

LESSON 1 RANSOMED

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: **ISAIAH 43:1-2, 10-13, 18-19**

KEY VERSE: *“But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.” (Isaiah 43:1)*

INTRODUCTION

All of us want security and stability.

When our world is shaken by the negative impact of unpredictable events or our own poor decisions, we cling to the hope that our unpleasant situation will change for the better...in time.

We often feel a great sense of separation and loneliness when situations arise that work against our plans and dreams.

Sometimes these circumstances drive a wedge between our community and us.

When this happens, our instant response is to seek a solution that will bridge the gap and reconnect us with the familiarity of our community.

“COMMUNITY” is defined as **“that with which you identify as a member”**.

We become a part of many *communities* during our lifetime, and they all have an impact on our character, our relationships, and the decisions that we make for ourselves.

There are the communities of local charitable organizations such as the Kiwanis Club, the Rotary Club, Masons, Eastern Star, and others.

There are also the Veterans groups, the social clubs, and many other organizations that draw our attention toward a common bond of fellowship.

There are even the loosely defined communities of local bars and ‘hang-outs’ to which many are attracted for sheer companionship.

All of these *communities* ultimately define who we are and who we become.

We start this Bible Study at the beginning; that moment when you realized your life was separated from God;

When you placed your carnal nature on the altar and asked Christ to be your Savior and ransom you from the jail called sin, and invite you into His community of believers.

CHRISTIANITY IS A COMMUNITY!

And the man or woman who chooses to join this community is wise...wise to admit that he or she is a sinner who can only be saved by being ransomed by the grace of God, through Jesus Christ.

Every avenue that the world offers does not lead to security and stability.

But a person can find perfect security in becoming a part of God's community, knowing that God holds the future.

As we seek a deeper knowledge of, and faith in God, we find hope in the promises that God gives to His redeemed people.

And just as importantly, we find rest in becoming a part of His covenant community.

I. A RANSOMED COMMUNITY (ISAIAH 43:1)

"But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine."

Through Isaiah, God's favor and good will toward His people speak comfort to all believers - *"Fear not, for I have redeemed thee!"*

Isaiah introduces the Lord as the One who made Israel in the first place.

Then he calls on Israel not to fear, no matter what lies ahead.

The *'new creature'* of God's covenant is of God's own forming.

God now takes a new direction in His covenant relationship with Israel and all of mankind.

He promises to set apart all who are redeemed through the blood of His Son.

Those who have God “for them” need not fear who or what can be against them.

True believers are precious to God; His delight is in them.

Isaiah comforts the faithful with God’s promise and dissuades the covenant-keeper from all fears.

This new covenant with God provides a commitment to a relationship that allows His purpose for us to be fulfilled in our lives.

Sadly, the word **“covenant”** has lost its meaning in today’s society.

In Biblical times, the word covenant involved promise, commitment, faithfulness, and loyalty even unto death.

A covenant was considered sacred, and was therefore not entered into lightly, and a man was only as good as his covenant word.

In a society where national agreements, business contracts, and marriage covenants are routinely broken, it brings great comfort to know that God still is a covenant making and covenant keeping God.

He has fashioned a flawless and permanent path to redemption for every living person, by offering His Only Begotten Son as a ransom for all sin.

God always initiates our covenant with Him.

He establishes it, and we cannot manipulate it.

We cannot go to God with our OWN terms and with our own proposal.

God sets the boundaries, and we are responsible for operating within those boundaries.

When God established His covenant with Israel, it was permanently written on their hearts.

Unlike man, when God enters into a covenant, He does not break His promises.

Question: How can the Church fulfill its role as the most significant part of any community?

A PROTECTED COMMUNITY (ISAIAH 43:2)

2"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

The purpose of God's covenant is to bless us and move us into the destiny that He has prepared for us.

The covenant God makes with us offers blessings both here and eternally.

God's covenant has tremendous spiritual implications.

It is a bond that not only brings great comfort to the covenant partner, but it is also a declaration to those outside the covenant.

A good example is the wedding ring in a marriage relationship.

The ring is a symbol of the marriage covenant.

It is a constant reminder to each spouse of their covenant agreement, but it is also a declaration to the world that the person who has entered into this covenant is not available for other romantic or sexual relationships.

Likewise, we enter into covenant with God through the blood of Jesus Christ, and Christ's blood covers us.

The blood of Jesus Christ gives a warning to every enemy, saying, *“Hands off! This is not your territory.”*

Covenant breaking, then, is serious.

We operate under the protection of a covenant God, and it is only when **WE** choose to break our covenant relationship with Him and live in disobedience to His will that we give opportunity for the enemy to steal our inheritance and destroy our destiny.

Question: How does our relationship with God protect us?

A WITNESSING COMMUNITY (ISAIAH 43:10-13)

¹⁰ “Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He: before Me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after Me.

¹¹ I, even I, am the LORD; and beside Me there is no savior.

¹² I have declared, and have saved, and I have showed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God.

¹³ Yea, before the day was I am He; and there is none that can deliver out of My hand: I will work, and who shall let it?”

In our covenant relationship with God, He chooses to employ us as His witnesses.

Who is better to declare His mighty works than those who have been the direct recipient of His blessings?

Only God’s people know the power of His grace, the sweetness of His comforts, the kind care of His providence, and the truth of His promise.

All of God's servants can give such an account of what He has wrought or fashioned in them, and accomplished for them, as they lead others to know and believe in His power, His truth, and His love.

Reflections: Consider your church's outreach to the community. How can it improve its witness to the unsaved and the un-churched?

A RECREATED COMMUNITY (ISAIAH 43:18-19)

¹⁸ "Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old.

¹⁹ Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert."

When you enter into a covenant with God as a newly ransomed believer in Jesus Christ, it is only the beginning of God's promise to you.

God desires that you would deepen your covenant relationship with Him.

