



"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."—Romans 8:38-39

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Pentecost: The *POWER* to Change Your Life

By Graemme Marshall

What happened on Pentecost in A.D. 31 changed the apostles in a way they never could have expected. It also reveals an incredible change that can—and must—take place in our lives.



THE DAY OF PENTECOST tells of remarkable transformations in the lives of Jesus Christ's disciples. This change was in sharp contrast to their lives 50 days earlier. The Gospel accounts are not flattering about their humanity. At Christ's arrest and trial, all forsook Him and fled (Matthew 26:56). Peter, who avowed he would always stand by Jesus, cursed and swore—even denying he knew Him (Matthew 26:69-75).

Yet within the span of seven weeks, by Pentecost, we see a transformation in the disciples' courage. They now speak openly to large crowds, declaring Jesus was resurrected from the dead. They boldly confront the civil and religious authorities. They defy orders and threats that they will be imprisoned if they continue to speak about Jesus (Acts 4:18-23). They courageously face beatings and death threats for preaching Christ (Acts 5:17-33).

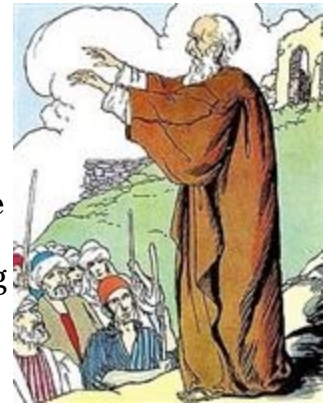
The crowd asks what they should do. Peter replies they should repent and be baptized.

Seven weeks earlier they denied they even knew Him. Now nothing can stop them from openly publicizing what they know to be true. These men will devote the rest of their lives to the daily transformation made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Peter's remarkable change

Peter's boldness on the Feast of Pentecost stands out. At the temple he addresses a large crowd, of which 3,000 later become disciples of Jesus. They are in Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Pentecost as commanded by God (Leviticus 23:15-16). Peter tells them they know about Jesus and what had happened seven weeks earlier at the Passover (Acts 2:22-24). Peter fearlessly tells them they are the ones who had crucified Jesus.

The reaction of the crowd is significant. There is no denial, outcry or attempt to stone Peter for this outrageous charge. They sense a personal involvement. They know of the events surrounding the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Christ. They know that many—perhaps even some standing there listening to Peter—had shouted for Christ's blood. They'd heard of the strange events that had taken place at the time—darkness over the land as Jesus was being crucified, people resurrected from their graves and walking the streets of Jerusalem, an earthquake and the veil in the temple being torn from top to bottom. Peter now challenges them to change their lives and make decisions that will affect their futures.



The crowd asks what they should do. Peter replies they should repent and be baptized. That is how they will receive the only *power* that can truly transform a human life—God's Holy Spirit.

Before He left His disciples, Jesus promised He would send another "Comforter" in His place—the Holy Spirit (John 14:26, King James Version). This invisible power from God is what makes possible the transformation of a human life. It's the power that can change ordinary men from ordinary walks of life.

This power starts inner changes to this frightened band of disciples who had been ready to throw away everything and flee. These adult men—who had failed miserably just 50 days before—are now, by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, changing into dynamic leaders for the Church. By the power of the Holy Spirit they perform supernatural healings for the crippled. Even Peter's *shadow* passing over the sick brings instant healing (Acts 5:12-16).

To be holy is to be different, and firstfruits don't apologize for being different in a world under the sway of the devil.

The power symbolized by Pentecost

The truth of Pentecost is that the same power that transformed the early disciples is also available to transform and change those today who are the firstfruits of God. Might you be one? Read on to understand the meaning behind this momentous feast day.

In revealing His plan for mankind, God chose Holy Days focused on the harvest seasons of the Holy Land (Exodus 23:14-17). Reaping crops at three festival seasons provided spiritual

symbolism for God's people. For us, Pentecost shows how God is harvesting people for eternal life in His Kingdom.

One picture from Pentecost is the tradition that the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai occurred on this day. For New Testament Christians the meaning is how to keep the spiritual intent of God's law. Pentecost shows we need God's Spirit in order to keep the law in our hearts and make real change in our attitudes. Mere form in keeping God's law does not enable us to think like God. Becoming godly in thought, attitude and action is beyond the ability of men and women without the additional ingredient of God's Spirit.

God reveals through Pentecost that He is now dealing with only very few people—the firstfruits (James 1:18) of the huge spiritual harvest to come. The majority of all who have ever lived will in their own time have an opportunity to know God. But for now God extends truth only to a few. That, too, is a miracle because only God can unlock the human mind so it can comprehend spiritual understanding (1 Corinthians 2:14). The awesome responsibility of firstfruits is in being the possessors of truth. Such knowledge must be used well.



Firstfruits are challenged to be the first to change their lives and do as Jesus would do. The first-century Church was the first (as a group) to work at this task. On Pentecost the Holy Spirit dramatically changed their lives. Their transformation started when they received the Holy Spirit. Some 20 years later they were viewed as turning “the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). Such was the dynamic, miraculous power of the Holy Spirit.

