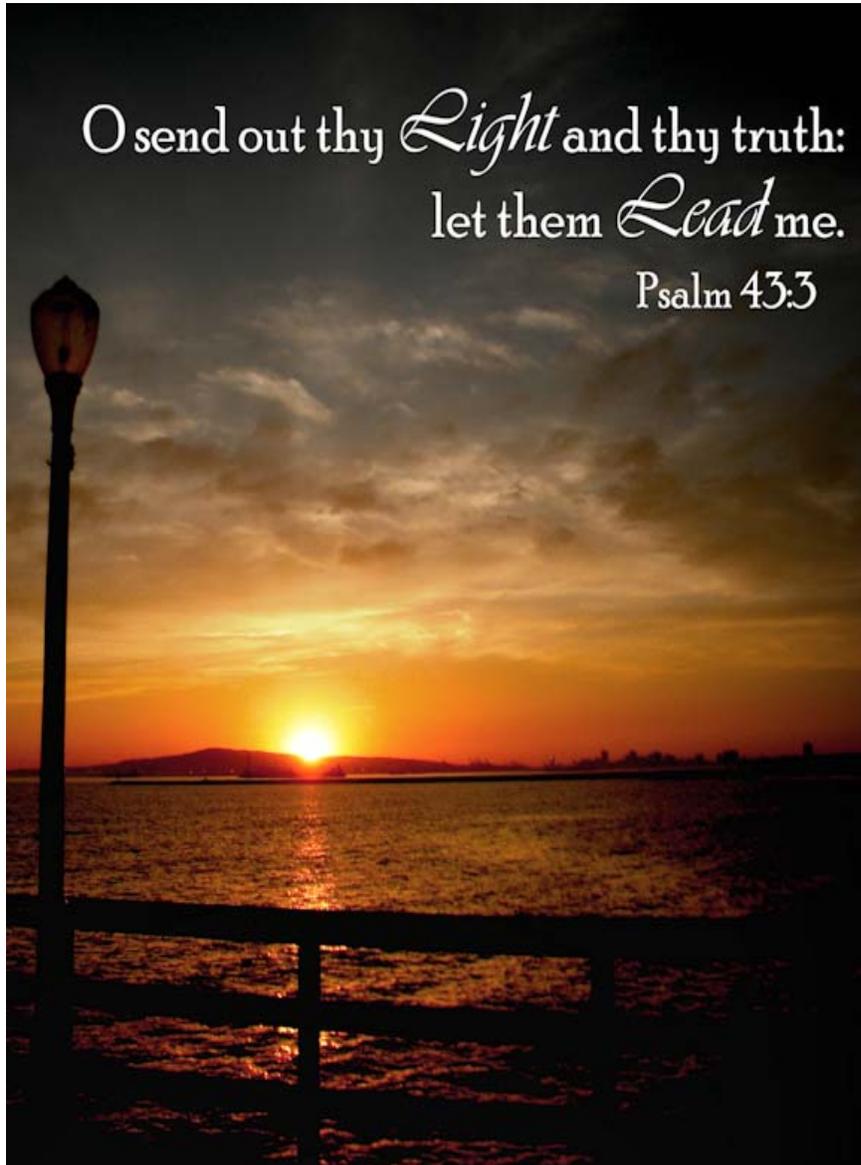


**April 2020**  
**Daily Devotional**

O send out thy *Light* and thy truth:  
let them *Lead* me.  
Psalm 43:3



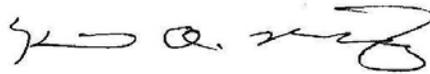
**Vistoso Community Church**

# Foreword

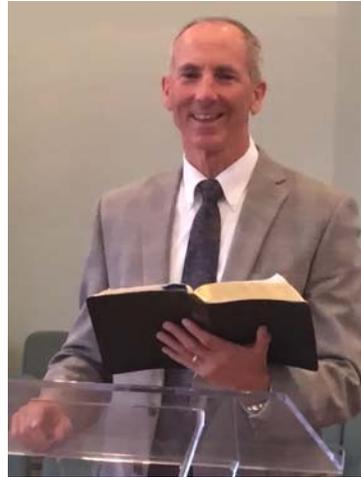
We finish our study in I John on the first day of the month and start a new series of readings on the last day. In between we will spend our time in Genesis and Ephesians, as well as a week of preparatory readings which I trust will focus your attention upon the resurrection and our celebration of Easter.

May God bless you for your faithfulness in the daily intake of His Word.

