



# The Sharon Star

## I Am The Resurrection and Life

By P.J. Mathew

"I am the Resurrection and Life" The Son of God brings out this powerful message on the occasion of Lazarus' death. Resurrection according to Webster's dictionary "A rising again from the dead"; "the stag of those who have risen from the dead"; "a new and a higher idea of immortality or spiritual existence". Looking into the background of this remarkable statement. Jesus was delayed by three days to reach Bethany where Lazarus and his family lived. Jesus was a close friend of this family. Martha and Mary the sisters of Lazarus were very hospitable to Jesus. Jesus loved this family very dearly. One day a tragedy struck this family; their younger brother died suddenly. The only one in whom this family could call upon was Jesus. But Jesus was away from Bethany at that time. Mary and Mary were very disappointed. They knew that if Jesus were there he would have performed a miracle that their brother would not have died. Finally, when Jesus arrived Martha said to him "Lord if you had been here, my brother would never have died. And I know that even now, I know that God will give you whatever you ask from him." Jesus replied to her "Your brother will rise again" Martha said to him "I know, that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." "I myself am the Resurrection and Life." Jesus told her, "The man who believes in me will live even though he dies, and any one who is alive and believes in me will never die at all. Can

you believe that?" "Yes, Lord," replied Martha. "I do believe that you are Christ, the son of God, the one who was to come into the world." "I am convinced that you are God's Anointed one, the Soil of God, the one who is to come into the world" John 11:2) 1-28 (J.B. Phillips translation).

When Martha met Jesus her heart spoke through her lips. This is one of the most human speeches in all the Bible, for Martha spoke half with reproach and half with faith that nothing could shake. The first half presents her frustration and disappointment saying "If you had been there my brother would not have died, thus making Jesus partly reprehensible. The second part is undoubtedly an unshakable faith stemming from her heart, acknowledging the fact that, through Jesus all things are possible. Martha was very disappointed to see that her master Jesus was not there at the critical hour of their need. Yet, when he came, she revives her faith believing that Jesus would turn away the tragedy. Jesus said to her "your brother will rise again" The Jews believed that the dead would rise again on the last day. Martha also knew that. But Jesus referred to the instantaneous resurrection of Lazarus when he spoke.

As the mourners and visitors watched, Jesus walks to the tomb of Lazarus. It was a cave, and a stone lay in front of it. Jesus said "Take ye away the stone" What an authority!" Lazarus had been dead for four days. However, Martha was very skeptical of how

Jesus was going to handle that situation. Her own reasoning overshadowed her belief in the power of the resurrection. She did not realize that transforming power of the Lord over the decaying body of her brother. Jesus had to admonish her saying, "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the Glory of God?" John 11:40 K.IV. In Ezekiel 37:1 "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the midst of thee valley which was full of bones." KJV. It is certainly not the nicest place one wants to be. But God had a tremendous ministry in the valley of the dry bones for Ezekiel. As he prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone, and as he looked the sinews (tendons) and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath. He prophesied again and breath entered them; they came to live and stood up on their feet - a vast army." Then he said unto me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off." Therefore prophesy and say to them: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them: I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle

you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord." Ezekiel 37: 11-14. NIV. What a remarkable restoration! God showed Ezekiel the hopelessness and miserable condition of the nation of Israel in exile. When the people were in captivity having lost their faith and hope, God spoke through Ezekiel about the glorious inheritance of his people. Glory to God! Our Lord is able to raise us from the dust of the earth to become his great army.

The way of the Lord is different from our way. We always want the Lord to work in our design. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" Isaiah 55:7-8. Today's world that we live in is full of human idealism. Such ideals of the world rationalize us in such a way that we assume that our plans are God's plans. Well, as long as the Holy Spirit guides us, He will not allow us to do any thing that is outside the will of God. We should be very vigilant and careful to discern the things of the world so that it will not interfere with our walk with the Lord. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the father is not in him" 1 John 1: 15 Martha and Mary want their brother to be alive, but Jesus wanted them to grasp the power of His Resurrection and the power of His Life. His intent was not limited just to bring Lazarus back to life. Our Lord Jesus performed miracles, fed the hungry, healed the sick, cast the demons, and raised the dead. No doubt such a ministry had temporal benefits but Jesus did every one of them with a deep spiritual implication. Through each of the miracles, Jesus manifested to the world that the Kingdom of God has come near to be possessed by the children of God. In one occasion the Pharisees asked Jesus "When the kingdom of God should come", he answered them and said, "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, Lo there! behold the Kingdom of God is within you" Luke 17:20-21. Jesus said to the disciples "when you heal the sick say to them "The Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you" Luke 10:9.