It was the same divine power at work in Jesus' ministry (Luke 4:14). It led the first-century Church to understand their battle with human nature (Romans 7:22-25); to see that tests were also with unseen evil forces (Ephesians 6:12); and to value the sanctity, symbolism and purpose of marriage and family (Ephesians 5:23-28). Wives were encouraged to submit to husbands “as to the Lord.” Slaves were obliged to obey masters. Christians were to obey authorities, whether emperor, king or magistrate.

Firstfruits in the Kingdom of God will be able to explain, from painful experience, how they subjected themselves to the authority of men while under the authority of Christ; how they withstood the philosophies of false teachers and apostles to sort out the true from the false. In effect, they will be able to use the modern phrase: “Been there, done that and bought the T-shirt.”

Firstfruits are called to be holy—different

They learn that when there is a conflict with a job and the Sabbath, it isn't a Sabbath problem but a job problem. They know the Sabbath was here before the job. They are prepared to be different to serve God. When the biblical Feast of Unleavened Bread comes, they set themselves apart by a different diet without leavened breads, cakes, cookies, etc. (Leviticus 23:6-8; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

Firstfruits have demonstrated a willingness to follow, obey, take orders, learn and repent because God's Spirit gives an attitude of respect. To be holy is to be different, and firstfruits don't apologize for being different in a world under the sway of the devil.

Jesus' counsel of the first century holds true today. A few common threads are woven into His instruction to the firstfruits of God's Church in Revelation chapters 2 and 3: "I know your works." "He who has an ear, let him hear." The reward is offered "to him who overcomes." Those admonitions apply to firstfruits in every age, including our own.

God reveals that Spirit-born firstfruits will be those who are as good as their word—people of high integrity.

Since every age on earth has been a violent, dangerous one in which to live, firstfruits are called to be the first to demonstrate that commandment keeping can be done, even in an evil time. Firstfruits are first in learning the limitations of man's government—whether it is Caesar, an emperor or Western democracy.

Firstfruits are first in being accountable for their actions. They are confronted with making righteous judgments on what is right and wrong. They strive to do what Jesus would do and to have a Christian attitude.

Firstfruit qualities

God reveals that Spirit-born firstfruits will be those who are as good as their word—people of high integrity. "They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless" (Revelation 14:4-5, New International Version). They are pictured as true, free of deceit, falseness or window dressing.

As we see in Acts 2, it was on the day of Pentecost that Jesus' promise to send another Comforter was fulfilled. It is by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives that we become the firstfruits of God's Kingdom—and it is only by that power and presence that we can live up to the responsibilities and opportunities of the firstfruits.

In 2009 Pentecost will be May 31 (for future years, see [our calendar](#)). If you would like to learn more about the meaning of Pentecost, see "[The Feast of Pentecost: The Firstfruits of God's Harvest](#)" from the booklet [God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind](#).

The Redeemer

By Robert Berendt

Sin is the enemy of all mankind and all men sin. So how can man redeem himself?



THERE ARE A NUMBER OF SCRIPTURES that reveal the need for mankind to be saved from the penalty of sin. Paul wrote that the penalty of sin is death, "but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). It is God who defines sin when He states His law. We are not born with an understanding of sin. It is the Bible, inspired by God that defines sin.

Many humans go blithely through life sinning—often with no conscience toward sin and no idea that their eternal lives are in danger. Not only do people fail to understand what they do that cuts them off and creates a barrier between themselves and their Creator (Isaiah 59:2-3), but they have no idea there is a redeemer who can help them regain His favor. Isaiah 59:16 explains that since God did not find a “man” to be an intercessor, “His own arm brought salvation for Him.” In verse 20, Isaiah wrote that “the Redeemer [would] come to Zion.”

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The references in the Bible to a “Redeemer” refer to Jesus Christ in His role of saving people from a state of sinfulness and its consequences. To “redeem” is to *set free, rescue or ransom* (by paying the cost, whatever that is). Since the penalty of sin is death, Christ had to take our place and die so that could live.

When we do not know we have offended God and cannot correct that offense, we are helpless. It is not enough to simply stop offending—there is a price to pay for past offenses. It goes without saying that once we know what our offenses are and once the account has been cleared, we should struggle with all of our strength to be sure we do not offend again. Paul tells us to do our best to follow Christ’s example, who “resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (Hebrews 12:4).

It is not that God has left mankind totally blind. Right from the beginning, God began teaching humans, and He also began to reveal to them the need for a Redeemer through whom they could regain His favor (Genesis 3:15). Satan was at work in the Garden of Eden, and Adam and Eve were not able to resist him. We all were lost to sin, but have been redeemed through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:10-17). Paul tells us to be sure we do not give ourselves over to becoming slaves to sin again. Sin ought not to have dominion over us.



That does not mean that God has redefined sin. Some think that the law was “nailed to the cross,” and humans cannot sin no matter what they do. That is Satan’s deception all over again. Paul continues to speak out against sinning. Verse 15 shows that being under grace does not mean we have permission to sin. There are many scriptures like these that explain that once we are under the forgiveness made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus’ blood, we must not deliberately and willfully sin.

As mentioned before, eternal life is offered to us as a free gift (Romans 6:23). It is not easy for a human to accept such a free gift. We seem to think there is something we must do to deserve this gift. It is clear from Isaiah’s writings that the Lord is the Redeemer (Isaiah 60:16). Isaiah is writing mostly about Israel, but as we read in John 3:16, Jesus died for the sins of all mankind. Some make the mistake of thinking that there is nothing at all that we humans can do in order to be saved—it has all been done for us through Jesus’ blood. What a great error in thinking that is.

