

HEBREWS 11:32-40

COMMENDED FOR THEIR FAITH

“What more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

“And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”¹

“All these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised.” When the writer speaks of “All these,” he includes multiple heroes of the Faith—Patriarchs, Judges, Kings and Prophets. Thought it may be difficult for us to relate to them, the heroes of the Faith are not always recognised as mighty at the time they are carrying out their ministry. After the fact, religious people may honour the memory of those blessed individuals who actually accomplished something in the Name of the Master.

You will recall that Jesus sternly censured the religious leaders of His day when He said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets” [MATTHEW 23:29-31]. Distance from the service rendered permits a more reasoned assessment of the labour provided.

Humbling though it is, we are compelled to confess that we are fallen creatures. Consequently, the most powerful of saints, the most conscientious servant of the Living God, the most blessed among the servants of God, will inevitably be discovered at last to be but a mortal. Though an individual may appear to have succeeded admirably in service to the cause of Christ, that one is nevertheless susceptible to error and will have exhibited foibles that did not honour Him whom we call Master.

This the unspoken message behind Jesus’ words spoken to His disciples on one occasion. “Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’” [LUKE 17:7-10]. Focus on the appropriate response given by a servant. “We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.”

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No one among us has anything of which he or she may boast. We acknowledge that we are recipients of divine grace. If a church is recognised for advancing the Kingdom of God, it will have done so by God's grace. If a congregation appears to be on the decline, the parishioners have nevertheless benefitted from God's grace. It is only when we attempt to impose human reckoning on the work to which we are called that we begin to think more highly of ourselves than we should. When we adopt God's view of matters, we realise that He has worked through multiple individuals over time to accomplish His divine plan. No man can claim to have accomplished anything through his own effort—it is all of grace.

I urge the people of God to see that they have a vital part in the continuum of the Faith. We stand in a lineage stretching back to the earliest days of the Gospel and continuing forward until that glorious day when the Master shall return. Some will have ultimately been recognised for great accomplishment in the work of the Kingdom. Others will have lived without recognition, nor will they be long remembered by those who follow in the Faith. What is essential is that each has served faithfully, fulfilling the tasks assigned by the Master. We see this truth in the text before us today.

GOD'S CRITERION FOR COMMENDATION — “All these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.” It is not wise to attempt to judge what is accomplished by those who serve the Master. Paul warns Christians, “Who are you to pass judgement on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand” [ROMANS 14:4].

I want to be practical in addressing each one hearing this message. The writer of this letter provides a list of men and women who were unquestionably great in the sight of God. Let's review these stalwarts of the Faith. The writer begins with *Abel* [HEBREWS 11:4]. We don't often think of Abel as one of the stalwarts; but he stood for God, offering what the writer calls a “more acceptable sacrifice” than that offered by his brother. His offering was, in the sight of God, a bold stance for righteousness at a time when his brother was offering “just enough.”

The writer continues by naming *Enoch*, who was spared death, having walked with God [HEBREWS 11:5]. Again, this man is commended for his faith. He then recalls *Noah*, remembering his act of faith demonstrated through building an ark [HEBREWS 11:7]. He faithfully preached, warning his generation of pending judgement. No one would have spoken of Noah as successful in his preaching ministry! In one hundred twenty years, Noah had but seven converts—his wife, his three sons and their wives [see GENESIS 7:13; 2 PETER 2:5]; and one of those converts proved to be less than godly in his conduct [see GENESIS 9:22-25]!

The writer then turns attention to *Abraham* and his wife *Sarah*. Abraham did follow God's call, though not perfectly; and Sarah had a difficult time believing God's promise [HEBREWS 11:8-12, 17-19]. The writer does not gloss over Abraham's failures, remembering instead that he has become the father of the faithful. Just so, our failures will be many; but our successes will be what are remembered before God. Thus, the writer comments, “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city” [HEBREWS 11:13-16].