In order to let go of your past and enter into this new and deeper covenant with the Lord, you must understand three things:

FIRST, YOU MUST UNDERSTAND GOD'S CALL.

God wants to answer your difficult questions, such as: "Why did God create me?" and "What is my purpose here on earth?"

God cannot answer these basic questions until you are willing to draw apart from the world and draw closer to Him.

You must be willing to let go of pre-conceived notions and expectations, and let God set your direction, completely.

When you yield to Him, you move into a new dimension of your calling, and it is a lifelong process.

And being fully submitted to Him means that you permit Him full access to the design of your life, trusting that He knows exactly where you fit into His plan.

SECOND, WE MUST ESTABLISH DAILY COMMUNICATION WITH GOD.

When the Lord extends His hand to us, we begin to establish a communication system of prayer and learning to hear His voice.

As we develop our communication skills, God moves us into a deeper level of covenant with Him and helps us to develop disciplines like meditation, prayer, fasting, giving, worship and work that aid us in our covenant relationship.

THIRD, WE MUST KEEP THE COVENANT.

We often don't realize the fulfillment of our blessings because we keep looking back at our past mistakes and we fail to trust God completely.

When Christ ransomed our souls, He paid the price for our sin, fully and completely.

When we look back, we are saying that we do not trust God for our future.

Refusing to keep the covenant with Him by not acknowledging that He is able to "change" us will only postpone our blessings.

The proper spiritual mindset is necessary to keep us from covenant-breaking events in our lives that allow the enemy to have access to our souls and separate us from God's will.

Question: What blessings may be postponed when we allow our past to distract us?

CONCLUSION

Isaiah introduced the Israelites to the coming Messiah, whom God empowered to establish justice on the Earth and redeem them from their sin of rejecting their role as God's chosen nation.

He prophesied that now, through the wondrous work of love, God would bring redemption to mankind.

The Israelites would come to know God as their Savior and Redeemer.

Though the Israelites had not fulfilled their mission for God, He would keep loving them.

Isaiah taught them that they were not loved for what they do, but because God is gracious.

When all the former things had been put behind them, they would sing a new song of praise as God's people, a song of forgiveness and joy.

We too, have the opportunity to "sing a new song".

All those who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are partakers of the New Covenant, which promises forgiveness and remission of the penalty of sin, justification and righteousness, being born again into the family of God, assurance, sanctification unto the Lord, adoption as sons and daughters of God, and glorification.

Through the new covenant, we have the promise of being ushered into the Everlasting Covenant at the second coming of Christ, bringing God and humanity back into eternal covenantal relationship.

The promises of this life include everlasting life, immortality, an everlasting kingdom, which the believer inherits, an everlasting inheritance, everlasting love, everlasting joy, everlasting strength and an everlasting name.

This is God's desire for every human being.

LESSON 2 - RECONCILED

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:

2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-21

Key Verse: *“Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17*

INTRODUCTION

Life is full of new beginnings - a new bride, a new career, a new home in a new state.

But there is nothing that compares to the newness of a believer who has been reconciled to Christ.

No matter what tragedies have shaped our past, we serve a God of ‘second chances’, and the repentant sinner becomes God’s reshaped and remolded servant.

When we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, Christ’s spirit remolds and remakes us; we become shaped into newness...into the likeness of Christ Himself.

The Christian who submits to a re-fashioning of his total man, experiences the reconciliation of his total being to the Body of Christ.

Reconciliation challenges us to see others through Christ’s point of view, in the same manner that He sees us.

Reconciliation nurtures and fertilizes our common ground, so that forgiveness and love blossom in our relationships, even with those whom we may dislike.

All who have experienced God’s transformation in their lives become a vital part of the ministry of reconciliation.

The Apostle Paul was fervent in his desire to see all men reconciled unto God.

As we study his letter to the Corinthians, we will witness the dramatic unfolding of the process of reconciliation.

I. DEFENDING CHRIST (2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-12)

¹¹Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

¹²For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart.”

Even though Paul knew that his salvation and eternal destiny were obtained by faith in Jesus Christ, he was still in awe of one day standing before the Savior.

Every time he contemplated that moment, Paul found himself moved to fear the Lord.

It was that fear that compelled him to continue in service to the Lord.

He knew that the purpose of his ministry was to persuade men to be “reconciled to God”.

We know from these two verses that Paul met opposition in carrying out his commission.

Using a familiar tactic, Paul would affirm his sincerity before God, and justify his conduct in order to win a hearing for his message.

Paul never put stock in personal credentials or associations.

He said, “*For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” (1 Cor. 2:2)

Paul made it clear that it was not his external qualifications but his internal spirit that authenticated his ministry.

Paul was, however, concerned with the reception of his message.

He needed others to regard him as a messenger of God, so that they would accept his message as sent from God.

Question: How can we get the unsaved to listen to what God has to say?

II. FOLLOWING CHRIST (2 COR. 5:13-15)

¹³For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause.

¹⁴For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:

¹⁵And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again.”

From his opening defense, we can probably assume that some reputed Paul to be deranged.

Festus thought so, and said, “*Paul, thou art beside thyself; too much learning hath made thee mad.*” (Acts 26:24)

Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that if he appeared to be “transported beyond himself” or out of control, it was through the hand of God himself, and solely to promote God’s honor.

Paul had sober moments when his cool and dispassionate manner surfaced, but he wanted the saints to know that in those times, his calm spirit was simply to better instruct and encourage them.

Paul says, “*For the love of Christ constraineth us*”.

Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand that when the love of God fills your heart, it causes you to love God intensely, and to labor for the salvation of men.

And it is the effect produced by this love, which bears the witness (messenger) away with itself, and causes him to be influenced by that same love as God so loved the world and gave his Son for it.

It is only then that the messenger of God desires to spend and be spent for the Lord.