In His grace,



Kevin Redig



*All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).*

# Finishing I John

## Wednesday, April 1: Read Galatians 2

Since we tackled one challenge yesterday, let's take on another today. I John 5:18 says:

**. . . anyone born of God does not continue to sin. . .**

Although I have heard individuals, including pastors, say that they don't sin anymore, I choose God's Word:

**If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves  
. . . If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him  
(God) out to be a liar. . .** I John 1:8,10

How strange to interpret the passage to mean believers don't sin in a book that makes clear what a believer is to do when they do sin! (See I John 1:9) So then, what do we make of the statement that those born of God do not continue to sin? Perhaps adding Galatians 2:20 will help:

**I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.**

I John is all about living in fellowship with the Lord, and John is concluding by reminding us that as new creations in Christ, Christ is to live in us. Those walking in the *born-again* life that God provides do not continue in sin. Sin is an indication that the flesh is again dominating the life and confession is needed. We lie if we say we don't ever need to confess sin. Nonetheless, the goal is to walk in newness of life. So don't be talking about your walk with the Lord if you continue in sin—for you don't have one. That is not to say you are not a believer; rather, it is to say that the life of Christ is most certainly not manifest in you as described by Paul in Galatians 2:20, or by John in I John 5:18. Thankfully the blood of Jesus continues to cleanse from all sin (I John 1:7) should we avail ourselves of God's provision to confess and be cleansed (I John 1:9).

# In the Beginning

## Thursday, April 2: Read Genesis 27

There is one item of background you need to know as you try to come to grips with the narrative of Genesis, Chapter 27. The Lord told Rebekah:

**“Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”**

Genesis 25:23

This Word of prophecy from the Lord Himself predicted that one nation would come from Esau and the other from Jacob. Furthermore, Esau would serve Jacob. In other words, the Abrahamic promise would come through the line of Jacob and not that of Esau.

What do you think of the manipulative way that Rebekah dealt with her husband, and Jacob's willing participation in the deception? There is simply no way to justify their behavior. Here is a principle for us to consider: under no circumstances do we ever have to plot and scheme in order to come into the blessing that God has promised. It is given in grace and will come to us in His timing. Ours is simply to learn to trust Him one day at a time.

Sometimes we just want to speed things up a little. How well does that work out for Jacob and Rebekah? Jacob is forced to flee for his life for a period of many years. He is isolated from his family. He makes a mortal enemy of his brother, and his close relationship with his mother is broken, all of this to grasp (that's what the name Jacob means) something that God had every intention of giving him anyway. Proverbs 28:25 will be proved in our lives one way or the other:

**The greedy stir up conflict, but those who trust in the LORD will prosper.**

# In the Beginning

## Friday, April 3: Read Genesis 28

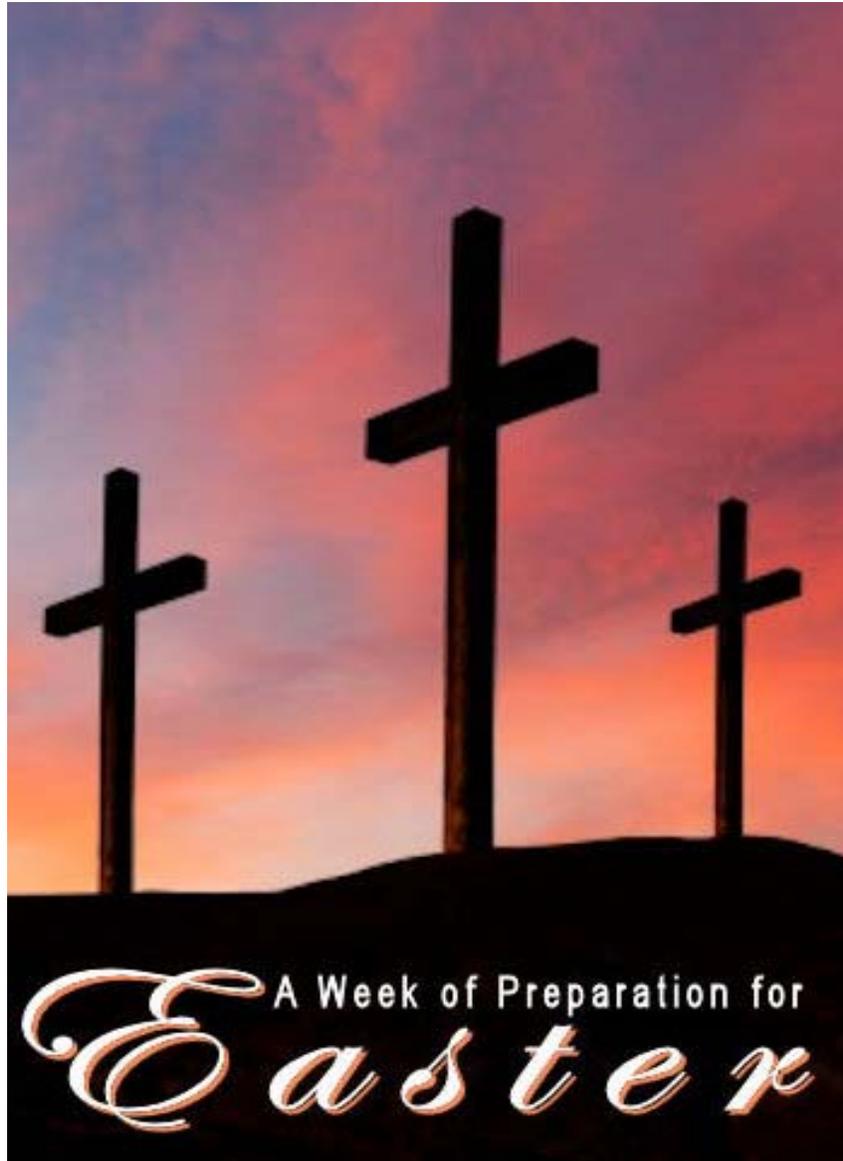
First, let's consider the message given to Jacob.