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The writer continues by recalling *Isaac, Jacob* and *Joseph* [HEBREWS 11:20-22] before turning attention to *Moses* [HEBREWS 11:23-28]. Each of these individuals was denoted for his faith and not for his failures. Their failures were many and the results of acting on faith may have appeared to be transient; nevertheless, their faith produced permanent results that would bless the people of God and glorify the Lord their God. Though it wasn't at all evident at the time, Moses is denoted as one who "endured as seeing Him who is invisible" [HEBREWS 11:27].

The writer then refocuses the readers' attention on the impact arising from the faith of this one man. Moses stood almost alone in turning a nation of slaves into a nation created for the glory of God. Following Moses, numerous individuals who are essentially incidental to the history of the faithful participate in advancing the cause of righteousness. So, the writer pens, "By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith *Rahab* the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies" [HEBREWS 11:29-31].

We read these accounts thinking that Moses was the one showing faith in leading the people across the Red Sea! However, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, the writer says that the people who crossed were the ones exercising faith. In the view of God's Spirit it was the faith of *all* those marching around Jericho who brought down the walls.

At last, we come to the verses that are the focus of our study today. "What more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of *Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah*, of *David* and *Samuel* and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth" [HEBREWS 11:32-38].

The writer names a few minor participants before naming David and Samuel. We may be confused that this writer would ask us to consider Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah in the same league as David and Samuel; our inclination is to shout out, "There's no comparison." Having given the individuals named, the writer simply invites us to think of "the prophets" before speaking of events, many of which are relatively minor to the greater story of the Faith. However, none of the events he listed were minor to those who endured those experiences. Being tortured, enduring restrictions, suffering mocking and flogging, being chained or imprisoned are not minor events for those experiencing those dreadful deeds. Perhaps some of us can relate to being deprived of comforts, though I doubt that any of us have ever been compelled to wander about in skins of sheep and goats. Neither can many of us speak with authority of being destitute, afflicted or mistreated. Yet, such exploits are presented as evidence of faith in the lives of those for whom these experiences were real.

Few of us have ever conquered kingdoms, though we may struggle to conquer our desires, ruling over our lives. We are not often called to be mighty in war, though we do engage in spiritual warfare as we pray for God's glory and seek the good of His people. We may not have put enemies to flight, but we have no idea how many enemies of God have been rebuked by righteous lives and by the testimony of grace. These is a truth here that we dare not ignore.

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When we consider the whole of this chapter, a truth unfolds before our eyes. God knows that those named in this chapter had failures in their lives—significant failures! Our failures are not remembered before God; the walk of faith is remembered. We will not have our losses thrown into our faces throughout eternity; we will rejoice in all that has glorified the Lord Christ. Let me show you that truth by referring to one of the earliest letters from the pen of the Apostle to have been included in the canon of Scripture. The passage is found in the opening words of the Second Thessalonian Letter. “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

“This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” [2 THESSALONIANS 1:3-12].

Walk back through the Apostle’s words, noting what is yet to be. Remember, Paul is writing a congregation that is small, a church that is hard-pressed by the society in which they served. Despite the opposition they were experiencing, Paul noted that their faith was growing! Not only was their faith growing, but they were growing in love for one another. The growth in faith and love was sufficiently noteworthy that the Apostle boasted about them to the churches as he extended the boundaries of the eternal Kingdom!

Take especial note that the suffering of these saints, despite service that many would have doubtless considered insignificant, will result in honour and glory. When Jesus comes—you do believe that our Master is coming again! When Jesus comes to receive His own people, He will be glorified in His saints and marvelled at among all who have believed. That in itself is great encouragement. However, the Apostle continues by noting that through faithful service, regardless of how insignificant the world may deem that service, Christ will be glorified in them and they will be glorified in Him. This is all of grace. Now apply this truth to our own service. Regardless of the estimate of those about us—whether the lost, whether false brothers, whether weaker brothers, whether untaught brothers—we who are faithful in our service to the Master will be glorified in Him and He will be glorified in us!

The criterion for the divine assessment of our labours is always determined by whether *we are commended through our faith*. *Whether we have stayed at the work* is the essential criterion. Underscore that the important issue is not whether we have met the standard of this dying world. How long did Gideon’s deliverance last? How permanent was the deliverance that Barak wrought (though it was actually Deborah who served as Judge and Jael who slew Sisera)? Jephthah’s service was marred by a glaring lack of character. Yet, God used each of these individuals to bring glory to His Name, always moving Israel along the path leading to the day when the Anointed One would come to deliver all who look to Him in faith.