In the present move of the spirit of God, we have been instructed to focus on the things of now and not just of the future. God has been unfolding His truth to us more clearly in the present times. Quite often, we are very positive of the future blessings but unsure of the present accessible heritage through our Lord Jesus Christ. "For I am a minister of the Church by divine commission, a commission granted to me for your benefit, and for a special purpose, that I might fully declare God's word; that sacred mystery which up till now has been hidden in every age and every generation, but which is now as clear as daylight to those who love God. They are those to whom God has planned to give a vision of the wonder and splendor of his secret plan for the nations. And the secret is simply this: Christ in YOU bringing with him the hope of all the glorious things to come" Colossians 1:25-27. J.B. Phillips. "What a glorious blessing!" The Christ in you now, the words of Christ. the miracles of Christ, the resurrection of Christ is to be believed as the working power of Christ operating in you right now. Although Martha was as shaken at first, her hope was still alive. She believed that Jesus was the Resurrection and Life. In her own words "I do believe that you are Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into the world" John portrays the life giving power of Jesus through the illustration of Lazarus in a powerful way. Jesus asked them "Where have you laid him?" "Lord come and see," they replied, and at this Jesus himself wept. John 11:34-35 J.B. Phillips. Jesus was compassionate and shared the grief with the family. It may sound paradoxical to think that the God of the universe, creator of all, is weeping with the mourners. That is our Lord who dwells in us and understands our feelings. Whenever a problem or a tragedy challenges you, remember you are not alone. When you are no longer able to walk, He will carry you on his shoulders. "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young." Isaiah 40:11.

Jesus called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out. What a spectacle and a miracle! At the voice of the creator, Lazarus who had been dead for four days and buried responds and comes out of the

tomb. Praise the Lord! Even the people who gathered there could not have believed their eyes. They have seen the blind receive their sight, lepers being healed, palsy being cured, but not someone dead rising from the grave. "Yes, I assure you that a time is coming, in fact it has already come, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who have heard it will live! For just as the Father has life in himself, so by the Father's gift. the Son has also life in himself" John 5:25-26 (J.B. Phillip's translation). The voice of the life giver awakens the lifeless body. When you are lifeless in your walk with the Lord, try to be attentive to his sweet voice calling you, "My son", my daughter, this is my way." The loving voice of my master turns you and me around to follow him. "My sheep will hear my voice." "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out of the fold, and when he has brought all his own flock outside, he goes in front of them himself and the sheep follow him because they know his voice." John 10:4-5 J.B. Phillips.

This miracle of raising Lazarus to life inspired some to believe in Jesus. Some others were filled with bitterness, fear and uncertainty and they planned to kill him. John 11:52. The words of Jesus brought life, liberty, and peace to those who believed in him: Even today, the same life flowing words of Jesus can bring life, freedom and redemption to us. Hallelujah!

Through this miracle Jesus also revealed his own death and resurrection. In the gospel of John chapter 11:48-50. "But one of them, Caiaphas, who was the High Priest that year, addressed the meeting: you plainly don't understand what is involved here. You do not realize that it would be a good thing for us if one man should die for the sake of the people instead of the whole nation being destroyed." (He did not make this remark on his own initiative but, since he was the High Priest of that year, he was in fact inspired to say that Jesus was going to die for the nation's sake - and in fact not for that nation only, but to bring together into one family all the children of God scattered throughout the world) (J.B. Phillips translation).

"For I passed on to you - as essential, the message I had myself received - that Christ died for our sins, as the scriptures said he would: that he was buried and rose again on the third day,

again as the scriptures foretold. He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve, and subsequently he was seen simultaneously by over five hundred Christians, of whom the majority are still alive, though some have since died. He was then seen by James, then by all the messengers." 1 Corinthians 15:3-7.