What should we do?

When the disciples of Jesus who were now enlightened through the Holy Spirit were asked what was to be done, they had an answer. That can be read in Acts 2:38-41. The first thing is to believe

and repent. Repentance entails understanding what sin is and being truly sorry for our offense against God (Psalm 51:4). The second step is to allow a servant of God to baptize you and lay hands on you for the receiving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17; 2 Timothy 1:6). God then grants you forgiveness and pours His Holy Spirit into your now clean self, to continue to lead you toward all truth. Then, as Paul states in Romans 6:1-2, we are to be sure we do not continue in sin. We are to resist and fight against any and every tendency to break the laws of God, which define sin.



A young man asked Jesus what he needed to do to receive eternal life. Jesus' answer was "keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17). That was and is our part, although we must rely fully on God for the help to do our part. Jesus knew He would pay the price for the past sins of this man and of all humans through His impending death, but we are left with the responsibility to resist Satan and resist evil—to stop sinning. Ecclesiastes 12:13 also states that we are to fear God and keep His commandments.

It is preposterous to think that God erased and changed the definition of sin after Jesus' death, thereby making it impossible for humans to sin. Those thoughts come from their author, Satan—the one who does not rest in his quest to keep you from receiving the promise of eternal life that God offers.

God then grants you forgiveness and pours His Holy Spirit into your now clean self, to continue to lead you toward all truth.

Not only do we need an understanding of sin in order to repent and receive the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse us from our sin, we also need the additional help from God through His Holy Spirit to have the strength and power to resist Satan and to choose the right thing to do. It is hard for us to learn to rely on God for every spiritual thing, but in fact, we depend on Him for the physical things necessary for life—the beat of our hearts and the oxygen we need to live. We humans are created physical, and we need the life-sustaining work of God every moment of every day.

Still, to think that such a tremendous price was paid "just because we slipped or sinned" is hard for us to swallow. We seem to want to pay something or do something to atone for our own sins. Christ is our atonement, and our obligation is to obey Him and our Father in heaven.

The Redeemer was in place before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8). All who are saved should worship Him and strive to return the love God has shown to us all. Our redemption is through His blood (Colossians 1:14). Our appreciation and return of that love that God has shown to us all is wrapped up in obedience to Him. John stated that the love of God is perfected in one who keeps His word (1 John 2:1-6).

God's awesome and ultimate love for mankind was made clear in the sacrifice of His Son. Now the question is, do we love our Redeemer? Do we love Christ?

If you would like to learn more about Jesus Christ and His role in your life, request our free booklet [*Jesus Christ: The Real Story*](#).

The Compass, Our Navigator

By Robert Nettles

Sometimes we need better tools in order to stay on course.



AS I PONDERED THE DIFFERENT PARABLES Christ told His followers, it got me to thinking there are concepts we may have as Christians that are not seen in the right light—things that may lead us off course if we don't use the right tools to navigate our lives. I thought how our calling is just the beginning of the trip, and we must look at that calling in a different way if we want to stay on course.

Sometimes we see Jesus speaking in parables to the Pharisees. In Matthew 22:14 we read, "For many are called, but few are chosen." I remember when God first started calling me, there was no doubt that my way of thinking was being changed. I could now be counted among one of "the many," but our goal is to be counted among the "few" who, by staying faithful, remain among the "chosen." We know that there are those who have been called but suddenly disappear and leave the path that God has set for them. They get knocked off course. How do we stay on course so we can reach our goal of being counted among the few?

I could now be counted among one of "the many," but our goal is to be counted among the "few" who, by staying faithful, remain among the "chosen."

John 14:16-17 says, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another helper who will be with you forever. That helper is the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept him, because it doesn't see or know him. You know him, because he lives with you and will be in you." Christ made a promise to send us "another" helper (the Holy Spirit), a promise He fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost.

In Acts 2:1-4 we read, "And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (American Standard Version).

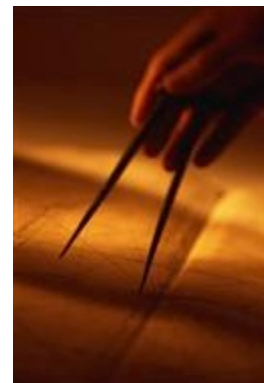
The compass, our navigator

I like to refer to this Helper, as do many others, as a compass or, if you will, a navigator. This navigator is our guide to follow the straight and narrow path. If we use our compass to guide us, we can follow that path; but if we ignore its readings, we can be led off course and lose our way. We all know that we have the ability to follow our *own* path. We all like to take shortcuts from time to time and that can really take us off course. If we look at the Spirit as a navigator or a compass and follow the direction it indicates, we will make it.

“The Day of Pentecost is an annual reminder that God poured out His Spirit to establish His Church, the group of believers who are led by His Spirit.”

In May 2008 NASA landed the Phoenix on Mars. The Phoenix mission went smoothly for the most part, but more than two thirds of past missions have failed in some way. They were unsuccessful due mostly because of navigation errors made by NASA and/or not spending the time needed to accomplish the goal.