GOD’S TIMING FOR CONFERRING HONOUR — “All these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.” It is human nature to want recognition in timely manner. However, what is timely in light of eternity and what we consider timely seldom intersect—the concepts may not even approach asymptotically.

I would not encourage any among us to ignore speaking words of commendation to one another. We need to build one another, encourage one another, strengthen one another. That is the purpose for the various ministries each has received. Instructing the saints in Corinth concerning the gifts distributed by the Spirit of God, Paul affirms, “The one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:3]. This threefold ministry is the expected outgrowth of serving together as the community of faith.

To the Thessalonian Christians, the Apostle sought to turn their attention from this moment called “Now” to focus on what will shortly be revealed to believers. Thus, he wrote, “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.” Then, with spiritual wisdom born of obedience to the Lord who gives us His Word, Paul wrote, “Therefore encourage one another with these words” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18].

To ensure that we understand that this is the essential outgrowth of our service together, recall that the Apostle concluded his first missive to these same saints by reminding them of the impact arising from their work faithfully performed in the midst of a dark and dreary world. The Apostle wrote, “Concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11].

This is the reason I insist to the people of God that we must cease living as the world does—demanding fealty to our petty and paltry ideas, insisting that others bend to our will, treating the assembly as a private fiefdom; rather, we are responsible to build one another in this most holy faith, encouraging one another and comforting one another. This is the import of the closing words of the Second Letter to the Christians in Corinth. “Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you” [2 CORINTHIANS 13:11].

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I have said these things to urge each of us always to encourage our fellow believers. Take note of the work performed to make the facilities comfortable—we who worship here are the beneficiaries. Speak a word of gratitude for the service we have received. Take note of the labours of saints who preceded us in this place, thanking them for their faithful service. Their ministry laid a foundation for what is done today, and we are the beneficiaries. So many acts are performed that are taken for granted during any given week. Combined, all these little acts ensure that we worship without distraction and ensure that those who join us are able to focus on the important work of building the believers. Think of the provision of music, the preparation of coffee and tea, cleaning the facilities, clearing the snow, printing the bulletin, decorating the auditorium where we meet, caring for routine maintenance, and the list could continue. What is essential is that we recognise that others have willingly accepted responsibility to do these tasks so that together we can engage in the great work of worshipping the Risen Saviour.

However, even though no one should ever take note of your labours, remember that you are performing your work to the glory of God and not for the accolades of man. Remember the admonition, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ” [COLOSSIANS 3:23, 24].

Though the context in the next passage speaks of service rendered by bondservants, the words nevertheless are applicable to each of us in our service to God. Paul admonishes, “Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free” [EPHESIANS 6:5-8].

Each Christian can anticipate recognition at the Master’s return. None will be overlooked, none will be forgotten. We have this promise, “If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward” [1 CORINTHIANS 3:14]. The foundation in question is Jesus Christ. If you seek His glory, if you strive to honour Him, if you endeavour to advance His cause, He will remember you. It will not be a case of others being acknowledged while you are ignored. Together all the saints of God will be rewarded at His return. Surely this is the intent of the Apostle’s teaching when he writes, “Each will receive his wages according to his labour” [1 CORINTHIANS 3:8b].

As the Revelator concluded writing the Apocalypse, the angel with whom he spoke admonished him, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy contained in this book, because the time is near. The evildoer must continue to do evil, and the one who is morally filthy must continue to be filthy. The one who is righteous must continue to act righteously, and the one who is holy must continue to be holy.’

“(Look! I am coming soon,
and my reward is with me to pay each one according to what he has done!”²

[REVELATION 22:10-12]

In the days of the Great Tribulation, as God pours out His awful judgements, the saints assembled in Heaven are seen worshipping; and as they worship they are saying,

² Biblical Studies Press, **The NET Bible First Edition, NET Bible**, (Biblical Studies Press, 2005)

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“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
 who is and who was,
for you have taken your great power
 and begun to reign.
The nations raged,
 but your wrath came,
and the time for the dead to be judged,
 and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints,
 and those who fear your name,
both small and great,
 and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.”