The death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus is real and it is not a fiction. All the attempts of the scholars to disprove the resurrection of Jesus are futile and fallacious. According to the scriptures "He died for our sins, was buried and rose again on the third day". Why is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ so important to us? Through Resurrection and ascension, Jesus overcame the limitations of the body and made his presence ubiquitous. He did not ascend up on high to leave the world but to fill the world with his presence. When Jesus was on the earth, he could only be in one place at one time. He was under all the limitations of the body: but when he laid his body aside and returned to glory, he was liberated from the limitation of the body and was able to be everywhere in all the world through his Spirit. Thus the ascension of Christ is not a Christ-deserted world but a Christ-filled world.

"He is both the first principle and the upholding principle of the whole scheme of creation. And now he is the head of the Body, which is the Church. He is the Beginning, the first to be born from the dead which gives him preeminence over all things. It was in him that the full nature of God chose to live, and through him God planned to reconcile to his only person everything on earth and everything in Heaven, making peace by virtue of Christ's death on the cross." Colossians 2: 17-20 J.B. Phillips. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have also become partakers of His resurrected life. "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." Romans 8:11 KJV.

"Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace are ye saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Je-

sus." Ephesians 2:6-7. Paul the apostle, describes in his letter to the Philippians, how he wants to attain the power of that resurrection of Christ. "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death. If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before; I press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" Philippians 3:10-14 (KJV)

The power of Resurrection of Jesus has to be attained. It is not a mere historical fact but a personal experience of each believer. We need to ascend to the heavenlies to partake of the ascension gifts of Jesus Christ. When Jesus ascended he gave gifts unto men. In Psalms 68:18 we read "Thou hast ascended on high, thou has led captivity captive: thou has received gifts for men" Ephesians 4:7-8 "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he with, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. In the Old Testament the conquering king demanded and received gifts from men". But in the New Testament conqueror the Christ offers and gives gifts unto men. That is the essential difference between the two Testaments. In the Old Testament a jealous God insists on tribute from men; in the New Testament, a loving God pours out his love to men. That indeed is the good news!"

Through the resurrection of Jesus we have received the gifts of ministries "And he gave some, apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Ephesians 4:11-12.

The gift of the five fold ministries was given to the body of Christ for the edification, perfection and even to par-

take of the fullness of Christ. Paul writes to the Ephesians "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head even Christ" Ephesians 4:12. The greatest challenge for a believer is to grow up to that higher level. The scriptures show us that we should come forth not only in the resurrection but also to ascend into heavenly realms while walking on this earthly sod. First of all if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection. In Colossians 3:1-2 "If you are raised up with Christ, reach out for the highest gifts of heaven, where Christ reigns in power. Be concerned with the heavenly things, not with the passing things of earth" (J.B. Phillips). We are constantly reminded to seek the things of heaven. We are citizens of Heaven. Although we still live in these earthen vessels, we have greater hope and a better country. Abraham lived in the tents, but his eyes were looking forward to that city with solid foundations of which God himself is both architect and builder. What a glorious hope! Hallelujah! Abraham was not a poor person that he should live in tents. He knew a better country whose foundations are solid and its architect was God. When we are confronted with earthly problems, we have to look to the heavenly Father. God is preparing His corporate body that is the Church as overcomers. He is calling out His people from all corners of the earth. Jesus said to Peter "Now I tell you that you are Peter the rock, (Greek, Petros, A Stone) and it is on this rock (Greek, Petra, Large Rock, Bed Rock, Jesus referring to himself) that I am going to found my Church, and the powers of Death will never have the power to destroy it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, whatever you forbid on earth will be what is forbidden in heaven and whatever you permit on earth will be what is permitted in Heaven!" Matthew 16" 18-20 (J.B. Phillips)

The Church is blessed with great authority and power, Yes, death will have no power over the Church. The Church will overcome the flesh, the devil and even death. Apostle Paul exhorts to the Church at Corinth "Death is swallowed in victory. Where now, O death, is your power?" 1 Corinthians 15:34-35. Jesus conquered death through resurrection and now fills the

whole earth by His presence. We are raised from our sins and trespasses and He has raised us to take our place with him in Christ Jesus. In the heavenly realm.

In conclusion, the transforming also power of Jesus is still accessible. His voice is still audible. We can still feel his touch. Therefore wake up from the spiritual slumber. "Thus it

is said: „Awake thou that deepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee" Ephesians 5:14 (J.B. Phillips").