**He (Jacob) had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven. . . There above it stood the Lord, and He said. . .** Genesis 28:12-15

The message from God to Jacob affirmed the promises given to Abraham: the land of Canaan, many, many descendants, the Lord's watch-care over him, God's presence with him, and God's blessing to the whole world through him. Here are two questions for you. Keeping in mind yesterday's reading from Genesis 27, did Jacob demonstrate himself worthy of this blessing? Did he do anything to earn or deserve it? The answer to both questions is no! This is another of the endless examples, in both the Old and the New Testaments, of the grace of God to undeserving sinners. We are going to see that eventually Jacob becomes a man of faith, particularly near the end of his life. Along the way, however, the Lord graciously provides, disciplines, and protects him.

What an amazingly patient and gracious God is at work in our lives! Let's consider one more question: does Jacob's vow beginning in Genesis 28:20 seem more like someone who has recognized the nature of God's gracious intent to keep His promises or like someone who is striving to strike a bargain with terms advantageous to himself? How often do we do the same thing? It's not attractive is it? How much better to come to God and say:

*Heavenly Father we could never earn or deserve the blessings we have in Your Son and so we praise and give thanks to You. Help us to walk worthy of who we are in You as we receive whatever You have for us.*



During this coming week, we will have a devotion each day that helps us focus upon the message and meaning of Easter. Then, when this week is completed, I ask you to spend some time over Easter weekend reading the narrative surrounding the resurrection. You can find this narrative in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20.

# Preparation for Easter

## Monday, April 6: Read Psalm 16

The text of Scripture makes it clear that David wrote this psalm. It has much value for us as a model from which we can give thanks and express our dependence and praise. For today's meditation, I want to draw your attention to Verse 8, where a change occurs. I drew your attention to David as the author because he begins to speak prophetically in Verse 8 and the verses that follow.

How can we know this? Look at Verse 10. Did David die and did his body decay? Absolutely! So is Verse 10 simply untrue, or is it speaking of someone else? David is speaking of One who also has a special place at the right hand of the Father. David is speaking prophetically of the Lord Jesus Christ, and, in doing so, he is speaking of the resurrection. For although Jesus died physically and spiritually as part of providing payment for our sins, His body did not *"see decay."* The bodies of Buddha, Mohammed, Joseph Smith, and all the rest have returned to the *dust* from which they were made, but not so the body of Jesus Christ. For He:

**. . . was declared with power to be the Son of God  
by His resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our  
Lord.** Romans 1:4

Not only that, God has said to Him:

**"Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies  
a footstool for Your feet."** Hebrew 1:13

Make no mistake about it! The Lord Jesus Christ stands in contrast to every other religious leader of all time—for only He is the Son of God, and God has been declaring His special role to us by means of the resurrection down through the centuries. As we celebrate Easter, we also celebrate God's plan of redemption, and we honor the Lord Jesus Christ.

# Preparation for Easter

## Tuesday, April 7: Read I Timothy 2

As our church calendar leads us to a time of remembering the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, this second chapter of I Timothy reminds us of a number of things. First, Verse 1 reminds us of the importance of prayer, and its scope is very broad. Did you note the direction to pray for those in authority? This is a particularly important point for us to remember in our day. If nothing else, pray for their salvation, their families, and their discernment in leadership.

Second, Verse 4 makes clear the heart of our Savior? Just who is it that He wants to be saved? All men! We certainly need to know that this is a possibility as we pray for others. Third, the reason to consider this passage prior to Easter is that there is one mediator between God and men and it is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider the following:

- This mediator is between God and mankind. Who would be qualified for such a role? Only one who could represent both parties. That would mean that person would need to be both divine and human. Exactly! And that is who Jesus is—eternal God who took on humanity during His First Advent.
- This is why He is the one mediator. No one else meets these qualifications except the Lord Jesus Christ.
- How did He mediate? Look at Verse 6. He gave Himself as the ransom for many. When He died on the cross, He received in Himself the judgment for sin that was really ours. In doing so, He paid our *ransom* and, therefore, for those who will trust in Him there is a release from the *slave market of sin* and an ushering into the freedom that is ours as *new creatures* in Christ.

