that because of..."** We have a wonderful way of doing that in our culture today.

We are great at blaming our parents, and our grand parents, or our environment, our schools, our jobs, our government, we blame everybody for our problems...but it's never our fault...right? **That family problem, your relationship with your wife, that church struggle...it's their problem isn't it!** Until one day we have to stand and look at ourselves in the mirror and say, **"You know what? It's me! It's because of me that this is the way it is!" That's when God can begin to do His work on us, never before!**

Jonah finally came to that real place of truth. And because of that he said, "if you want to get rid of the storm, get rid of the cause of the storm, that's me, it's because of me!" In a moment of courage he said throw me over board, everything will be all right.

When we meet the next time, Jonah's going to be in a whale of a mess. I mean to tell ya! It gets worse before it gets better. But through it all don't forget the commitment of God to you. He loves you. Don't forget about compassion. God's called us to a world that needs Christ. Don't forget about the complicity of sin. All of us carry our influence wherever we go. And take heart, courage is the first step to making things right.

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Have you ever wondered how to answer the Jehovah Witnesses, who claim that the 144,000 sealed in Revelation 7 show that heaven is already full? Why are all those tribes listed? What significance do they have for the church today?

THE SECRET OF THE 144,000 **Theories in the study of Revelation 7**

John Norton

For centuries the book of Revelation has been shrouded in mysterious symbolism and unfortunately controversy has surrounded much of the opinion regarding its meaning and application. There is the promise of blessing for all who endeavour to understand this book (1:3) and so we should be humble in approaching the text. Revelation 7:1-8 gives a description of the 144,000, and like many other passages in Revelation, has been interpreted by scholars in many different ways. However, it can reasonably be concluded that the 144,000 "are the Christians who are still on earth undergoing persecution."¹ They are representative of all ancient and contemporary believers who have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and face oppression from those who despise Christ's Church.

John tells us that on the isle of Patmos he was caught up "in heaven" (4:1) and there received a vision from his Lord Jesus Christ. This supernatural revelation begins with seven letters to the Asian churches (ch. 2-3) and follows

¹ Hobbs, "Amillennialism", Revelation: Three Viewpoints

with a vivid description of the reigning God in His glorious heaven (ch. 4). The slain Lamb is then described as opening the seven seals one after another (ch. 5-6). There is an interlude between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals during which John depicts two groups who are distinct and separated from the world (ch. 7). Within this difficult chapter is the revelation of the "144,000 from all the tribes of Israel" (7:4). It is generally recognized that the reference to Israel either symbolically represents the Church or the actual literal Jewish people. These two interpretations have resulted in a number of different views all possible and respected within Christian orthodoxy.

THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES MISINTERPRETATION

The Jehovah's Witnesses serve as an example of misinterpreting John's Revelation and specifically the meaning of the 144,000 in chapter seven. Without a proper understanding of apocalyptic and prophetic literature it is impossible to make sense of Revelation in the context of acceptable biblical theology. However, if various views are held even among evangelical scholarship, how is it possible to determine that the Jehovah's Witnesses' interpretation is definitively wrong? The answer to this objection can be found not only within their exegesis but also in their adamant application of the passage. They do not recognize the possibility of other interpretations and suggest that their view is authoritative. This inflexibility with a controversial passage, combined with shallow hermeneutics, positions the Jehovah's Witnesses outside acceptable theological boundaries.