# Parallels

**By Markus Hansen**

Bethlehem, referred to as the City of David, a small walled town about 8 kilometers south of Jerusalem, overlooks the main highway to Hebron and Egypt. It was here that Rachel was buried, Ruth gleaned in Boaz's field. David was anointed king and Jesus was born. How was it that Jesus was born in Bethlehem; born in a cave carved out of the limestone hills surrounding Bethlehem? A cave used to house cattle was the birthplace of our dear Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Our Saviour, born in a barn? Born in a town of no repute, why, how could that be? Why not Jerusalem, the Holy City for the Jews?

Before 1948, who had ever heard of North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada? I dare say that a very, very small percentage of all the born again Christians living at that time had ever heard of North Battleford. It was just a small obscure town sitting on the banks of the North Saskatchewan River, not a town of influence in commerce, nor a place known for its beauty. Nobility, prime ministers, the well to do, nor movie stars were attracted there. Just a small town of no repute!

But on February 11th, 1945, heaven came down on that little unknown town. Not in one of the grand church cathedrals, but in an abandoned, second story classroom formerly used to teach WW II pilots about the weather. The room was called the "cloud room". You might say that prophecy was fulfilled that day for various cloud formations are painted above the blackboards surrounding the classroom. Many scriptures refer to the Lord returning in the "clouds" and surely He came and visited humanity in a very miraculous way on that day. Oh, the Glory of His Presence, how it swept over the student body that day! How the Holy Spirit changed the course of Christendom on that day. Why, it seems that nearly every Spirit filled Christian today

has heard of the revival that began in North Battleford, a revival that swept across the continent in the late 40's and early 50's but where are the crowds today?

What happened to Christ after He was born in the Holy City? His parents took him to Egypt for a time and then returned to their hometown of Nazareth. Where were the shepherds that came to visit Jesus as a child and where were the wise men? Jesus, the Son of God as a child, became unknown. Similarly, a few years after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, many who had flocked to witness the moving of the Holy Spirit were not willing to come out from the religious system of the day and only a remnant remained. "All dried up, nothing happening", some say. But glory to God, He has a plan; He is bringing many sons unto perfection, unto maturity in Him.

There is no other record of the early life of Jesus other than when Joseph and Mary brought Him as a child to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord and when they returned when He was twelve years old. Let us read from Luke 2:39. "And when they had performed all thing, according to the law of the Lord, they returned unto Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem,

seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."

It would appear that at the age of twelve, Jesus though He was ready to begin His full-time ministry for He said to his mother, "wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" How many times have we thought in our hearts that we were ready to fulfill our ministry to the world at large? How many times have we said to the Lord, "why not now"? Since this present move of the Spirit broke forth in 1948, God has restored the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit. Many times we have looked for that day when the gifts of the Spirit would begin to operate in their fullness. We've longed to be able to say to the terminally ill, "Rise up and walk", to the lame, "Jesus sets you free". to the emotionally disturbed, "May the Lord God lift your burdens and set you free". But for reasons known only to God. He still has not seen fit to give us the fullness of the gifts of the Spirit. We have seen the hand of God move in miraculous ways in our lives however we have also cried unto God to heal a terminally ill brother or sister in the Lord and God has said, "Not

now".

Notice particularly this phrase in verse 51. "And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was **subject** unto them:" Another word for subject is obedient. In other words, He was obedient to Mary and Joseph, or He lived in subjection to them. Jesus, as a child of 12 years old, had much to learn before He became an adult. During the period in His life from 12 years to 30 years Jesus was under the tutelage of His parents and His heavenly Father. He was being equipped with the necessary skills so that he would be able to fulfill His ministry to the world. During this time, He was hidden from the world. Likewise, during the last 52 years we have been under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit. Christ through the Holy Spirit has been imparting His mind and will unto us. You might also say that we have been hidden from view during this time of growing up in Him.

There did come a time when Jesus was ready to fulfill His calling. He was about thirty years old when John baptized Him. After Christ's baptism, the scripture records: "And Jesus **being full of the Holy Ghost** returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Forty days tempted of the devil." Luke 4: 1-2. When you are in the wilderness you are alone. Haven't we likewise at times felt we were alone? Haven't we been hidden from the world? But Praise God, He has been working on us. The Holy Ghost is upon us, praise God. He is living within us, quickening us, teaching us, and bringing us unto a perfect (mature) man. Praise God!