By the fear of God, the apostles endeavored to persuade and convince men, and the love of Christ constrained or forced them to act.

Paul makes it clear that Christ died for all mankind, because all mankind was guilty of sin and doomed to eternal death.

Man was spiritually dead and in danger of eternal death, till Christ redeemed him from destruction.

We therefore must live not unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and made the necessary atonement for our sins.

Question: How can you be certain that your love of Christ constrains you and forces you to act better?

III. NEW FROM THE INSIDE OUT (2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-17)

¹⁶ “Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.

¹⁷ Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

Paul teaches that the **NEW** man acts upon new principles, by new rules, with new ends, and in new company.

God creates the believer anew.

God does not merely set his heart right, but He gives him a **NEW** heart.

The new man becomes the workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.

Though he looks the same as a man, his entire character and conduct are changed.

His re-creation is more than an outward reformation.

The man who, in the past, saw no beauty in the Savior “that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2), now loves the Savior above all things.

Question: What outward demonstrations by a Christian prove that Christ is favored above all else?

IV. RECONCILED BY THE WORD (2 CORINTHIANS 5:18-21)

¹⁸ “And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

¹⁹ To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

²⁰ Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.

²¹ For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

The heart of sinful man is filled with hostility toward God, and he justly offends God.

Even so, there is still hope of reconciliation.

Our offended God has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ.

The Scriptures were written by the inspiration of God, and they are the word of reconciliation.

Peace has been made through the cross.

Through His love, God implores sinners to surrender and accept the salvation that He offers.

Once we are reconciled to God through Christ, we become His representatives, as did the Apostle Paul, to carry the message of salvation to those who are not of the household of faith.

Our ministry of reconciliation, by its witness, draws others into the faith.

Reflection: Consider how you portray yourself as reconciled to Jesus Christ. Describe what others see when they look at you.

Remember...they don't know your heart.

They only know what they SEE.

Be honest, since you don't have to share your answer with anyone.

CONCLUSION

RECONCILE means **“TO CHANGE”**.

It is we who need to be reconciled to God, not God to us.

God desired to change His severed relationship with mankind caused by man's enmity toward Him, exercising His grace to invite us to be “reconciled” to Him; that is, to change our attitude, and accept the provision He has made for us through His Son.

Once we are reconciled, we exchange OUR will for HIS Will.

We become His appointed ambassadors, spreading the gospel without reservation, even at the risk of being considered, like Paul, a “mad man”.

Christians are extremists by our very spiritual nature.

We live and teach a doctrine that supplants our human nature, because a greater force than our own guides us.

But by our extremism and revolutionary teaching, we bring no harm to man.

Rather, we choose to draw all of mankind unto a higher elevation of understanding called the Will of God.

We are reconciled to God, and therefore we desire above all else, that all men would follow in our footsteps.

LESSON 3 - RETRAINED

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: LUKE 24:44-53

KEY VERSE: ⁴⁸*“And ye are witnesses of these things.*

⁴⁹ *And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.”* (Luke 24:48-49)

INTRODUCTION

Evangelism makes many Christians nervous.

If we would confess our fears, most would admit that they fear their witnessing will be ineffective, or worse, rejected.

Since we would rather leave the task of evangelism to someone else, God has to retrain our way of thinking.

Witnessing is a science, an art, and a mystery, because it involves connecting your faith with people’s experience in a way that they can understand it.

It means being willing to cooperate with God and partner with Him to reach another soul with the message of salvation.

The difficulty comes in when we try so hard that we fail to leave the results in God’s hands.

We are a society that responds to instant results.

But unfortunately, there is no such thing as instant or microwave evangelism.

The seeds we plant today may not even sprout in our lifetime.

But God has empowered us with His Word to sow a great harvest, and He will not hold us accountable for seeds that do not sprout.

As long as we are obedient and sincere in our witness, we are fulfilling our duty as evangelizing Christians.

We are called to share the Word of God with others, but it is God who orchestrates events in people's lives so they will turn toward Him.

I. PROPHECY FULFILLED (LUKE 24:44-49)

⁴⁴ “And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me.

⁴⁵ Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures,

⁴⁶ And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:

⁴⁷ And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

⁴⁸ And ye are witnesses of these things.

⁴⁹ And, behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

Since His Resurrection, this was the first time that Jesus appeared to His disciples all at once.

There were two purposes to Jesus' appearance.

The first was to prove without question that He had risen from the dead.

There is nothing like an eyewitness to prove facts.

The second purpose was to point out to the disciples that all Scripture concerning the coming Messiah had been fulfilled.”

Jesus had already appeared four times prior to this moment.

He appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:14), to the women visiting the tomb (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1), to two who were walking on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:1), and to Simon Peter (Luke 24:34).

Word of His appearing had spread quickly, and the apostles and disciples rushed to where Jesus had told them to meet Him.

We can be sure there was electric in the air as each of them began to grasp what was about to happen.

Any sadness they felt over the loss of their Great Teacher was now replaced with great anticipation.

Many Bible students ask the question, *“How did the Lord’s resurrected body differ from His earthly body?”*

We can draw some conclusions by comparing Christ’s resurrected body to the glorified body promised to believers.

Christ’s resurrected body was His body, but it was radically changed.

It had all the appearance of a physical body, but it was not bound by the properties of the physical world.

It bore the marks of His physical body (John 20:20) and the disciples could recognize Him upon close examination.

But unlike His earthly body, He could now travel and appear anyplace at will.

His glorified body was unhampered by space and time (Luke 24:36, John 20:19).

The new properties of this glorified body somehow made Him difficult to identify.

Mary Magdalene thought He was the gardener (John 20:15).

The two men on the road to Emmaus thought He was a traveler (Luke 24:31).

The disciples who were fishing did not recognize Him standing on the seashore (John 21:4).