Another example of a failed mission from history: Most of us know that when Christopher Columbus discovered America, he was actually trying to find a shortcut to India. Because of this, we have for years been calling Native Americans, Indians. Columbus thought he knew a better way, but instead found something much different. In the long run, he ended up getting quite a reputation for his discovery, but his initial plan took him to a totally different destination and was a heavy price to pay for his crew. When we follow our own directions or take shortcuts, we can easily get lost.



The booklet [*God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*](#), states: “God used these miracles [that took place on Pentecost] and Peter’s preaching to add 3,000 people to His Church in one day. These converts were all baptized and received the Holy Spirit (verses 40-41 [of Acts 2]). From this pivotal point, God’s Spirit has been available to all who truly repent and are properly baptized. The Day of Pentecost is an annual reminder that God poured out His Spirit to establish His Church, the group of believers who are led by His Spirit.”

Acknowledging this inherent weakness of humanity, God lamented in Deuteronomy 5:29, “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and *always keep* all My commandments that it might be well with them and with their children forever!” (emphasis added).

If we follow the Compass, the Navigator, that God gave us—if we continue to read the biblical directions daily and observe God’s course corrections, which are the Sabbath and the seven annual Holy Days—we will one day be counted among the *few* that will be chosen and not just the *many* that are called.

To read more from the booklet [*God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*](#), request your free copy.

The Wonderful World Beyond Today! Part 7: The Universe and Beyond

By Mike Bennett

The plans, promises and prophecies of the Bible all lead to one thing—a potential almost beyond human comprehension! What does God have in store for you?



THE BIBLE DESCRIBES INCREDIBLE physical blessings to be enjoyed on this earth after Jesus Christ returns to save humanity from itself. Weapons of war will be recycled for productive purposes, and deserts will blossom. Even dangerous predators and poisonous snakes will be tamed (Isaiah 11:6-9)! This period of peace and prosperity on earth is prophesied to last 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4).

But as amazing and utopian as this time will be, God has something even more in store for those He is training and transforming. By choosing to follow God's ways and learning to think like He does, human beings are preparing for a potential beyond our wildest dreams!

However, God has always given humans a choice. It's the only way to truly develop God's character—to consciously choose to go God's way even when the alternative looks appealing. That's certainly the way it works in this present evil age, and so it is logical to assume that those choices will still exist for humans living under the benevolent rule of the Kingdom of God.

In this beautiful world, why would anyone choose to reject God's way of give and follow the selfish way of get instead? It seems incomprehensible.

By choosing to follow God's ways and learning to think like He does, human beings are preparing for a potential beyond our wildest dreams!

The return of the enemy

An event prophesied to occur at the end of the 1,000-year period (often called the Millennium, from the Latin for thousand years) demonstrates that humans will still have free will. The Bible shows that Satan will be released and will again lead humans to make wrong choices.

Remember that at the beginning of the Millennium, Satan will be locked up “so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while” (Revelation 20:3).

So then after the Millennium Satan “will go out to deceive the nations” and apparently will be very successful (Revelation 20:8). This final rebellion will be firmly put down, and Satan will again be put away—this time forever.

Then comes a time of resurrection and judgment that helps fulfill God’s purpose for the masses of humanity who have lived throughout history.

The Great White Throne Judgment: everyone gets a chance

One of the most challenging things many Christians struggle to understand is how the God who loves everyone enough to give His only Son, and who wants all people to be saved (John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:4), could eternally condemn little babies and adults who had never heard His name. Has God lost the majority of human beings who have ever lived?



Consider what Christ said about the day of judgment when everyone from the queen of Sheba to the people of Sodom to the people of His day would be raised together (Matthew 11:21-24; 12:42). He told people of His time that “it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you” (Matthew 11:24).

What could this mean? The depraved men of Sodom had never heard of Christ, but He was sure they would be more willing to repent and obey Him in the judgment day than those who had seen His miracles in the first century.

A prophecy of the day of judgment recorded by Ezekiel helps explain. After raising people from their graves to physical life, God tells them, “I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and...you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it” (Ezekiel 37:14).

So, God’s Spirit will be offered to those in the judgment day. They won’t be raised just to be condemned and thrown into the lake of fire. It seems evident that our loving God will give, to those who have never had that chance before, an opportunity to repent.

Man’s highest aspirations are only a shadow compared to God’s great goal for us.

With this in mind, consider John’s description of this time. “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it... And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (Revelation 20:11-12).



Evidently, the books that were opened are the books of the Bible, opened to their full understanding for the first time. The resurrected humans from all periods of history will understand for the first time the standards by which they are being judged, and will have the opportunity for the first time to repent and accept the sacrifice of Christ, the only name “by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

As we saw in Ezekiel, God’s Spirit—and thus a chance for salvation—will be offered during this time. So, like the judgment that is now on God’s Church (1 Peter 4:17), the final judgment must provide a period of time, and a real chance to be saved.

Our just and merciful God would provide no less.