[REVELATION 11:17, 18]

Take note that before the throne of the True and Living God the redeemed are worshipping because it means that He now is rewarding His servants. Knowing that God is faithful, that He will do what He says He will do, causes His people to rejoice. When we are translated into the presence of our God, we shall witness the fulfilment of His promise to reward His servants! His servants include the prophets and saints, just as we would anticipate; but notice that His servants also include “Those who fear [His] Name, both small and great!” ***Only together are all the redeemed rewarded.*** There are no inferior saints before the throne of God!

I have often thought about these things. We sometimes are inclined to say that those who have preceded us in the Faith are now enjoying their rewards while we must look to the future. I’m not so certain about that. Throughout the Word is the constant refrain that only together are the people of God rewarded. The emphasis is upon equality—no one gains precedence over another. God is just; He treats us equitably, honouring each alike.

I consider that as I enter into the presence of my King, I shall be able to look to my left and see Paul, and Timothy, and Luke together with a great host of saints entering into eternity at the same moment that I am entering. Looking to my right, I shall see others who are now serving the Master, saints who have diligently longed for His return while faithfully serving. Surveying this vast throng, I shall see my beloved granddad who faithfully declared the Word of God in small communities throughout the lead mining regions of my natal state. Entering into glory with all the saints I shall see my dad who stood firm in the Faith, beating out a rhythm sharpening ploughshares while singing the great hymns of the Faith. Together, we shall be gathered to the Master; and together we shall receive the promised rewards. What else can the words of our text mean other than this? Note that the Spirit of God clearly says of what shall be, “Apart from us they should not be made perfect?”

GOD’S PURPOSE IN HONOURING HIS FAITHFUL ONES — “All these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.” God inhabits eternity; and though we are being fitted for eternity, for this moment we are bounded by time. We measure our lives by the transit of the planets through the heavens, calculating the number of circuits about the sun we have endured. We speak of a birthday, knowing that we are moving inexorably toward a final date that will be etched on our tombstone. Yet, from the time we came to faith in the Living Son of God, we have experienced a continual transformation in preparation for eternity.

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At last we shall be gathered together with all the redeemed of God; there, we will receive “something better,” that something which is so wonderful that only when all the redeemed have at last been gathered together can it be revealed. Are we able to discover what that “something better” is? Is it possible to learn now what God has provided for those who love Him?

Reviewing this chapter, we note that Enoch walked with God, providing encouragement to all people that God “rewards those who seek Him” [**HEBREWS 11:6b**]. This is the first hint of what is held in reserve for God’s holy people.

Then, we are asked to remember Abraham and what he anticipated. The writer reminds us, “He was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” [**HEBREWS 11:10**]. Abraham looked for a heavenly city—the city of God. However, what he anticipated was greater than a mere city—together with all who have been named to this point, Abraham was looking for “a homeland.” These stalwarts of the Faith are said to have anticipated “a better country,” a country that is heavenly. They knew they were not fitted to live on this earth; they were being fitted for Heaven itself. This is what is stated when the writer says, “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city” [**HEBREWS 11:13-16**].

We are coming nearer to an understanding what the “something better” can be. God has promised to give to those who love Him something so great that it equips His saints to perform mighty deeds. When called to do so, they will conquer kingdoms, enforce justice, obtain promises, stop the mouths of lions, quench the power of fire, escape the edge of the sword, create strength out of weakness, become mighty in war and put foreign armies to flight! That which God has promised is so great that those who live in anticipation of God’s reward are enabled to endure unthinkable evil. “The world is not worthy” of saints such as these who serve the Lord!

I need only read a little further before I discover how to bring together all the threads that have hinted at what God is providing. “You have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, ‘If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.’ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I tremble with fear.’ But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

“See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’ This phrase, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” [**HEBREWS 12:18-29**].