There came a time when Christ was ready to be tested to see if He would stand strong. The devil tempted Jesus with many statements, but Jesus always answered the devil quoting the word of God; not His own reasoning, but with the almighty Word of God. As a mature Son of God, Jesus depended solely on the word of God for His rebuttal. That is spiritual maturity. Praise God.

Only after Jesus had been tested and found faithful was He ready to go into the world and fulfill the ministry for which He was sent.

Likewise, we are being tested and tried in this present hour. We have grown in the Lord, in wisdom and knowledge and stature, as His Body. Now we, like Christ, have come to the point where we are being tested. The devil is trying every tactic available to discourage us. If it isn't sickness, it's financial, marital, emotional

or relationship problems. Everywhere we look in the Church, the saints of God are being tried. The devil wants you to say in your heart, "Oh, what is the use of trusting in God". But, oh, dear saints of God, let us put our trust in the Word of God. Let us lean on Jesus.

If you are having financial difficulties, do like Jesus did when being tested by the devil. Quote these words every morning when you get up, "My God shall supply all my needs through His riches in Christ Jesus". Do as the brethren have taught, pay your tithes first, and then live on the balance. There is far more rest in following the pattern God has set than buying lotto tickets or trying every get rich quick scheme that comes your way. If you are not well in body, call for the elders of the church and ask them to anoint you with oil and pray for you as instructed in James 5:14. You will find greater peace in this rather than chasing the latest health fad or miracle remedy that is being propagated on the web. «"h} not trust the word of God where it says. "I am the Lord that healeth thee", Exodus 15:26. You say that you are up against an obstacle you can't overcome, remember these words, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me", Philippians 4:13. Are you troubled in mind? Let these words become a solace: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." John 14:27. God desires that we would cast aside all our own reasoning and learn to trust Him, in every aspect of our lives. Praise God.

#### **Christian Maturity**

God is not going to unleash the full power available through the nine gifts of the Spirit until we have reached a state of full maturity in Christ. You can not give the keys to a car to a young boy or girl before they have been instructed in the use of the car and gained experience in driving it. If you do, they could destroy themselves. They have to conduct themselves in a manner that proves they are trustworthy before you give them the keys. Likewise, we have to be proven before God will give us the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of healing, miracles and faith, referred to as the power gifts, are indeed very powerful. We saw them in operation in the life of Jesus. The effect was that great crowds followed Him everywhere He went. Pride could easily rise up within the heart of a

man who is given the fullness of any one of these gifts if he is a novice or inexperienced in the workings of the Holy Spirit. He likewise could destroy himself. He has to come to the point in his life where everything he does points to Christ, not to himself. We must reach full maturity before we will be trusted by God with the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

What are the signs of maturity in a Christian's life? The first sign is that of obedience. We saw that in the life of Christ as pointed out above. As well, Jesus said, "**I do nothing of myself**; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; **for I do always those things that please him**". John 8:28-29. In God's sight, every man, woman and child has a head, someone they are subject to. That is right. You may not agree with that statement, but be assured that it is correct. Whether here on earth, or in heaven, we are all subject to someone. Children are subject to their parents, a wife to her husband, the husband to the local elders and deacons, the local elders and deacons to the apostolic brethren, the apostolic brethren to Christ, the head of the Church and Christ to God the Father. When we recognize and become obedient to our head, we have reached a high level of maturity in God's sight. How do we learn obedience? The word of God say's, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, (or mature), he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;" Hebrews 5:8-9.

Another sign of Christian maturity is showing the love of God in our actions, deeds, and words that proceed out of our mouths. The scripture says that no matter what we do, or what we say, even if we give our bodies to be burned, but have no love it achieves absolutely nothing. NOTHING! "And this is my commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, **and, love one another**". I John 3:23.

Let us examine some of the characteristics of the love of God as described in J.B. Phillips translation of! Corinthians 13:4-8. "This love of which I speak.

- is **slow to lose patience**,
- looks for a way of **being constructive**,
- is **not possessive**,
- is **neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own**

**importance,**

- has **good manners,**
- **does not pursue selfish advantage,**
- is **not touchy,**
- **does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people.**

**KNOWS NO LIMIT TO ITS ENDURANCE,**

- has **NO END TO ITS TRUST,**
- has **NO FADING OF ITS HOPE;**
- **CAN OUTLAST ANYTHING.**

**It is, in fact, the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen."**

Are we measuring up to these standards?