Those who have fully understood the choice, but inexplicably reject God and choose the way of death, will have their lives quickly ended in the lake of fire, which will “burn them up” (Revelation 20:15; Malachi 4:1). For more about the resurrections and the fate of the dead, read our free booklets [You Can Understand Bible Prophecy](#), [Heaven and Hell](#) and [What Happens After Death?](#)

Incredible potential

At this point all humans who have ever lived will have had the chance to accept eternal life and the incredible potential God offers. What is that potential? Beyond the Millennium lies a fantastic future that we can now see only dimly. As Paul explained, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Man’s highest aspirations are only a shadow compared to God’s great goal for us. John put it this way: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! ...Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:1-2).

It seems evident that our loving God will give, to those who have never had that chance before, an opportunity to repent.

As incredible as it may seem, we are to be like Him!

The universe and beyond!

King David pondered man’s position in the universe now, and the awesome potential God has in store:

“When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?” (Psalm 8:3-4).

The book of Hebrews picks up the quote, and expounds on it. “For a little while you made him lower than the angels, and you crowned him with glory and honor. You gave him authority over all things.’ Now when it says ‘all things,’ it means nothing is left out. But we have not yet seen all of this happen” (Hebrews 2:7-8, New Living Translation).

So far we have seen Jesus Christ die to make it possible for all of us to be resurrected as He was to inherit “all things”—not just this physical universe but the spiritual realm as well!

God is expanding His family and wants to welcome us into His realm to share “all things” with us!

Why did God create us, give Jesus Christ for us and work out all the details of His incredible plan for us? Not to transform us into angels, for Paul shows we will judge angels (1 Corinthians 6:3). No, God intends to literally bring “many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10)! Christ is not ashamed to call us brothers (verse 11)! We will actually be our Father’s “sons and daughters” (2 Corinthians 6:18)! God is expanding His family and wants to welcome us into His realm to share “all things” with us!

Our minds boggle at concepts like eternity and infinity, much less the limitless power and great glory God wants to share! The biblical descriptions of the spiritual realm are couched in physical language or we could not comprehend it at all. Read for yourself John’s lyrical visions of the New Jerusalem and the new heavens and new earth in Revelation 21 and 22. We are meant to sense the immensity of its indescribable beauty and long for its fulfillment.

At the end of the book, Jesus Christ tells us, “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work... Surely I am coming quickly” (Revelation 22:12, 20).

As we have seen in this series of articles, this world desperately needs Christ’s return to save us from self-destruction. The wonderful promises of 1,000 years of peace and a fantastic eternity on beyond may seem too good to be true. But our Creator says they are real—and coming soon! So, after exploring this incredible vision of the world beyond today, we can reply with John, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (verse 20).

If you would like to know more about how to be part of this wonderful future God has in store, read or request a free copy of [What Is Your Destiny?](#)

God and Mammon

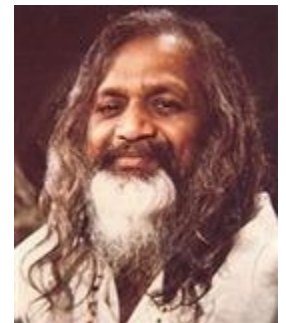
By William Miller

What did Christ mean when he said we couldn't serve mammon?



CHRIST SAID CLEARLY, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). What was Jesus Christ talking about?

When I was around 26 or 27 years old and had no master, I did whatever I wanted—good or bad. The Beatles had become a powerful influence in the world; and they were, in turn, influenced by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. For \$25, any person could be initiated into their following. If you really liked it, you, too, could be trained to become an initiator. You could “turn on” others without drugs.



Much time has passed for me, and much water has passed under that particular bridge. Now I look back with experience, insight and concern for others. I am perfectly aware that serving mammon can result in monetary success. I know that some succeed honestly, some don't succeed at all and others cheat their way to riches. In many publications we can read about the few who succeed honestly, share that success with others and then call this God's Blessing. This looks like a good thing. But does achieving monetary success, even achieving it God's Way—the Way of Give—equate to real success?

I believe that Jesus Christ was confronting this concept when He stated, “No one can serve two masters.” We need to ponder His statement. Real success (to me) is knowing the true God and having the faith and knowledge that They—both the Father and the Son—are Master. This also includes knowing that we can also be the Father’s children, (that is, Jesus’ brothers and sisters). We have a family relationship that transcends all other relationships—and They will not leave us hanging! That is why I will not serve any other master.

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My wife read this and said to me that it seemed to her that I was saying that people shouldn’t work—which I am not. The apostle Paul said that if you’re capable of working and don’t (that is, don’t earn money), then you should not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). I agree with him. That said, earning money is different from “serving mammon,” as serving implies that it is the master.

According to *Webster’s College Edition Dictionary*, mammon is the false god of riches and avarice. If you are consumed by a desire to obtain wealth—even if you say that you simply want to help others with your wealth—you are serving mammon and fooling yourself.

How is it that people do not heed this warning? Look to the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:1-15). Jesus took some time to thoroughly explain the various shades of response possible.

To summarize the parable, not everyone hears the message. Even those who are privileged to hear don’t all hear the same meaning. Some respond not at all, others only for a while, and some respond powerfully and are steadfast to the end.

As the aging process occurs, I remember several youthful desires that were faulty and resulted in less than truly successful outcomes. I will not serve that phony master again, even though the world sees it as success. I want real success.

As the aging process occurs, I remember several youthful desires that were faulty and resulted in less than truly successful outcomes.