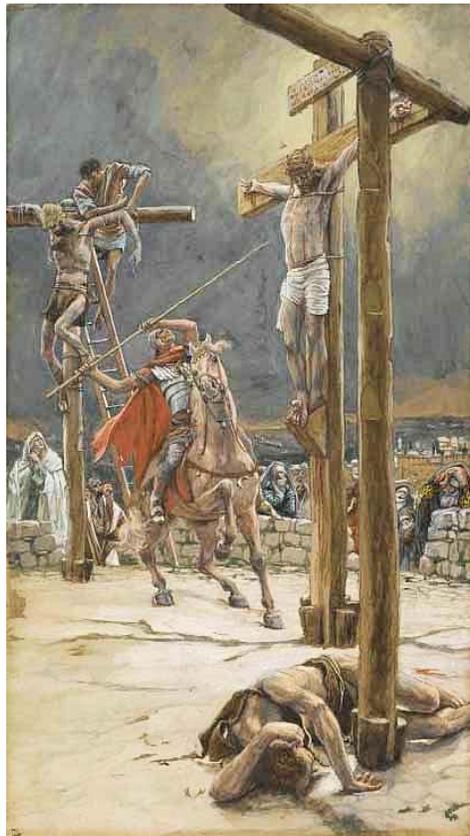
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

# Preparation for Easter

## Wednesday, April 8: Read Isaiah 53

Just enjoy reading through the prophetic 53rd chapter of Isaiah. Then consider these connections and the New Testament verses that corroborate Isaiah's prophecies as having been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

- **Verse 3:** Throughout His earthly ministry, Christ was rejected by the religious establishment.
- **Verse 4:** Jesus Himself bore our sins while on the cross. (1 Peter 2:24)
- **Verse 4:** The Jews considered Jesus' crucifixion as punishment by God for His sins and heaped insults on Him while He was dying for our sins. (Luke 23:35)
- **Verse 5:** He was pierced when the soldier ran a spear through His side as part of the crucifixion. (John 19:34)
- **Verse 5:** We got peace with God and Jesus got our punishment. (Romans 5:1)
- **Verse 6:** We are reminded that none of us is righteous, no not one! (Romans 3:10)



Continued on the next page.

# Preparation for Easter

## Wednesday, April 8: Read Isaiah 53 (Continued)

- **Verse 7:** Jesus did not open His mouth to defend Himself before the Sanhedrin and during His illegal trial. (Mark 14:61)
- **Verse 8:** He was cut off from the land of the living by His death, and by His wounds we are healed. (1 Peter 2:24)
- **Verse 9:** He was assigned a grave with the wicked and the rich. How could that be? As a crucified criminal He would have been thrown into Gehenna and burned, but instead Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, placed Him in his own grave.
- **Verse 12:** Jesus will indeed be given a portion among the great as the returning King of kings and Lord of lords.
- **Verse 12:** Again— Jesus bore the sin of the entire human race.

There are many more prophecies in this chapter that we just glossed over. What an absolutely phenomenal chapter. How could anyone, especially a devout Jew, miss the literal fulfillment of the prophecies? The answer is hardness of heart—unbelief!



# Preparation for Easter

## Thursday, April 9: Read Romans 1

As part of our meditations leading up to Easter, let's focus today on Romans 1:1-6. Did you note in Verse 1 that Paul was set apart for the Gospel? You and I, as believers are set apart as well, for we have been given a Great Commission to go and make disciples. In fact, every believer is an ambassador for Christ holding out a very important message to a lost and dying world! (II Corinthians 5:20)

Read on to Verse 2. As we have seen, the Gospel was not an afterthought with God, nor was it *Plan B*. God promised Adam and Eve that He would send a Savior after they had sinned, and in the fullness of time He sent His Son to go to the cross on our behalf. (Hebrews 1:2)

As pointed out earlier this week, Verse 3 is perhaps the most important of all. We serve a risen Savior, One who promises to prepare a place for us and to come and take us to Himself, so that where He is we may be also. (John 14:1-3) So which is it: the claims of a dead prophet or the promises of a risen Savior? *I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day!*

In Verse 5 we are once again reminded of our responsibility to spread the Gospel so that the call to obedience through faith is clear. Did you notice that we do this not in the power of the flesh, but through the enablement that comes from Christ and for His glory (*His name's sake*)? Pray to God that our motivation would be pure. And, brother or sister, if you have placed your faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ then, according to Verse 6, you are of those who, down through the centuries, have become part of the *called*, that is *the elect* of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Praise God for His great plan of redemption that would allow those such as us to be His elect!

# Preparation for Easter

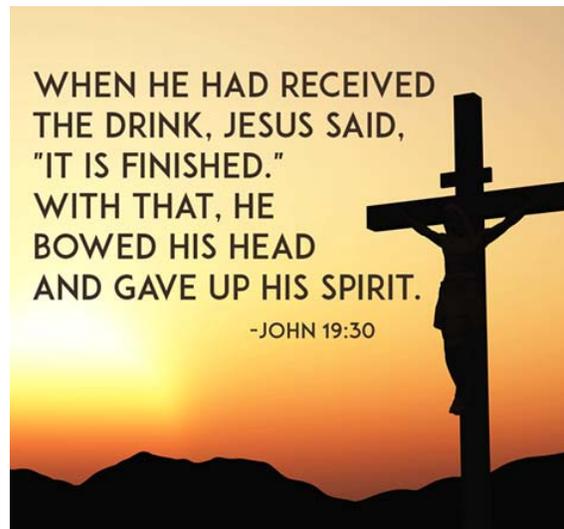
## Friday, April 10: Read John 19

You will recognize that some of the prophetic claims of Isaiah 53 are fulfilled right here in John 19. In fact, there is much rich detail and other fulfilled prophecy in this chapter. Compare John 19:24 with Psalm 22:18 as just one example of many. For today, I would like us to consider more deeply just one verse in our reading, Verse 30.