Jehovah's Witnesses teach that the Times of the Gentiles have ended and that the future "kingdom has come (1914-1918 A.D.)"². Their interpretation of Revelation 7

² Martin The Kingdom of the Cul ts p. 114

demonstrates "that only 144,000 faithful servants will rule with King Jesus in the heavenly sphere."³ They teach that the 144,000 come from their early church membership and are made up mostly of Gentiles. Therefore the Jehovah's Witnesses suggest that John's use of "the tribes of Israel" (7:4) symbolically represents their own chosen remnant. However this results because they have inconsistently applied a literal interpretation to the number "144,000" while a symbolic interpretation to "Israel". It is much more logical, in light of the entire book of Revelation, to understand the 144,000 as symbolic of "the full number of the people"⁴. The numerology suggesting 12 X 12 raised to 1000th degree "signifying a great number, a great, perfect, complete number."⁵ In any case, under analysis it is easy to recognize the misinterpretation of Revelation 7 by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

THE DISPENSATIONAL INTERPRETATION

From the area of misinterpretation we move into the realm of the various possible biblical interpretations and begin with the so-called literal view. Its premise is that the 144,000 are literal Jews and descendants from each of the listed tribes. This explanation of Revelation 7 has been argued convincingly by dispensation theologians and widely supported by conservative laity who have responded to its simple, literal approach.

³ Martin p. 111

⁴ Ladd, A Commentary on the Revelation of John, p. 117

⁵ Hobbs p. 99

According to dispensationalists, Revelation 4:1 teaches that the universal Church is raptured at the beginning of the tribulation and rule of anti-christ. Revelation 7 "begins by flashing back to the very beginning of the seven-year period, where God sends 144,000 evangelists out with the gospel message..."⁶. These evangelists are Jews who become believers "when they discover that all the believers are gone" and "turn in faith to Christ to become their Messiah."⁷ The great success of the evangelistic campaign is evident in the multitude "from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (7:9).

This interpretation does not account for the serious textual difficulties in understanding the "144,000 from all the tribes of Israel" as literal. The fact is that there is no simple explanation for the irregularities in John's list of tribes, being that it follows no Old Testament order. Also, the tribes of Dan and Ephraim are omitted, although Ephraim is represented by Joseph who was the father of both Ephraim and Manasseh. "This means that in reality, the tribe of Manasseh is included twice."⁸ Moreover, a literal interpretation of the number "144,000" is improbable because of other symbolic numbers in the book of Revelation (as noted above). Finally, there is no reasonable explanation for concluding that the "144,000 from all the tribes of Israel" are to be understood as meaning Jewish

⁶ Lindsey There's A New World Coming p. 112

⁷ Lindsey, p. 112

⁸ Ladd p. 115

people. This view "depends upon the theory that the church has already been raptured -- a theory for which we have found no evidence."⁹

THE JEWISH CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

Another possible interpretation of the 144,000 is that they represent believing Jews who are part of the historical converted Church of Jesus Christ. This view has the advantage of amalgamating an exegetical desire for a literal interpretation and yet is able to avoid the premises of the dispensational position. It demonstrates a desire to reconcile Pauline theology in Romans 9-11 and lends support toward the difficulties inherent in Romans 11:26, "And so all Israel will be saved...".

This interpretation is possible but presents some difficult conclusions. George Eldon Ladd notes that "the 144,000 are not sealed in salvation but for protection from the plagues"¹⁰ (9:4). This is evident in verse 3 where the 144,000 are called "servants of God" and therefore were saved before this divine phenomenon occurs. Also, whether this chapter is interpreted to take place during a future or present historical tribulation, it is difficult to understand why the Jews should be sheltered from the sufferings while "great unnumbered multitudes of gentiles are permitted to suffer martyrdom."¹¹ Certainly the anti-semitism of this century demonstrates that the sealing protection from persecution has not yet been provided, if this interpretation be accepted.

⁹ Ladd p. 114

¹⁰ Ladd, p. 114

¹¹ i bi d.

THE CHURCH AS THE NEW ISRAEL

Some scholars have understood the 144,000 to be representative of the Church as the new Israel, including Jews and Gentiles. This view is most probable as it is easily drawn out of an exegesis of the text as well as fitting into the overall revelation of Scripture. Many commentators have considered other biblical passages for the purpose of illuminating this chapter. However, a close examination of the description of the various tribes will reveal the apocalyptic image as a portrait of the Church which includes believing Jews.