But in each of these instances, upon closer examination, Jesus became recognizable.

This is the same body that is promised to the believer.

Our vile bodies will be changed so that we will have the power to subdue all things (Philippians 3:21), and we shall be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29).

1 John 3:2 gives us the most assuring evidence of this promise, saying “*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is*”.

“*There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body*”, says 1 Corinthians 15:44.

It is a perfected body no longer subject to pain, tears, death, or sorrow.

It was sown in corruption, but it is raised in incorruption; sown in weakness but raised in power.

Question: Why is it so difficult for believers to trust the promise of our own resurrection?

Jesus stood before His disciples with all Power, ready to commission His army.

His first words to the crowd were “*Peace be with You*”.

Though this was the regular greeting used by the Jews in that day, at that moment it took on new significance.

Jesus was bestowing a peace on them that only He could bestow as their Risen Savior (Ephesians 2:13-14).

The impact of Christ’s resurrection was now fully manifested in the fact that Jesus now stood before them.

There must have been mixed reactions to His sudden appearing.

Fear, doubt, indifference, complete acceptance stood before Jesus in one massive gathering, as Jesus unfolded the proof that He was not a spirit, not a vision or hallucination.

He was the Risen Lord, standing before them bodily.

It was different in the mere fact that His glorified body was no longer subject to the limitation and frailties of the physical universe and its laws, but He was Jesus, their Christ, standing before them in the flesh.

The second statement Jesus made was to point out that all Scripture had been fulfilled concerning His Messiah-ship.

Notice that Christ gave the three divisions of the Old Testament: the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms as evidence that the whole Old Testament prophesied of His coming and His salvific gift.

In other words, He opened their eyes of understanding.

His appearing should not have been a surprise to the disciples because He had foretold of this event and forewarned His followers (Luke 18:31-34).

He had told them that He must suffer and arise (Luke 18: 31-34).

He had told them that repentance and forgiveness must be preached (Matthew 26:28).

And He had told them that the Holy Spirit must be given (John 14:15-26).

In other words, the believer had to be equipped for witnessing. Jesus had to open His disciple's spiritual eyes so they could understand (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Reflection: Reflect on the events in your life that opened your own spiritual eyes to the truth of the Gospel.

Discuss how your 'story' impacts your ability to witness for Christ.

II. JESUS' LAST APPEARANCE (LUKE 24:50-53)

⁵⁰ “And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them.

⁵¹ And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

⁵² And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy:

⁵³ And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.”

Jesus could not ascend before carefully unfolding the prophetic fulfillment of His mission.

He challenged them to remember the prophecies of His coming, taught by the Rabbis from the Books of Law, Prophecy and the Psalms.

They had to fully understand that His appearance was all the proof they needed now of the complete fulfillment of God's promise.

But Jesus' primary purpose was to equip the believer for witnessing, and by His ascension, to release the power of the Holy Spirit upon His followers.

What is this power that Jesus released upon His followers, past and present?

John the Baptist was the first to introduce the idea of a person possessing a power greater than his own.

In all probability, the people had no idea what it meant to be baptized by the Holy Spirit.

They may have had ideas, but nobody knew exactly what he meant.

Jesus did not speak of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit until He prepared to ascend into heaven.

In these Verses of Luke, Jesus equates the Holy Spirit with *“the promise of the Father”*, and more importantly in Acts 1:4, *“that which you have heard from Me.”*

Jesus is referring to a conversation with His disciples just before His arrest, when He promised to send the Holy Spirit after He departed (John 14:16-17).

In that conversation, Jesus said that He would ask the Father to send the Spirit and the Father would do it.

Jesus made a promise on behalf of His Father, which was the same as the Father promising the Holy Spirit.

Question: How do God's promises differ from those we make?

It's important to understand that the coming of the Holy Spirit and the baptism of the Holy Spirit are identical.

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given to the church, and they were filled with rivers of living water (John 7:38-39) that empowered them to do the Will of the Father.

No ministry of the Holy Spirit has been more misunderstood than the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

But the bible is clear and consistent in its explanation of the Baptism of the Spirit, and there is no need for confusion.

Nowhere in the Bible does it support the idea of two levels of believers – those who have received the Spirit and those who have not.

In fact, this way of thinking opposes everything the Bible teaches about spiritual gifts and the Body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:13 teaches that every believer has been baptized by the Holy Spirit.

Baptism symbolizes our identification with the Body of Christ.

It happens at the moment of salvation.

If you trust Christ as your Savior, you have the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Since Christ has already sent the “Comforter” (the Holy Spirit) into the world, we no longer have to *tarry* and wait for it.

Luke closes his Gospel with the ascension of Christ, and begins Acts with the ascension of Christ.

The ascension is said to be the final chapter and consummation of Christ’s journey on earth.

But the ascension also opened the Lord’s heavenly ministry.

Christ’s mission of intercession for the world, and His mission of bearing witness through the lives of His followers.

Therefore the ascension is the last chapter in Christ’s earthly ministry and the first chapter in His life as our Risen Lord.

At the point of His ascension, Christ became the propitiation (the payment or reparation) *“for the sins of the whole world”* (1 John 2:1-2).

The disciples were now retrained or retooled.

Their response to the ascension of Jesus Christ was threefold.

FIRST, THE ASCENSION STIRRED WORSHIP.

They now knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that Jesus was the true Messiah, the Son of God.

He was now due all of their adoration and praise.

SECOND, THE DISCIPLES WERE FILLED WITH JOY AND REJOICING BECAUSE CHRIST WAS NOW EXALTED, AND SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, AND THEY KNEW THAT HE WOULD BE WITH THEM FOREVER.

Nothing would ever separate them from Him again.

AND THIRD, THE CHURCH WAS NOW THE FOCUS OF GOD'S PRESENCE AND WORSHIP, AND THE CENTER FOR TEACHING.