Note, first of all, that Jesus' work on the cross was finished while He was still alive, for He declared it to be so! Only after it was finished, after the purpose for which He

came had been accomplished, did He simply dismiss His spirit from His physical body.

Second, the phrase "*It is finished*" is one word in Greek—the verb *teleo*. It means to finish, to bring to a close, to discharge a debt, or to accomplish. This is a cry of victory from Christ for He has concluded the work that the Father had given Him. His coming resurrection will bear witness to heaven and earth that the Father has found the work of the Son to be completely satisfactory in terms of paying in full the debt of sin that separates man from God. In that regard, Christ is crying out "*Paid in Full*" as He triumphs over the issue of sin.

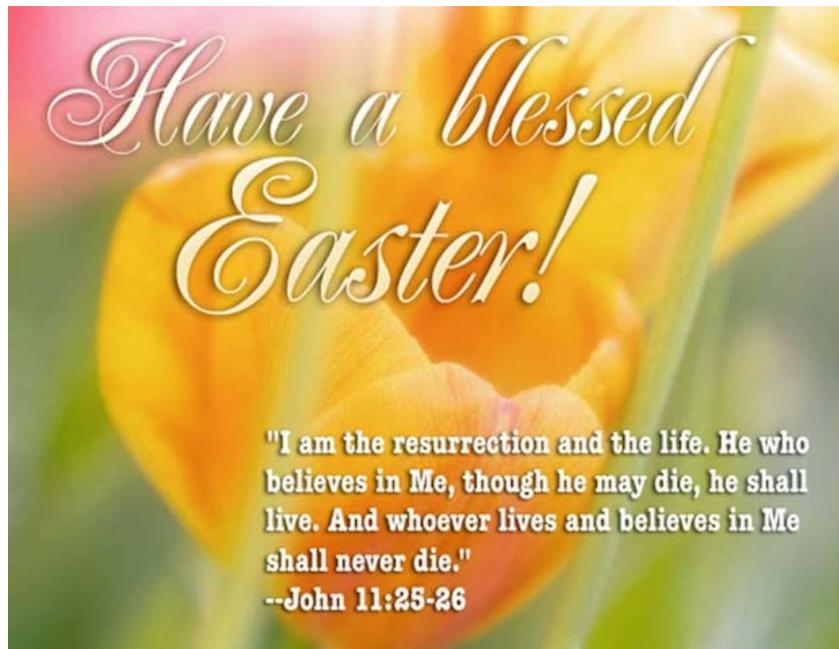


# Preparation for Easter

Friday, April 10: Read John 19  
(Continued)

Furthermore, this verb is in the perfect tense and the passive voice. The perfect tense is used for a verb when the action happened in the past and the results continue right up to the present time. The work of Christ happened on the cross 2000 years ago and yet the results, the sin debt completely discharged, continue right up until our day and cover our sins. The passive voice means that the subject (the Father's great work of redemption) receives the action of the verb. Sins were poured onto Christ—they were judged by the Father when He turned His back on His Son.

Now the work is done—salvation is available in Jesus Christ. What a Savior!



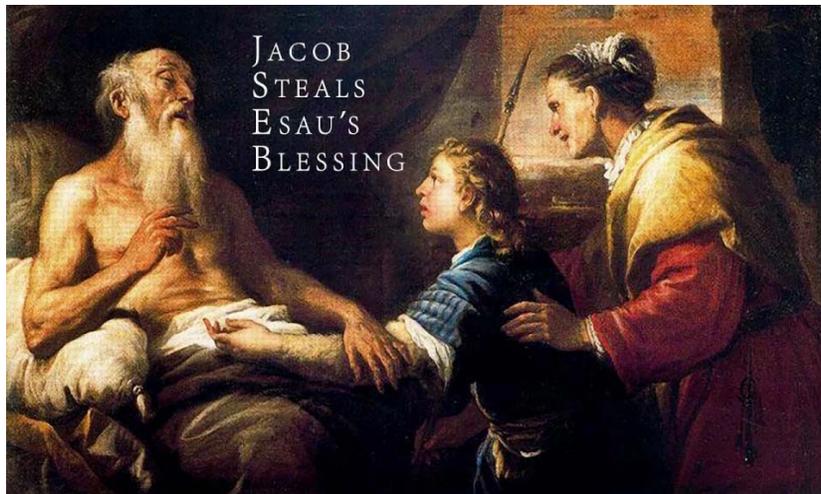
# In the Beginning

## Monday, April 13: Read Genesis 29

We have a saying that goes something like this, "What goes around comes around!" Or you might prefer:

**A man reaps what he sows.** Galatians 6:7

That certainly seems to be the case with Jacob. For, after deceiving his father in order to receive the blessing reserved for the firstborn, Jacob is himself deceived by his father-in-law who promises him one daughter as his wife and then gives him another. Jacob ends up working an extra seven years to marry the daughter of his own choosing.



What do you think? Is it going to end here with Jacob repenting of his deceit of Isaac and cheating of Esau, or is the struggle going to continue? The next few chapters show us the answer.