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The appropriate response of those who are receiving such a gift is to give thanks, thus offering worship pleasing to God in devotion and awe. When we realise what God has planned for His people, we worship. How tragically incomprehensible are our puerile efforts to worship now. For too many, worship consists of a stupefying, trance inducing liturgy that has become so familiar that we move through the motions without thought. However, the writer informs us that “Our God is a consuming fire!” Focus on that thought of God’s nature!

Worshippers coming into the presence of the Living God are expected to engage Him who causes us to burn with passion. Honestly, when did we last burn with passion? When did we last come into the house of God, so filled with expectation that we knew that when we met Him in worship our hearts spontaneously burst into flame? Such expectation grabs the heart of all who worship the Living God. Why does the prospect of eternal worship induce somnolence in so many? Perhaps they have never worshipped—truly worshipped? For when we worship our hearts inevitably burn with holy fire and we are lost in the joy of His presence.

I have often spoken of the account of two disciples who met the Risen Christ and the impact that resulted from that meeting. These men were not expecting His presence, but He graciously joined them as they walked toward the tiny village of Emmaus. Their spirits were downcast; they were consumed with a strange admixture of grief and consternation. The One whom they had followed had been seized by the religious leaders; and after a hurried trial He had been crucified. Just this morning, some women whom they knew and respected had gone to the tomb hoping to attend to His body. The women had rushed back to where many of His disciples were gathered; they excitedly brought a wild report that the tomb in which He had been buried was empty. Some of the disciples had rushed to the tomb to verify the report and they had indeed found the tomb empty! No wonder they were bewildered!

As the two men walked, heads down and speaking softly, a silent traveller matched their pace, walking beside them. He inquired what they were discussing. Surely, the man who had joined them was a stranger to the area, so they began to tell him about all the events of the week. Having unburdened their hearts, the stranger responded with a gentle rebuke. He had listened to their sad recitation of events; but now He turned their attention to what was written. “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken” He began! “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory” [LUKE 24:25, 26]? Then, beginning with the writings of Moses the stranger began deliberately to lead them through the Scriptures, demonstrating the Messiah on every page.

The two travellers were moved by this explanation of the Scriptures and since the day was almost spent they invited the wayfarer to spend the night. The stranger consented to their request and entered into the house. The two men gathered the foodstuff for a humble meal. The stranger, now their guest, took the bread, blessed it and broke it. When He did this, their eyes were opened, their understanding was excited and they realised that Jesus had been walking with them throughout the journey. As suddenly as they realised who He was He was taken from their sight. The men began to speak excitedly to one another, “Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures” [LUKE 24:13-32]?

If there is no anticipation when we worship, it is because we are not expecting the presence of the Master! If when we have recited our liturgy there is no burning love motivating worship, it is because we have not worshipped! For when we worship, we meet the Risen Son of God; and we cannot help but be moved with joy and excitement when we meet Him. Worship touches the heart of the worshipper causing that one to be lost in admiration, marvelling at the grace and glory of the One worshipped and rejoicing in the knowledge of His acceptance!

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Worship, when we are at last gathered with all the redeemed of the ages before His throne, shall move us in a manner that we have only glimpsed briefly and transiently in this life! Because our God is infinite in grace and glory, we will never plumb the depths of love, of grace, of power, of might, of majesty! We will never exhaust the experience of discovering God when we worship before His throne with the saints. Worship, for the believer, will be eternally fulfilling, stimulating each of us in ways that cannot be imagined now. At last, the purpose in the honour God shall confer on His beloved saints is that we may enjoy Him forever. God has given us life, liberty and access to His throne. He has given us an eternal home. Ultimately, He gives us His very self.

I weep when I think of deluded people. They live without thought of God, though they perform sterile rites with boring monotony imagining that such acts assure them a place in the heavenly kingdom. On the authority of God's Word, I insist that only those who are born from above shall ever see God. How dreadful is the warning Jesus spoke. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'"

[**MATTHEW 7:21-23**].

There is life in Him. He gave His life as a sacrifice because of your weakened condition. He offers you the forgiveness of sin, life and freedom to be all that you were created to be. Believe this message and receive the gift of life that is found only in Him. Do it now. Amen.