God has given me—and gives me still—every good thing that I need. What I want most right now is to daily serve my Master, God, both Father and Son. I want to serve Them for the rest of my life. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Matthew 13:9).

Read our free booklet [Making Life Work](#).

Pentecost and the Book of Ruth

By Graemme Marshall

What connections are there between Pentecost and the book of Ruth?



THE BOOK OF RUTH is a delightful story of romance, simplicity and purity. It conversationally tells of a mother bereft of husband and sons, yet still faithful to God. Also described is a daughter-in-law widowed of her husband (and childless) who demonstrates outstanding devotion to her mother-in-law and God. Further included in the narration is an upright and generous farmer blessed both by employees and God alike. The historical setting is Bethlehem in Judah in the days of the Judges around 1100 B.C.

Although a specific purpose is not clearly stated, there is considerable connection with the meaning of the biblical festival known as the “Feast of Weeks,” the “Feast of Firstfruits” or “Pentecost” (Exodus 23:16; 34:22; Acts 2:1). A study of the book of Ruth is worthwhile for gleaning great principles and truths.

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Ethnically, Ruth was a Moabitess, only distantly related to the Israelites through Lot, Abraham’s nephew (Genesis 11:27; 19:37). She didn’t grow up worshipping the God of Israel. However, the book of Ruth shows that, in God’s sight, conversion to God’s true religion is incomparably more important than one’s ethnicity.

Royal lineage

Ruth’s marriage into the royal Davidic line foreshadowed the eventual composition of the larger Church to come. The book foreshadows how gentiles would be called to join with “spiritual Israel”

upon repentance and faith. In Ruth's life we also discover how God at times circumvents the norm.

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The author takes care to trace David's ancestry all the way back to Perez to encompass Abraham's blessing (Genesis 49:10). Interestingly, Perez is the illegitimate, yet chosen, son of Judah and Tamar. This "unexpected" type repeats again with Boaz. He was the son of Salmon by Rahab (Matthew 1:5). Then later, still contrary to convention, we have David, who wasn't the eldest son but the youngest. Finally, David's heir, Solomon, is not the eldest either and was born through inauspicious circumstances of Bathsheba.

Ruth herself was a Moabitess who by marriage to Boaz now symbolically reunites the wayward clan of Lot's son (Moab) back into Abraham's family. Ruth thus becomes a vital link to David as his great-grandmother.

God's generous providence is exhibited by the inclusion of a gentile into the royal lineage of the Messiah. When Ruth says, "Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God" and "The LORD do so to me, and more also, if..." (Ruth 1:16-17), her words imply that Ruth, who once lived by the gods of Moab, now lives by the standards of Israel's God.

The setting of Bethlehem, too, is interesting. It is here later that Jesse and David will live. And it is also here, in Bethlehem, that Christ our "Redeemer" is born.

A near kinsman

Boaz acted as the Old Testament "kinsman redeemer," which also serves as a Messianic type. His actions were based on the "levirate law" given in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. The Hebrew word *gaal* describes the one who fulfills this function. The book makes it clear that the *gaal* alone possessed the right to redeem, yet was under no obligation to do so. The graciousness of God towards sinful humans is a type of the love and generosity exhibited by Boaz towards Ruth.

We are told that Boaz was a righteous man who kept the law (Ruth 2:20, 9, 11-12; 3:9, 12). But there were others who did not. Boaz encourages Ruth to continue gleaning (according to the law in Leviticus 19:9) but acknowledges the dangers for a young woman to do so on her own in some fields (Ruth 2:8). Bethlehem appears to have been an exceptional town, considering the chaotic period of the Judges—generally characterized by idolatry, syncretism (mixing of paganism with true faith), social injustice, intertribal rivalries and sexual immorality. However, the way the people of Bethlehem greeted one another (verse 4) shows a degree of conscious allegiance to God.



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God is often portrayed in the role of Israel's near kinsman, because He is the Creator, Redeemer and Savior of His people. Redemption from Egypt was not only an act of purchase but also the action of a kinsman moved by love. God told the Israelites, "I have remembered My covenant [with Abraham]... I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem [*gaal*] you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I will take you as My people, and I will be your God" (Exodus 6:5-7).

When Israel became God's by redemption as well as by creation, they could trust Him to deliver them in the future. Believers today can also count on God. As our Redeemer, He has made us His own and will act to deliver us.

The near kinsman had to be a blood relative, and Christ became our Brother by the virgin birth to become a human being. The kinsman had to have the money to purchase the forfeited inheritance (Ruth 4:9). Christ alone has the worth to pay the price for sinners. The kinsman had to be willing to buy back the forfeited inheritance (verse 6), even as Christ laid down His life of His own free will. The kinsman also had to be willing to marry the wife of his deceased relative (verse 10), a type of the bride-and-groom relationship between Christ and the Church.

The Day of Pentecost

From this standpoint, the four brief chapters of Ruth are most instructive concerning the redemptive and saving work of Jesus.

God's Spirit has been available from that first Pentecost after Christ's resurrection to all who truly repent and are baptized (Acts 21:1, 38-39). The Day of Pentecost is an annual reminder that God poured out His Spirit to establish His Church, the group of believers redeemed by Christ's sacrifice and led by His Spirit. With these marvelous truths in mind, a study of the small book of Ruth can be uplift and strengthen us as we think about our "near Kinsman" who acts on our behalf.