# In the Beginning

Monday, April 13: Read Genesis 29  
(Continued)

In the meantime, the family of Jacob is starting to grow with four sons born to Leah. This is the first time since the Abrahamic Covenant was given to Abraham that the promise of many descendants is starting to pick up a bit of momentum. Still, we are a long way from having descendants as many as the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore. I wonder how God is going to fulfill His Word.

As the story unfolds, we can certainly see that God is using imperfect people to fulfill His perfect plans. What an incentive for us in our day. We have the completed canon of Scripture and the



indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We must take advantage of what we have and avoid the fruitless years of *grasping* for blessing in which Jacob persisted. God wants us to simply trust in Him to provide what we need.

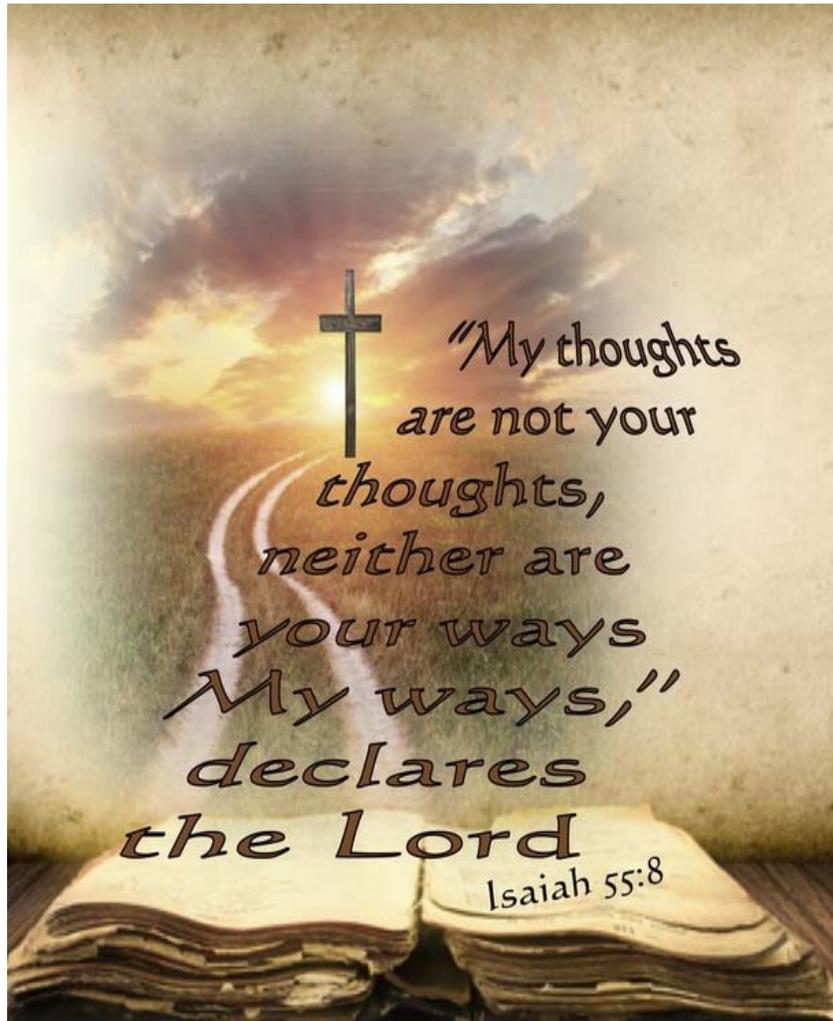
**For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless.**

Psalm 84:11

## In the Beginning

Tuesday, April 14: Read Genesis 30

Rather than looking for any particular principle in Chapter 30, we are just going to consider it as part of the ongoing storyline involving God's ways and man's ways.



“My thoughts  
are not your  
thoughts,  
neither are  
your ways  
My ways,”  
declares  
the Lord

Isaiah 55:8

# In the Beginning

Tuesday, April 14: Read Genesis 30  
(Continued)

As far as man's ways go, we can identify two things:

- The competition between Leah and Rachel on winning favor and having the most children does not bode well. Bringing their servants into the struggle, in effect, gives Jacob four wives. This competition, at the most basic level of the marriage relationship, simply lays the foundation for family feuding.
- We also see that Jacob is up to his old tricks again, *grasping* to obtain as much as possible by way of material possessions, this time from his own father-in-law. Did you note how Laban revealed that simply being associated with Jacob is a source of blessing? Did Jacob really need to grasp at blessing? Do we?

Where do we find God's ways in all of this? First, He is beginning to grow the progeny of Abraham. More importantly, while all this overt activity is going on, Joseph is born without any special fanfare, other than the pleasure that Rachel has to finally have a son of her own. But, in the plan of God, it is this Joseph who is going to play a key role in preparing the right kind of environment for this family to turn into a nation in spite of the actions of man.