Having noted that John's list of the tribes follows no other known enumeration, Ladd argues that "when interpreted literally, these twelve tribes do not represent actual Israel."¹² This is accurate but does not demonstrate what the tribes actually do represent. Ladd states that there exists "no satisfactory explanation of this irregular list of names."¹³ On the contrary, rather than giving up, there does exist modern scholarship which convincingly is able to demonstrate that the list of the twelve tribes represents the fullness of God's chosen Church. Christopher R. Smith successfully argues that "there are exegetical grounds to conclude that John changed the order" of the list of tribes "specifically to adapt the conventional listing of the tribes (in Genesis 35:23-26) to portray the church as the New Israel!"¹⁴ This interpretation recognizes that the text in Genesis 35:23-26

¹² Ladd, pp. 114-115

¹³ *i b i d.* , p. 115

¹⁴ Smith, "The Portrayal of the Church...", Journal for the Study of the New Testament, 1990, p. 113

presents an intelligible ordering of the tribes into four groups: sons of the first wife Leah, of the second wife Rachel, and followed with the sons of their respective handmaids Bilhah and Zilpah. In Revelation, John's listing has altered the traditional Genesis listing by: (1) elevating Judah from fourth to first; (2) omitting Dan; (3) adding Manasseh; (4) and moving the sons of the handmaids as a blocked group from last up to right after Reuben. Each of these changes are "easily and clearly accounted for by" Smith's thesis.¹⁵

Smith explains that Judah is elevated to the head of the list because Christ, the head of the Church, was descended from this tribe. Dan is replaced by Manasseh so that the "twelve tribal names here have followed the same course as those of the apostles: one has been lost, and another has taken its place (Acts 1:12-16)."¹⁶ Dan specifically is excluded because of its long history and association with idolatry as well as the Jewish expectation that "the Antichrist was expected to arise from the tribe of Dan."¹⁷

Next is the explanation that John's "promotion of the handmaids' sons"¹⁸ represent the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Church age. They are moved as a group -- Gad, Asher, Naphtali, and Manasseh (in place of Dan) -- up above all their brothers except Judah and Reuben. Reuben is not displaced because "as the first

¹⁵ i b i d . , p. 114

¹⁶ i b i d , p. 115

¹⁷ Ladd, p. 115

¹⁸ S m i t h , p. 114

born, he represents believing Israelites"¹⁹ and those Jews who first responded to the gospel. Significantly, the six other sons of the true wives -- Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin -- are not deleted but included later in the list. They represent Israel and her eventual salvation through the church as suggested in Romans 11:25-32.

THE GENIUS OF THE INSPIRED AUTHOR

Through C.R. Smith's interpretation of Revelation we can conclude that the 144,000 of Revelation 7 represent the spiritual sealing of God's Church. We are in awe at the genius of John and recognize how he allowed himself to be filled with the Holy Spirit and inspired to write the Revelation. Even in times of intense persecution God's people are assured that the Holy Spirit will be with them, sanctifying them, and enabling them with His power. He has sealed us with His mark and we can rejoice knowing that in totality we will be one of those 144,000. The message of Christ is then one of hope and reassurance for all throughout the ages who must face the world amid its hopelessness and despondency.

NOTES

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JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

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Geoff Ryan is the leader of The Salvation Army in the Russia South Region. He was one of the original pioneering Salvationists appointed to enter the Soviet Union in 1991, just before its break-up. He has spent the last nine years in Russia and among other things currently spearheads the humanitarian aid work of the Army in the Russian-Chechnyan War.

THE SIREN CALL OF A DANGEROUS GOD

Looking for love in all the wrong places?

Geoff Ryan

Many thanks to Jeff Lucas for his excellent book, "Elijah: Stressed and Anointed" (Chariot Victor Bible Character Series, 1998). It is largely his thoughts on the prophet that I have reflected here and expanded on.