Recommended reading

[*You Can Have Living Faith*](#) and [*Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*](#) are two great booklets you can request that delve further into this subject.

When a Friend Is Hurting: How You Can Help

By Becky Sweat

Facing difficult times is hard for anyone, but how about when it's a friend who is suffering? What do you do then?



PHYLLIS WALKED INTO THE RESTAURANT where she was meeting her friend Carla for lunch, her stomach in knots and her eyes filling with tears.

“What’s wrong?” Carla asked Phyllis after she sat down at the table.

“I was talking with my mother-in-law on the phone this morning, trying to tactfully to tell her I didn’t appreciate some things she said to my husband about me, and it turned into a huge argument,” Phyllis sobbed. “She told me it was her prerogative to say whatever she wanted to HER son, and then she proceeded to tell me what she thought were my biggest faults. Then, without giving me a chance to respond, she hung up on me!”

Carla did not want to spend her lunch hour with a sobbing friend. “Calm down,” she told Phyllis. “You’re going to make yourself sick.”

“But I just feel *so* upset,” Phyllis lamented.

“I’m sure your mother-in-law didn’t mean to hurt your feelings,” Carla insisted. “Come on, smile. I don’t want to hear any of this sad talk. Let’s have a nice lunch.”

“I’ll try,” sighed Phyllis, who now felt worse than before she arrived at the restaurant.

At one time or another most of us find ourselves face-to-face with a friend who is in tears. Your friend may be upset about a disagreement with another person, as was the case with Phyllis, or your friend might be dealing with the loss of a job, a serious illness, financial difficulties, the death of a family member, or problems at work or home. During these times, our friends need our support more than ever.

“She told me it was her prerogative to say whatever she wanted to HER son, and then she proceeded to tell me what she thought were my biggest faults.”

But as much as you might want to help, it’s not always easy to know how to respond when a friend unloads on you. You may have never been in a similar situation and have no clue what your friend is going through. You may not feel comfortable in tense situations and be afraid you might accidentally say the wrong thing. Or if the tragedy is particularly serious, you might be tempted to avoid a suffering friend altogether, rather than risk blurting out words that don’t come out right.

Although each crisis situation is unique, we can learn to respond tactfully, sincerely and appropriately. It all boils down to knowing what types of things you shouldn’t—and should—say and do.

What *not* to do

Don’t dismiss the sufferer’s feelings. One of the biggest mistakes you can make when a friend tells you bad news is to deny you heard anything troubling. Changing the subject, making jokes and coming up with reasons why the problem *isn’t* a problem cut off communication and tell the sufferer that it’s not OK to feel sad or express sorrow. This includes saying things like “Don’t worry,” “Cheer up,” “It’s not so bad,” and “Look at the bright side.” The message you are conveying to the sufferer is that you do not want to hear his or her disclosures.

“People get so panicky about not knowing what to do or say that they shut the suffering person out to make themselves feel more comfortable,” says psychology professor Sandra Burkhardt, Ph.D., ABPP, of Saint Xavier University. Most people don’t do this intentionally, she adds. “They may actually mean well and not even realize how they’re coming across.”

Don’t change the subject to what happened to you. When your friend is upset, this is not the time to say, “Hey, you think that’s bad, let me tell you what happened to me.” Your friend came to you with a problem and needs you to listen to her. If instead, you try to switch the conversation over to what happened to you, you are, in effect, saying you’re much more conversation-worthy than she is. This can be very frustrating to the sufferer, Dr. Burkhardt says, “who may feel like you’re sloughing off her feelings and not giving her a chance to express what she is going through.”

When your friend is upset, this is not the time to say, “Hey, you think that’s bad, let me tell you what happened to me.”

Don’t offer false hope. Although you may want things to be better for your friend “on the spot,” avoid making statements you don’t know are true as a way of trying to be positive. Telling someone who’s just been in a serious automobile accident, “Don’t worry, you’ll be better soon,” or “You’re going to be walking in no time,” is an attempt at being positive. But it may not be a realistic assessment of the situation. It could also come across to the sufferer that you’re being critical of her for feeling as down as she is.

Don't share your own complaints. If your friend unloads on you about a situation that involves another person, don't use that as an opportunity to voice your own beefs about that person. Comments like "Yes, I have the same issues with him. He is so...!" and, "I never liked her in the first place" only lead to a gripe session.

Don't give unsolicited advice. What to do to solve your friend's crisis may seem obvious to you, but resist the temptation to give unsolicited advice. Dr. Burkhardt says giving advice is another way we cut off communication. Basically, you are telling yourself, If I can distract my friend by giving her some brilliant advice, she'll stop crying.

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Advice can put the sufferer in an awkward position if he or she doesn't take your suggestion. One man who was unemployed for six months told me: "I received a lot of unsolicited advice, and usually I didn't think their suggestions would work. I felt like I had to defend the way I was handling my situation and didn't feel encouraged at all. Instead, I'd think to myself, 'Whew, I've made it through another interrogation.'"