It is interesting to observe, that a child most often exemplifies the opposite characteristics of love. They have little patience, they can be quite destructive, they most often are possessive, they like a lot of attention, they want it their way and they can be very touchy. You would say that such a child is immature. If a child is brought up properly it learns that childish behavior is not acceptable. It takes a lot of effort and time to teach a child to act maturely. Are we as adults any different when we lack these traits? Unfortunately, there are some grown men and women who have not learned their lessons well. Divorce at one time was unheard of in the Church. If the characteristics of God's love outlined above, are alive in the heart of a man and woman, how can divorce ever be an option? The Word of God says that the LOVE OF GOD can outlast anything.

If we really had the love of God in our hearts would there be division in the Church or hard feelings against a brother or sister? Paul was concerned about this. "For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." Galatians 5:13-15. These same verses from the J.B. Phillips translation read: "It is to freedom that you have been called, my brothers. Only be careful that freedom does not become mere opportunity for your lower nature. You should be free to serve each other in love. For after all, the whole law toward others is summed up by this one command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." *But if freedom means merely that you are*

*free to attack and tear each other to pieces, be careful that it doesn't mean that between you, you destroy your fellowship altogether!"* It is odd, but it seems that the better we know each other, the easier it is to find fault in each other. Paul said, "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh" 11 Corinthians 5:16. In other words, Paul was able to look beyond the human shell with its myriad of personality traits and see the life of Jesus Christ revealed in his brother and sister. Oh, hallelujah, that is maturity.

God created many different personalities amongst mankind. You may be one who tends to be very friendly, out going, enjoy telling a story and your spiritual gifts may be down the exhortation line. It is in your nature to be that way. A brother in the Lord, sitting at the other end of the row in Church, may be quite opposite to you; withdrawn, serious, maybe a teacher. You may think he is rather dry; he thinks you are rather boisterous and not to be taken seriously. Now when your brother is led to give a teaching that the Lord has laid upon his heart, you will need to be in the Spirit to be able to recognize the Christ in him. because your human nature is at opposite poles to your brother. But God made you the way you are and your brother the way he is. That is right. "We are all per` different by natural birth. but God is in the process of bringing a body of people together who will be called by His name and they shall be one body, one glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle. This will only happen when we recognize that the ministry of our brother and sister is really the ministry of Christ operating in and through them. When we acknowledge that it is Christ that sets a man in a particular office no matter how different his personality is from yours and we recognize Christ in his ministry, then we are becoming one body in God, we are growing up into maturity.

Have you ever wondered why there seem to be so many sick amongst us? Paul addressed a similar situation in the Church at Corinth. I Corinthians 11: 130. He said the reasons there are so many sick amongst us is because we do not discern the Lord's body, meaning, we don't recognize the Christ in each other. We see our brother and our sister by our carnal eyes, not by Spiritual eyes. In verse 18, Paul indicates that he was aware of divisions in the church at Corinth. He goes on to say that if we partake

of the Lord's supper knowing that we have something against one of God's people, we are drinking and eating damnation to ourselves. When we judge the worth of a person by our carnal mind, that is a sign of immaturity. When we truly appreciate those personality traits that are different to ours and see Christ living and working in our brother and sister, that is maturity. "*But to obtain these gifts, you need more than faith; you must also work hard to be good, and even that is not enough. For then you must learn to know God better and discover what he wants you to do. Next, learn to put aside your own desire so that you will become patient and godly, gladly letting God have his way with you. This will make possible the next step, which is for you to enjoy other people and to like them, and finally you will grow to love them deeply. The more you go on in this way, the more you will grow strong spiritually and become fruitful and useful to our Lord Jesus Christ.*" 2 Peter 1:5-8 Living Translation.

In Galatians 5:19 to 21 Paul summarizes the activities of the carnal nature and a, Christians: none of these should be named an lon~~st u~. He goes on in the rest of the chapter to ~ point out the fruits of the Spirit which are ether signs that one will find in a mature Christian. They are. Love, joy, peace, longsuffering (patience), gentleness (*kindness*), goodness (generosity), faith, meekness, and temperance (self-control). These are traits that are not usually manifested in a child or an immature person, but they should become the very core of our nature.