Sadly impractical, never conforming,
Never your spirit to prudence would bend;
Love's sweet fanatic, untiringly storming
Ramparts impregnable, young to the end.
(From the poem "To George Scott Railton" by David Guy)

More than anything else, prophets are gamblers. They risk all on the chance that it really is God that is speaking to them and through them. A priest is someone different altogether. They hear God as scheduled in the Temple on the Sabbath or during early morning prayer time. A prophet, on the other hand, will pause to cock an ear to a low whisper snaking out to him from the depths of a darkened alley late at night, betting his life that it is God issuing the strange invitation. He knows that God is capable of this. A priest has God boxed in by predictable and unyielding systems of religion thought and practice (is not the very concept of "systematic theology" an oxymoron?) A prophet knows that God is dangerous.

For example, the Bible tells us about God ordering Hosea to marry a whore; Ezekiel to lie on his side for 390 days and cook bread using human waste;

Jeremiah to invest in real estate in a city on the verge of being captured and destroyed. Then there was John eating locusts (forbidden food for a Jew); Jesus healing, eating and reinterpreting Sabbath injunctions, not to mention the people he hung out with. You know the rest.

A true prophet is God's extremist, a maximalist, with a willingness to go anywhere and do anything regardless of convention or personal concerns all for the sake of the mission. A prophet is driven by an inner burning message.

What does this mean for The Salvation Army, whose founder was acknowledged by many to be a prophet? Why did he call the Army's first training institutions "schools of the prophets"? Why did our early ecclesiology define us as a prophetic movement?

A couple of years ago I first visited the city of Saratov, a city of roughly one million people on the banks of the Volga, about an hour-and-a-half of several million people and borders on the largest Central Asian Republic, Kazakstan. Someone in that city had been writing to Headquarters in Moscow for months asking for The Salvation Army to come to the city. This in itself is not unusual, we get many requests like that. Because it was in my region, Headquarters asked me to go and check it out . So I flew there, with just the name of the person who was supposed to meet me.

It was a 10:30 on a cold February night when I stepped off the plane and there were two well-dressed men waiting for me. They carried mobile phones and they led me to a brand new, fully loaded Toyota jeep. If you have a cell phone and a brand new jeep in Russia that usually means you are "Mafiya" (In Russia the term "Mafiya" is an umbrella term loosely applied to anything from street level hoodlums to sophisticated organized crime operations). Things were getting interesting.

I soon realised that my hosts were pagans in every sense of the word, materialists with seemingly no sense of the transcendent at all. As the jeep started up, our first conversation went like this:

"Geoff," said Evgeny, "do you want a cigarette?"

"No thanks, I don't smoke", I replied.

"Don't smoke, eh?"

"Nope."

(Pause) "Do you drink?"

"Nope."

"Women?"

"Only my wife"

(Pause) "Yeah, I've been thinking about giving up smoking too."

I spent four days being shown around the city by these men, and meeting various people. They took me to a sort of children's home run by the paolice, but which in reality was a children's prison. Opened in 1837, it was still being used. In this huge cavernous building the youngest child was six years old and the oldest 16. There were twelve-year-old girls who sold themselves on the highways to long-distance truckers, ten-year-old drug addicts, eight-year old thieves - and policemen were trying to look after them! I was shown into a room and told, "There used to be a church in this room in the last century, but we can't find anyone to come and do something. We need something for the kids that's lively, that's interesting." He was describing a Sunday-school program, without having seen one.. "If you would like to come you can do this, you can do what you want", he said as we left.

Throughout those four days I was baffled as to why these two hoods were interested in hosting The Salvation Army. I tried subtly to let them know that even though I was a foreigner, I was not rich and if the Army came to town they were not going to get any money. I must have said a hundred times, "We are not a business." But I sensed that they listened to me without really understanding.

The evening before I left, as I sat in an apartment on a white leather couch surrounded by expensive European appliances, I bluntly put it to them: "Evgeny, why have you invited The Salvation Army here? What interests do you have? What's in it for you?"