This is also not the time to point out your friend's mistakes and what you think led up to the current dilemma he is facing. Nor is it the time to play "devil's advocate" with the sufferer by asking questions to challenge him on his perspectives and force him to "think through" how he is feeling. Doing these things will make the sufferer feel like he is on trial and that he has to prove to you that his perspectives are valid. This can lead to an argument, when really what the sufferer needs most is for you to just try and understand where he is coming from. Remind yourself that you are not an expert on someone else's situation. Even if you did experience a similar crisis as your friend, you are not the same people and there were certainly different factors at play. Furthermore, what worked for you might not work for another person.

In some cases, a suffering friend may ask you for advice. If so, it can be okay to give advice—IF your advice comes in the form of several alternatives, rather than one specific course of action you think he should take. Be sure your friend knows these are just possible ideas. Try to evaluate these ideas together. You might say, "What would you think of doing...?" That way, you are giving your friend an easy way to decline your advice if she doesn't think it'll work for her. But don't be surprised if the sufferer is not ready to talk about solutions. Most people need to have their feelings validated first, before they are ready to move to the solution stage.

How you should respond

Listen in a nonjudgmental way. The best response you can give a hurting friend is to listen in a nonjudgmental way and try to understand why she feels the way she does. Romans 12:15 tells us to "rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" (New International Version throughout). Galatians 6:2 says we should "carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."



Your friend needs to be able to talk about her problem. Talking about what happened will allow her to begin working through the healing process. Calmly accept your friend's situation for what it is and try not to deny what is happening. Responses such as "Tell me more about it," "You've been through a lot," and "I was sorry to hear the bad news," communicate genuine acceptance and concern.

If your friend says something negative after a traumatic experience, try not to let it make you nervous. "It may be hard to hear, but remind yourself that she's in a lot of pain," Burkhardt says. "Just let her talk because, at that moment, that's exactly how she feels."

Show discretion. If the sufferer's troubles involve a conflict with another person, it goes without saying that what you are told should not be repeated to anyone else. Also, you should be very careful to not start bad-mouthing the other person—even if you think this person is totally at fault. Responses such as "I can see why you feel that way" and "You must be very disappointed" let the sufferer know you accept how he feels without attacking anyone. Also, you do need to stress to your friend that she should go to the person she is upset with (according to the admonition of Matthew 18:15) and perhaps the ministry as well.

Remind the sufferer that she's not going through this alone. Reassure your friend that you want the best for her and that you are praying about the situation. In James 5:16 we are told to "pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." To say, "I'll pray for you," and mean it is enormously encouraging and will bind you together. Don't be afraid of sounding gushy or syrupy.

Respect the sufferer's privacy. Realize that some hurting people may not be ready to talk about their problem or may open up to only a few of their closest friends. Let the sufferer call the shots.

If you know someone is going through a difficult time, don't jump on them the minute you see them and start asking prying questions. First discern if it's a good time to talk, and try not to take it personally if the sufferer doesn't feel comfortable opening up to you.

Asking "How are you doing?" or mentioning "If you ever need to talk, I'm available," lets the sufferer know you are willing to listen if the need arises. Otherwise, you may appear pushy or like a busybody.

Give practical assistance. Don't overlook some of the most obvious ways you can help a friend who is hurting. People in the middle of traumatic situations often feel overwhelmed and could use some help with their daily activities. That could mean cleaning house for them, running errands, cooking a meal for the family or picking their children up from school.

The husband of a cancer victim told me: "One of the biggest worries during my wife's illness was who would watch over our 9-year-old daughter. I was either at work or at the hospital most of the time and wasn't able to be much of a father. Several ladies in our church stepped right in and really helped out. They took our daughter shopping, to the movies, had her over for meals and even took her camping."

Be patient. Don't get impatient with your friend if he is not over his tragedy, even though you and others may think he should be. It takes time to work through the grief process. Some problems are not going to have quick solutions. Depending on the severity of the situation, it can take months or even years to fully recover from some tragedies.

Don't get impatient with your friend if he is not over his tragedy, even though you and others may think he should be.

A friend shared how she felt during the five years her husband was battling chronic fatigue syndrome and was unable to work: "Although I know people meant well, they would ask me things like, 'When is that guy of yours going to get well and start working again?' and 'Why doesn't he try a less demanding job so he can at least get out of the house?'"

She continued: "They seemed to be saying he could go back to work if he really wanted to. They made us feel like there was something wrong with us. Some of our friends became uncomfortable around us and pulled away. When people avoided us, we started feeling like we were going through this difficult time alone."

Job said, "A despairing man should have the devotion of his friends" (Job 6:14). We shouldn't give up on people during their low periods.

Of course, there are limits to just being a good listener when your friend is upset. Sometimes you need to do more than just listen. If many weeks go by and your friend is still just at the initial "talking it out" stage of the grief process, if her emotional state seems to be deteriorating and her physical health is starting to suffer, if she doesn't appear to be taking any steps towards resolution of the situation, or if she's no longer comforted by your listening to her, encourage your friend to seek the help of her pastor or counselor.

And finally, don't despair if you make a few mistakes while trying to help. No one can be expected to know what to say or how to act in every situation. Remind yourself that sufferers need the support of their friends. What matters most is that your friend knows she doesn't have to face the difficult times alone.

Recommended reading

For more material on how to build and strengthen good relationships, request the booklet [Making Life Work](#) or a free subscription to [The Good News!](#)