It would be the gathering place for all who desired to be instructed in the scriptures.

Question: What was the hardest part of your retraining, once you accepted Christ as your personal Savior?

CONCLUSION

Unbelievers respond to the resurrection in five ways.

THEY ARE TERRIFIED AND TROUBLED BY THE RESURRECTION, because it means they must obey and serve Christ.

If He is the *living Lord*, then it means man is His subject.

THEY QUESTION THE TRUTH OF THE RESURRECTION.

The idea that a man could arise from the dead is beyond their acceptance.

THEY IGNORE THE RESURRECTION AND COUNT IT AS MEANINGLESS.

They react to the resurrection with anywhere from mild opposition to the persecution of any who bear witness to the resurrection.

THEY RESPOND TO THE RESURRECTION, ACCEPTING JESUS CHRIST AS THEIR SAVIOR AND LORD.

We should not anticipate an unbeliever's response, nor attempt to shape our gospel message to make it more palatable to those who oppose it.

God has equipped us for any battle.

Believers have the same weaponry given to those early disciples.

The Holy Spirit empowers us to be bold witnesses in spite of opposition and rejection.

Our power source is God Himself, and He alone can give power to our evangelism outreach.

The greatest of all tragedies is that there are those who, despite irrefutable evidence, refuse to believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Centuries have come and gone, and thousands upon thousands of “witnesses” have carried the first story of the Resurrection forward into many generations, as told by eyewitnesses.

Not “one jot or tittle” has been altered in the telling of the story.

Yet, despite the authenticity of the account, millions have chosen to discount its accuracy and legitimacy.

However, those who are empowered by the Holy Spirit will never let this deter us from the task of being witnesses for Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we have a duty to **“tell the story”** and to **“spread the good news”** about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The wisest advice concerning evangelism came from Peter, whose exhortation was, *“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have”* (1 Peter 3:15).

We must be ready at all times to explain the newness of life that we so freely demonstrate.

While the salvation of souls is the sole focus of our witness, there is another added benefit to disciplined evangelism.

Our continual witnessing provides a “checkpoint” for our own inner commitment to Christ.

As we share the Word with others, our sharing helps to strengthen us.

It gives us a “right now” kind of faith that stays focused on its primary objectives, and leans completely on the truth of the gospel message.

LESSON 4 - REUNITED

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 2:11-21

Key Verse: *“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” Ephesians 2:19*

INTRODUCTION

If you were asked to explain **‘perfect peace’**, how would you define it?

Would it include envision tranquility, harmony, serenity, unity...or all of these?

God’s vision for peace goes far beyond our finite mind’s comprehension.

The peaceable kingdom of God involves transformed relationships and societies, and a government that adheres to God’s rules for justice, righteousness and faithfulness.

In fact, God’s perfect peace will, one day, cause *“the wolf to dwell with the lamb”* (Isaiah 11:6).

God promises to raise up a Rod and a Branch out of the stump and roots of His people.

This Rod and Branch is Christ, who will lead His people into the state, which the Lord intended for them all along.

Ultimately, this vision of peace cannot come about completely until Christ Himself assumes full power.

Perfect peace will be found when Christ comes to rule the redeemed city (Isaiah 26:3).

While this renewal will be God’s work, God’s people can make a difference in the meantime, especially if we are spirit-led and love the Lord.

Perfect peace is an ideal that the people of God can achieve when we allow ourselves to be reunited by our faith in Jesus Christ.

I. FROM ALIENATION TO INCLUSION (EPHESIANS 2:11-13)

¹¹ “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Un-circumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

¹² That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.”

The Jews and Gentiles had a difficult time worshipping together.

Customs and religious law divided the early church along cultural lines.

In the 1st-century Roman Empire Jews made up about 1/10th of the population.

What made the Jews special was their unique relationship with God, through covenant promises given their forefather Abraham and the Law given by Moses.

These deep-seated differences created a sense of superiority on the part of the Jews and of hostility on the part of many Gentiles.

Anti-Semitism is not new, and in the two centuries before Christ many cities in Asia and Europe had anti-Jewish riots.

The early converted Jews were excited about the arrival of their Messiah, but they were not overly anxious to share Him with the outlawed Gentiles who were not part of the original covenant promise.

Paul thus encourages the Gentiles, telling them that while they were once living outside the promises of God as the uncircumcised (or non-Jew), Christ came to redeem all of mankind.

The Gentiles were no longer aliens from the Promise, but partakers of this New Covenant.

Christ and His covenant are the foundation of all the Christian's hopes.

Paul gives a sad and terrible description here of the Gentiles' miserable separation from God.

Who could, without trembling, even think about the misery of a man who is separated forever from the people of God, cut off from the body of Christ, fallen from the covenant of promise, having no hope, no Savior, and without any God but a God of vengeance, for all eternity?

Those who have no part in Christ are lost indeed.

Question: Why does it often take tragedy to cause communities to seek God for answers?

II. HE IS OUR PEACE (EPHESIANS 2:14-18)

¹⁴ "For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

¹⁵ Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

¹⁶ And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

¹⁷ And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

¹⁸ For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father."

The Hebrew word for peace, "**SHALOM**", expresses a basic and vital Biblical concept.

It suggests wholeness and harmony; that which is complete and sound, prosperous, healthy, and fulfilled.

The word '**PEACE**' occurs over 200 times in the Old Testament.

In narrative books it is typically used to describe an absence of hostility or strife.

In the Psalms and the Prophets it goes beyond this so that, in at least two thirds of the Biblical references, the word indicates a total fulfillment that comes when persons experience God's presence.

Isaiah 32:15-16 portrays both the inner peace and material prosperity that will mark the joyful fulfillment of man's hopes under the rule of the Messiah, God's Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

The New Testament word for peace (*EIRENE*) originally meant the ordered life that was possible when people were not at war.