Dear brother and sister, let us go on in God. Let God do what He has to do to bring us unto maturity (perfection). Yes, we are being tried, but let our resolve be as recorded in Romans 5:3-5, "...but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience: and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." God is preparing us to be the bride of Christ. When He has finished His work in us there will be no carnality left in us, only Christ shining forth from us. It is a marvellous calling. Many are called but few are chosen. Let us who remain be steadfast unto the end, for His grace is sufficient.

A particular song has meant so much to me of late and I will quote it in closing.

HE GIVETH MORE GRACE  
 He giveth more grace when the  
 burdens `crow greater;  
 He sendeth more strength when the  
 labors increase,  
 To added affliction He addeth His  
 mercy;  
 To multiplied trials, His multiplied  
 peace.

Chorus:  
 His love has no limits, His grace has  
 no measure,  
 His power has no boundary known  
 unto men;  
 For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,  
 He giveth, and giveth, and giveth  
 again.  
 When we have exhausted our store of

endurance.  
 When our strength has failed ere the  
 day is half done,  
 When we reach the end of our hoarded  
 resources,  
 Our Father's full giving is only begun.

May God richly bless you.

# God's Great Plan and Purpose

By Andy Snoke

The glorious order of the universe and the strangely mysterious yet marvelous architecture of mankind, was not some cosmic mistake, it was by Divine plan. It was not some disastrous explosion that set the laws of physics in place; neither was it by unmeasurable chance that the cells of your body decided to become who and what you are.

"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear". Heb. 11:3

God had a divine plan and purpose for creating mankind. It was not some chemistry experiment gone awry by the only true God, but there was a divine destiny that has never changed.

What was His purpose? "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion..." Gen 1:26 Man was created to be in the likeness of God himself, with his attributes, with His nature, with His authority. The obvious fact that mankind has walked away from God has no bearing on the fact that God created man for fellowship, and to be in His image. Before God completes the last chapter of human history, He will have a people that are truly in His image, and in His likeness.

He created man to have dominion over the works of the Creator. Once again, we recognize that at this point in this great race, we do not have dominion over all. We often don't have dominion over our own appetites, let alone sin and sickness! But we know that God is perfecting a people to bring them into a place of dominion and authority, it is His plan for creation.

"Thou hast put all things in subjection under his (mankind) feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him he left

nothing that is not put under him (man). But now we see not yet all things put under him". Heb 2:8 makes clear the call of God for mankind and reminds us that we are not there yet!

He continues: "But we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that he, by the grave of God, should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the caption of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Heb. 2:9-19.

Before He closes out this age, He will have brought a body of believers to a place of full maturity, a place of fellowship equal and beyond the fellowship God had with Adam. Have you ever given much thought to the fellowship Adam had with God before sin entered into the world? I don't believe that Adam prayed very much like we do today. First, there were not the usual requests we have today. No one was sick, the crops all ways produced abundantly, there was no curse on mankind.

If Adam wanted an audience with God, he need not pray. He only needed to wait until the cool of the evening and God would physically walk and talk face to face with Adam, it was there that he spoke his requests to God. What an unthinkable experience he must have had. And yet God desires not to return to the days of Adam, but will somehow lift a creation back to Himself.

Jesus prayed that we would have this restored fellowship with God as He enjoyed. "That they all I may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." John 17:21.

Deep within the heart of humanity is

that outward cry for restored fellowship with God. The entire world is looking for those that can lead the way back to God, the first fruits company of believers. "The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." Romans 8:19.

Thank God that He has not left us comfortless but is restoring again those foundational ministries that were "gifted" to the church to bring us into fellowship and maturity in God. These ministries are called the ascension gifts, or in other words, they were the gifts he gave to the church when Christ ascended to heaven. There are individual gifts of the Spirit that He gives to the individual (1 Cor. 12:8- 10) and there are ascension gifts He gave to the Church at large. (Eph. 4:8). There is a difference.

"And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.; Why did He give us this 5 fold apostolic ministry? "For the PERFECTING of the saints for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ" How long will these ministries be in the body? "till we all come in the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Let us continue on into maturity in Christ. Let us give earnest heed to those gifted ministries God has placed in the Church for this hour. Let us strive for perfection and Sonship.

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Phil. 3:13-14.