Something special happened at that moment. Jesus spoke to me through the mouth of a bandit. Evgeny, who I was sure had never ever seen a Bible let alone read one, looked up into my eyes and said: "You know, I was in Moscow for a couple of years in the early 90's (pause) .I was in prison and you visited me (pause), yeah, some little old lady from The Salvation Army visited me. So I said to myself, 'The Salvation Army is a good organization, when I get out I am going to do what I can to get The Salvation Army into my city'. That's why."

The question: "Should we open The Salvation Army in this city at the request of the Mafia?" Would we be prophetic?

There is a fascinating episode from the life of Elijah in 1 Kings 17, in which the prophet heals the son of the widow of Zarephath by raising him from the dead. God sent Elijah to this woman in a foreign land that was in the midst of a famine - a strange invitation from a dangerous God. In a humbling act of submission Elijah moved in with the woman.

For Elijah, one of God's chosen people, to put himself at the mercy of a foreigner, a non-believer, was difficult enough. Compound this by the foreigner being a woman and a widow to boot, this was a real pride-breaker for the devout prophet. The gossip of the neighbours, the whiff of possible scandal, could not have sat well with the man of God.

I imagine that Elijah spoke much to the woman about his God, tried to evangelize her as we would say. There were several months of this with no apparent result. "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" was the question she flung at him on the death of her only child. She figured that her son's death was a punishment from God for her sins and that Elijah, as God's representative, was the harbinger of this punishment. She was trapped. He was obviously to blame but he was also the only hope she had.

Passionate person that he was, Elijah flung himself into the fray and onto the body of this young boy, raging against his death and against the hopelessness of the situation. No passive determinism here, no fatalistic, hand-wringing "if God wills". It is never God's will that pain and suffering, injustice and sin have the last word.

A.W. Tozer wrote: "Many of us spoil our prayers by being too "dainty" with the Lord... We ask with the tacit understanding that the cost must be reasonable. After all, there is a limit to everything, and we do not want to be fanatical! We want the answer to be something added, not something taken away. We want nothing radical, and we want God to accommodate us at our convenience. Thus we attach a rider to every prayer, making it impossible for God to answer it. In a world like ours, courage is an indispensable virtue. The coward may snivel in his corner, but the brave man takes the prize. And in the kingdom of God, courage is as necessary as it is in the world. The timid soul is as pitiable on his knees as he is in society."

I imagine Elijah yelling, shouting at God, shaking his fist even in holy anger. How does a grown man cover a small boy? Hands on his hands, chest on his chest, feet on his feet, mouth on his mouth, as if to say, "Take my

body, take my health, take my breath, take my life. Take it if you need it, but heal him, save him." Three times he did it as in the cumulative holy, holy, holy - fashioning a prayer out of pain, an act of worship, "kicking at the darkness until the daylight bled through" (words of a song by U2).

The Scriptures say that if a Jew touches a dead person he is contaminated, made unclean. The boy was not only dead, he was a dead foreigner, doubly unclean one could say. A hot eastern country and a body dead for a few days - the sight, the smell! How Elijah embraced this dead boy to his chest and breathed his breath into his fetid mouth without passing out, or worse, is something I will never know.

But none of that mattered. The instinct to save was too strong in Elijah, the different reality that blazed in his minds eye rejected the evidence of his physical eyes. Charging through the religious, cultural and racial taboos, he would not let his religion, his race, culture, or his personal comfort stand in the way. He was, after all, a prophet.

After God brought the boy back to life, his mother said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth." "Now" is the operative word here. What Elijah had been saying for months made sense, came into focus. Now his reputation as a man of God had credibility, his God had been given credibility. Now the words he spoke were made truth, given weight and substance by his actions.

He had accepted the strange invitation of God and when the time came, was prepared to do what was needed, no matter how difficult and dangerous. The message needed to be given, the mission was all that mattered.

For the record, we did open up the work in Saratov, there is now a Salvation Army corps there and each week our team runs a Sunday-school type program for the kids in that children's home.

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