Later, the concept was expanded to include an inner, personal peace.

Through Christ, our lives are made whole, our relationships are harmonized, and we experience the spiritual and psychological wholeness that God intended for human beings in the original creation.

Peace is possible only where there is righteousness, and righteousness only where God's Spirit transforms humankind.

This could only be accomplished through Christ, who is indeed our peace.

Therefore, true peace is found only at the feet of Jesus Christ, who sacrificed Himself for our peace.

Christ is the author of the Gentile union with Jewish believers to form one church of the Living God.

Through the person, sacrifice, and mediation of Christ, all sinners (Jew and Gentile) are allowed to draw near to God as a Father, and are brought with acceptance into His presence, with their worship and services under the teaching of One Holy Spirit, One Father and One Son.

Christ paved the way for us to come to God together as Christians.

The Holy Spirit gives us the heart to come, and the strength to come.

God then gives us the grace to serve Him in acceptable fashion.

Question: Christ’s peace reunites us with God. How does His peace reunite us with each other?

III. A PEOPLE UNITED (EPHESIANS 2:19-21)

19 “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone;

21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:”

In bringing both Jew and Gentile to God through the Cross, Jesus settled the long-standing hostility between the races, by removing its cause.

As a result, Jew and Gentile are now “fellow citizens,” members of God’s great household and together parts of a holy temple God’s Spirit is building

Paul compares this newly formed body of believers as members of one household, one community, and one nation.

He also compares us to a building that has been properly framed and built together, sharing one foundation, and one Chief Cornerstone.

With the tearing down of the separation between the Jew and the Gentile, God now dwells in all believers, and they have all become the temple of God through the working of the Holy Spirit.

Question: Can we be divided by race or culture and still be “one in Christ”?

CONCLUSION

No one wants to be alienated from God.

The word “**A-PALL-O-TRI-OO**” (*alienated*), found only here in Ephesians 2:12, Ephesians 4:18, and Colossians 1:21, indicates man’s desperate state of utter separation and isolation.

His lost relationship with God is also marked by hostility.

It is man’s own evil which makes him hostile to God, and which alienates him from God.

Jesus was the means God used to bring man and the universe back into harmony with Him – “**HE IS OUR PEACE!**”.

The actual, literal death of Jesus on the Cross of Calvary is the means by which God saved us and made us holy.

God united all mankind under ONE covenant, removing all division and separation among men.

LESSON 5 RENEWED

Background Scripture: Jeremiah 29:1-14, 31:31-34

Key Verse: *“But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.”*
Jeremiah 31:33

INTRODUCTION

Man separates himself from God when he becomes predisposed to explore his own path, and reject the Will of God for his life. It is during these times of separation that man suffers the ramifications of his poor choices.

Life’s circumstances become difficult when we cannot find a solution for our problems. When this happens, our difficult circumstances point us directly toward God.

We have often heard it said, *“Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.”* If we sincerely seek God and bring Him our repentant hearts and our deepest spiritual questions, He provides the answers through a renewed spiritual relationship with Him.

I. **THE PATIENCE TO WAIT** (Jeremiah 29:10-11)

¹⁰For thus saith the LORD, that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.

¹¹For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

Judah was caught in the web of oppression under the rule of Babylon. Jeremiah’s announcement of a long exile was countered by the false prophet, Hananiah, who foretold of Judah’s freedom within two years.

The people of Judah were eager to hear the good news foretold by Hananiah because they wanted desperately to return to their own homeland and rule. But

God proved Jeremiah to be the true prophet of Judah when He removed Hananiah from the face of the earth and exposed him as a false prophet by having Jeremiah predict the very month in which he would die (29:1).

Jeremiah again reinforces his prophetic message of a long exile for Judah. Judah would have to prepare for a long stay in Babylon; they would have to make the best of life in this foreign environment, plant gardens for sustenance, build houses, marry and have families, and settle down.

Instead of praying for Babylon's quick demise, the people were encouraged to pray for Babylon and seek its peace and prosperity.

Jeremiah delivered to Judah the difficult message that it was God's judgment that they would spend 70 years in exile. Only then would God fulfill His promise to restore the exiles to their land.

Question: **How does God use our enemies to transform us?**

II. **FAITH RENEWAL** (Jeremiah 29:12-14)

¹²Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you.

¹³And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

¹⁴And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive."

Judah's seventy-year exile was part of God's plan to give Judah hope and a bright future. God knew that suffering would draw them closer and cause them to rekindle their relationship with Him.

God's judgment through Jeremiah prompted the exiled nation of Judah to seek God wholeheartedly.

Life's circumstances became difficult for Judah when they could not find a solution for their problem of exile and oppression.

But their disappointment and depression over their situation gave Jeremiah the open door to point them directly toward God.

God yearns to give us a future and a hope. He has appropriated these things for every believer.

But we too have a role to play in receiving them.

Here in Jeremiah, God says that when we call upon Him, He will listen, and when we search for Him with all our hearts, we will find Him.

Reflection: **Have there been times when you felt exiled from God, as a believer?**

III. COVENANT RENEWAL (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

³¹Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

³²Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD:

³³But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

³⁴And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

God not only promised Judah a new beginning, but a New Covenant with His people.

This new covenant was expressly for the house of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and the house of Judah (the Southern Kingdom).

It would be unlike the covenant that God made with their forefathers during the time of the Exodus, because the people had broken that covenant. Their sinful hearts had forsaken the holy standard of conduct set by God.

Therefore a complete change was needed.

God's new covenant involved an internalization of His law.

God's law did not change, only the method by which the law was applied changed.

Under the New Covenant, God would put His law in their minds and on their hearts, not just on tablets of stone as He did in the wilderness (Exodus 34:1). *“I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts”*.

God's new covenant with Israel, the one that would be offered after 70 years of exile, would give Israel an inner ability to obey God's righteous standards and consequently enjoy His blessings.