As a final thought on this chapter, I was reminded of verses from Proverbs that are the exact opposite of the storyline in Chapter 30, and how beautiful in contrast they are:

**Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.**

Proverbs 3:5-6

# In the Beginning

## Wednesday, April 15: Read Genesis 31

Chapter 31 is so full of application for you and me, that I hardly know where to begin! Let's start by taking a look at Verses 19-20:

**When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father's household gods. Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was running away.**

This comes after Jacob is given both an order and a promise from the Lord Himself! God tells Jacob to go back to Canaan and God promised to be with him. You can see that Jacob decides to obey, in terms of going, perhaps



# In the Beginning

Wednesday, April 15: Read Genesis 31  
(Continued)

because it is simply in his best interests to do so. But he doesn't think too much of God's promise to be with him. As the text makes clear, he acts in deceit by trying to get away without telling his father-in-law. What did he have to fear once God had said that He would be with him in his return to Canaan? Could anything actually prevent what God had promised to protect? How often do we feel the need to *help God out* by adding our own plans to His clear promises, just because His promises don't seem certain enough?

Not surprisingly, Laban comes after Jacob and catches him in a very vulnerable position. The foolishness of Jacob, in trusting in his own scheming, is fully exposed for Laban could have done any harm he wished. Jacob had no allies in the hill country of Gilead—except for One, of course! Now we see the one and only protector that any of us ever need, for God had warned Laban in a dream to do no harm to Jacob. So we see it was not all the schemes of Jacob that carried the day. It was the promises of God.

One more thing to note. What is up with Rachel stealing her father's household gods? Why does she want anything to do with them? Apparently, Jacob is so intent on grasping for wives and material possessions that he has forgotten to share his faith with those who are supposed to be dearest to him. Wouldn't you agree that Jacob's priorities are all wrong!

Let's take a moment to ask the Spirit to reveal any areas where our priorities might be equally out of line.

# In the Beginning

## Thursday, April 16: Read Genesis 32 and 33

Several dramas occur in these two chapters. First, Jacob knows he cannot avoid Esau once he returns to the land, so he sends messengers ahead. If you remember, Esau promised to kill Jacob after Isaac died, and so Jacob is worried. When Esau comes to meet Jacob with a small army of followers, it does nothing to calm his fears. Jacob's plot to protect at least part of his family seems somewhat pathetic in the face of 400 trained men. On the other hand, to his great credit, he turns to the Lord, and prays, clearly claiming God's promises to him. He does so with a certain humility that we haven't really seen before. (See Genesis 32:9-12.)

For the second item of drama, Jacob spent the night wrestling "*face to face*" with God. (Genesis 32:30) Despite being lame in the hip as the result of his encounter, the blessing Jacob received from God should have given him great encouragement just prior to his encounter with Esau. Lastly, there is the family reunion with Esau. It no doubt surprised Jacob how well it went. It shouldn't have! Didn't God say that He would be with him and hadn't God just blessed him? Once again, Jacob is surprisingly humble, which is good, but then reverts back to his old form. After committing to Esau to come to his home in Seir, he actually heads off in another direction to Succoth and on to Shechem. Perhaps he still did not trust Esau, but doesn't this also show a certain mistrust of God's ability to protect him? Here is a lesson for us: the habits of the *old man* die hard. We need to constantly be on guard against them as God seeks to transform us to the image of His Son. To fail to do so is to compromise our witness, as Jacob no doubt did with his own brother as he once again acted deceptively to Esau.

# In the Beginning

## Friday, April 17: Read Genesis 34

Rather than deal with the sordid details of this chapter, let me make a few *big picture* observations:

- The first thing is the relentless way the world works on God's people. Rape becomes a request for marriage, and the plan to acquire the assets of these newcomers is described as an opportunity for prosperity. If God's people allow it, the world will always swallow them up. This is most certainly still true in our day.
- Simeon and Levi are having nothing to do with this offer and come up with a plot to extract revenge. What do you think about killing every male in the city and carrying off all that remained as a way to deal with the situation? Here is a principle for you: it is very difficult to take the moral high ground when someone does to you the exact same thing you have done to others. Did not Jacob deceive both Esau and Laban in order to get what he wanted? Shechem simply took what he wanted. Notice how easily the sons of Jacob fall into acting in a deceptive manner. This does not bode well for the future, particularly for Joseph's future.
- Lastly, did you notice anywhere in the text where they took this situation to God and asked for His guidance? It doesn't seem as if this family of the covenant has a particularly close relationship with the Lord, does it? Here is something we have seen and will see many times in the future. God's promises to man are not fulfilled because of the faithfulness of man, but because of the faithfulness of God. The family is going to receive divine protection and grow, but not because they are such wonderful spiritual examples. Instead, it will be because God is faithful to His Word and will bring to fruition what He has promised.

# Back to the Armor of God

Monday, April 20:  
Read Romans 5:1-11

We are back to the armor that God has provided as the means by which we can *stand our ground* when the day of evil comes. After considering the *belt of truth* and the *breastplate of righteousness*, let's consider having our:

**. . .feet fitted with the readiness that comes from  
the gospel of peace.** Ephesians 6:15

First, let's consider the footwear of a Roman soldier. It consisted of thick leather with metal studs. The leather provided protection from rough terrain and the studs provided grip during battle. The soldier's footwear was meant to provide protection, grip and mobility.