This proclamation through Jeremiah was God's first promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

This was the first difference noted between the Old and New Covenants... that God would bestow His Holy Spirit upon all believers.

In Old Testament times the Holy Spirit did not dwell in all believers.

The second difference noted between the Old and New Covenants was God's provision for sin.

Under the Old Covenant, the sins of the people resulted in curses; but under this New Covenant, God would forgive Israel their iniquity and remember their sins no more.

When God *covenants* or agrees to do something, His commitment is built on a love that far exceeds human love.

God will sometimes even stick with the object of His affection sometimes in the face of outright rebellion or abject failure.

We see this demonstrated in the love He expressed to Judah, whose rebellion motivated God's New Covenant.

Paul described it to his spiritual son, Timothy, this way, *"If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself."* (2 Timothy 2:13)

Our New Covenant with God, through the shed blood of Christ for the remission of our sins, makes all believers recipients of His forgiveness.

The descendants of Judah would one day understand that under this New Covenant, God made provision for a Substitute...*Jesus Christ*, to pay the penalty required of man that the curses of the Old Covenant might be forever lifted.

Question: What are you doing to pass on your faith to the next generation?

CONCLUSION

We must discover God's covenant plan for our personal lives. Even those whose lives have been separated from God can repair the breach through repentance, and re-establish a new covenant with God.

The only way to rediscover God's purpose for our lives is to listen for His still, small voice, to search for Him with earnest, and when we find Him, to obey His commandments.

"Praise Ye the Lord. Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in His commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed." (Psalm 112:1-2)

When we take delight in serving the Lord and living according to His Will, we are assured that He will be faithful to preserve His end of the covenant with us, and we shall be blessed for generations to come.

God's family album reveals our identity. We know who we are because we know whose we are: we belong to God.

Those who have received His call, mercy and claim on their lives have committed ourselves to uphold the covenant agreement God has made with us.

And God will never break His end of the covenant promise.

His commitment is much like a parent's commitment to a child. God tells His people, *“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?”* (Isaiah 49:15).

God has made a covenant with Believers today that is just as firm as His covenant with Judah. He promises that He *“will put [his] law in their inward parts, and write it in [the] hearts”* of all who believe on His Son Jesus Christ.

His commitment is incomparable because He is without equal, and His unalterable and unbreakable covenant lasts for eternity.

LESSON 6 RESTORED

Background Scripture: Ezekiel 47:1-12

KEY VERSE: *“And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh.”* (Ezekiel 47:9)

INTRODUCTION

The term *restore* is an interesting one, in the original biblical translation. It meant *“to set a broken bone back in place”*.

If you’ve ever had a broken bone set, you know how painful and unpleasant it can be. But the resetting of the bone has to take place if the bone is going to grow properly.

Without the proper resetting, the brokenness will always be present.

There is always an element of pain with restoration. As the bone knits itself back to wholeness, the fracture fights the natural process until it finally gives in.

When a Christian is broken by sin, his carnal nature will fight against the need for mending. This is where the edification of the body becomes so critical.

It is the duty of the body of Christ to mend a fallen brother or sister until he or she is whole again.

Broken bones are always stronger after the mending. The experience of brokenness causes the bone to generate new strength against a possible future break.

It is the same with Christians.

Each time a Christian falls into sin and is successfully retrieved from the grips of Satan, he is more prepared for the next attack.

The process of falling (a popular song says, *“We fall down, we get up.”*) may seem like a handicap to the church, whose benchmarks are often set too high for the new Christian to achieve.

But the actual process of *“setting the brokenness”* of a struggling Christian, is designed not only to strengthen the fallen, but the witnessing congregation as well.

It is our duty to instill in novice or new Christians the importance of a healthy relationship with God that strengthens our spiritual bones against adversity and attack.

Like a soldier being prepared for battle, the church edifies the body in preparation for the world’s attacks.

When the soldier returns to us wounded, we repair the wound with the Word of God, and send the soldier back out into the battlefield with new and improved equipment.

No matter how awful or disappointing the breach, God is able to mend.

I. GOD’S LIFE-GIVING POWER AND PRESENCE Ezekiel 47:1-6

1 “Afterward He brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward: for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar.

2 Then brought He me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the utter gate by the way that looketh eastward; and, behold, there ran out waters on the right side.

3 And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the waters were to the ankles.

4 Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters were to the loins.

5 Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.

6 And he said unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen this? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river.”

Many Bible readers have erroneously suggested that the life-giving river in Ezekiel’s vision refers only to the symbolism of God’s blessings that flow from His presence.

While symbolism plays an important role in the Book of Ezekiel, the vision of the restoration of Israel in Chapter 47 is meant to be taken literally. There is nothing in the passage to suggest that Ezekiel had anything in mind other than a literal river.

The benefits of a river existence are apparent to the farmer. Until man’s modern irrigation techniques were developed, no farm could survive without a water source. The river provides him with an endless source of life-giving water that will sustain him and his crops. Its banks overflow with new growth and seasonal sustenance.

This is the focus of Ezekiel’s river vision. God’s power and presence are exemplified in the river’s ability to restore a barren and destitute land.

The prophet Joel mentioned this same river (Joel 3:18), and Zechariah spoke of it after Israel returned from Babylonian captivity (Zechariah 14:8).

This prophecy will take place in the Millennium, and the river will be an ever-present reminder of God’s presence and blessing upon Israel.

The Psalmist speaks of God’s river city in Chapter 46:4-5.

It reads: *“There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High.*

[5] God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.

[6] The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted.

[7] The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

Defense and deliverance are the stuff that men shout about. Victories cause our souls to well up with songs of celebration.

Psalm 46 is such a song. It was most probably written to celebrate Israel's victory over the Assyrians, when they came down *"like a wolf on the fold"* and Sennacherib and all his army were swept into swift destruction by the blast of the breath of God's nostrils.

Consider this river by which the Psalmist says this city is planted. It is a symbol of great joy and truth. Its significance is derived from the geographical peculiarity of Jerusalem.

Of all the great cities, Jerusalem alone had no broad river. One little perennial stream or rill of living water was all it had.

But Siloam, as it was called, was mightier and more blessed for God's city dwellers than the Euphrates, Nile and Tigris combined.

Standing by that stream, you can envision the Psalmist looking over the plain eastward, and remembering the mighty forces that came against them, symbolized by the breadth and depth and swiftness of the great river upon which Nineveh sat like a queen.

Then he considers the little tiny thread of living water that flows past the base of the rock upon which the temple is perched. It seems small and inconspicuous – nothing compared to the dash of the waves and rise of the floods of those mighty secular empires.

But still, *"There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God."*

The Psalmist knows that these waters shall never fail. This tiny river will one day be the great river that feeds Israel's restored nation.

While Ezekiel's prophecy brought great comfort to Israel, it should do the same for the 21st century Christian, because it demonstrates God's presence in the life of His people.

This river, which will overpower the forces of nature and turn a desert wasteland into an Eden, will be a visual display of God's threefold character: 1) **HIS OMNIPRESENCE** [God is everywhere, always!] (*"For the LORD will not forsake His people for His great name's sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you His people."* – 1 Samuel 12:22);

2) **HIS OMNIPOTENCE** [God is all-powerful] (*"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."* Matthew 28:19);

And 3) **HIS OMNISCIENCE** [God is all-knowing] (*"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."* Revelations 1:8).

Question: What should our response be when God's blessings overflow in our lives?

II. GOD'S HEALING AND PROVISION (Ezekiel 47:7-12)

7 Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other.

8 Then said he unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed.

9 And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh. 10 And it shall come to pass, that the fishers shall stand upon it from Engedi even unto Eneglaim; they shall be a place to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many.

11 But the miry places thereof and the marshes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt.

12 And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.

Notice that where the river flows, everything will live. Fishermen will crowd the shores to catch all manner of fish from this miraculous source of supply.

The trees on the riverbanks will produce an abundance of fruit year-round.

This prophecy paints the picture of a completely revived and restored nation.

This complete restoration of Israel will be a great end-time miracle, as Israel is brought back to her former state, and to spiritual health.

God's redemption and restoration represents a complete makeover. But it should come as no surprise because God's healing and provision are *always* complete. God's very character will not permit Him to leave mankind wanting and destitute, without hope.

If we are to believe in Ezekiel's prophetic promise of a nation blooming in the desert, we must first accept a strong belief in miracles.

Belief in miracles is indispensable to our understanding of the Living God, and to our trust in His ability to save our souls.

Miracles provide us with a special exhibition of God's supernatural power.

What is a **MIRACLE**?

Webster defines a miracle as *“an event or effect in the physical world deviating from the known laws of nature, or transcending our knowledge of these laws; an extraordinary anomalous, or abnormal event brought about by super-human agency.”*

Biblically speaking, a miracle is defined as *a work wrought by a Divine power for a Divine purpose by means beyond the reach of man.*

The general idea is that it is something wonderful or unusual. It can be an event, an experience, or a discovery – so strange as to awaken in man the feeling of awe.

Bible miracles often display the reversal of nature's own course, as in this promise for Israel.

Scientists make the argument that the laws of nature are self-existent and uncaused, and that there cannot be any deviation from them.

But if these laws were designed by a Supreme Will, surely this Will has the power to introduce or interpose a new agency into them.

God created nature, and He therefore has the power to control it, and reverse its previously assigned patterns.

The Bible not only exalts God above nature, but it also brings Him into direct relation to nature, so that everything is filled by Him.

God dwells in nature as the omnipresent, as well as the omnipotent, God. He is the life of all that lives; the Spirit of all spirits.

As He is all in all, so is all in Him. He transcends nature (Psalm 90:2); He is immanent in nature (Ephesians 1:11); He continually exercises His power before our blinded eyes.

Nature has therefore been referred to as God's Braille for a blind humanity.

If, as Christians, we can take the whole Bible in our hands, and say without fear or hesitation that we hold the revealed Word of God handed down, without essential loss, from generation to generation throughout the centuries;

If we accept the Bible as God's pure and unadulterated Word, then we can trust God to fulfill this promise to Israel because the Bible has already recorded countless historical examples of God's miraculous power.

His very work of grace and salvation is a miracle, for it requires the exercise of a Supernatural Power who can heal and cast out demons, and restore a man to his original perfect form.

Reflection: What part of the Word of God has been the hardest for you to accept as truth?

Restoration is the visible evidence of God's miraculous presence in the life of a believer.

There are six steps to a person's restoration:

- 1) The person must be led to recognize his failure;
- 2) The person must acknowledge responsibility for his sin;
- 3) The person must be led to repent;
- 4) The person must understand the necessity of restitution;
- 5) The person who is caught in sin must be led to receive the message God wants to teach him through his failure;
- 6) The person must be led to respond to God's chastisement with gratitude.

The spirit in which we restore a fallen brother or sister is of vital importance to the Body of Christ. We must avoid spiritual bandages that only cover up the problem.

Real restoration is often a long and painful process, and must be done with a spirit of humility and love.

CONCLUSION

Israel looked forward to a newly restored nation of plenty, fed by a life-giving river.

But to the New Covenant believer, Christ is our "River" from which flows our life-giving source of our redemptive supply.

We are replenished daily by His grace, His mercy, and His Holy Spirit.

Christ's blood, which has flowed for centuries, and will continue to flow as the only source for redemption and restoration, is the fountain that turns our sinful life's wasteland into a place of promise and hope of Eternal Life.