So, what is the spiritual analog? In order to answer this, we need to put together all that we have covered thus far: the Word of truth makes clear our status of justification before a holy God as the result of receiving Christ's imputed righteousness.

# Back to the Armor of God

Monday, April 20:  
Read Romans 5:1-11 (Continued)

Now we need to take our justification a step further:

**Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. . .**

Romans 5:1

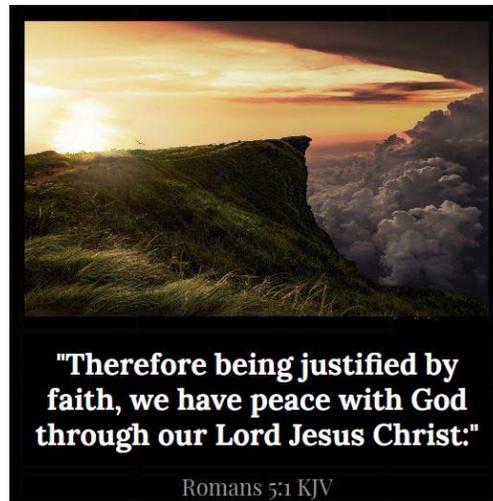
Satan is an accuser of the saints, and he seeks to weigh us down with guilt for our failures. But we can keep moving forward in the Christian Life protected from Satan's booby-traps and with a firm grip on the circumstances of life, for

part of our readiness to stand against the accuser of the brethren is to know ahead of time that we have peace with God. It is the imputed righteousness of Christ that makes it so!

Once we know we have peace with God, then we can know for certain that no accu-

sation of Satan can ever touch our eternal standing before the great Judge of the universe.

Praise God for His wonderful provision of the *gospel of peace* for all who believe!



**"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:"**

Romans 5:1 KJV

# Back to the Armor of God

## Tuesday, April 21: Read Philippians 4

Let's spend another day thinking through this idea of the *gospel of peace* as part of our armor to stand against the wiles of Satan. It is *gospel*, because it is the good news of our reconciliation to the Father through faith in the Son. This reconciliation, or peace, is the permanent possession of every child of God, but let me share something with you that is important to discern:

- To begin, Romans 5:1 yesterday made clear that there is peace with God. It is the result of being justified by faith and is only possible through the work of Christ. It is a marvelous aspect of our salvation: our status as an enemy is gone. It was not something we had to work to earn or have to work to maintain. It is part of the so-great salvation that is ours in Christ.
- Then there is the peace of God, and this is something very different. Consider the well-known verse:

**Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.** Philippians 4:6-7

What can cause us to lose *peace with God*? Nothing!  
What can cause us to lose the *peace of God*? The anxiety, fretting, and worry that are symptoms of unbelief. What do we need to do? Confess any sin of unbelief that may have crept into our thinking, and then turn to the Lord. Give Him thanks for His sovereign control of things, and lay everything at His feet. When we do, we have a promise: our peace with God will be coupled to the peace of God which will guard our hearts and minds in and through every anxiety-causing circumstance that comes our way in Christ Jesus!

# Back to the Armor of God

## Wednesday, April 22: Read Hebrews 11

The next piece of the armor of God is the *shield of faith*:

. . .above all, taking the shield of faith with which  
you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the  
wicked one. Ephesians 6:18

Let's make sure we first understand the physical reality from which the metaphor is drawn.

The shield of the Roman soldier was quite large and meant to cover the body of a crouching soldier. It consisted of a wooden frame with a thick and hardened rawhide covering. The Romans typically covered the rawhide with a thin layer of metal so that it would be non-combustible. So, from this physical analog, what are the spiritual principles which we need to apply?



For the purposes of our devotional reading, we will look at three aspects of the shield of faith over the course of the next few days, starting with first, *The Subject of Faith*:

- What is faith? Hebrews 11:1 is the closest thing we have to a Biblical definition:

**Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**

The word translated *substance* carries the idea of *holding title* to something, such that you own it. We have faith when we *hold title* to those things in which we have confidence even though they may not be visible. Now that would make faith very subjective, if it wasn't for the next point.

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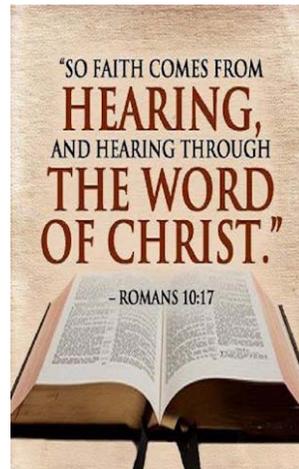
# Back to the Armor of God

Wednesday, April 22: Read Hebrews 11  
(Continued)

- The object of faith is critical!

**So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.** Romans 10:17

Are you seeing the connection? It is crucial! We hold title to the way things really are when we rightly understand the Word of God. We can trust in every promise God has made, even when it deals with subject matter we can't physically see because although heaven and earth will pass away, the Word of the Lord will stand firm! So our faith is believing, trusting, and resting in the truths of God's Word.



- Placing one's faith in what God has said, will always bring His commendation:

**This (faith) is what the ancients were commended for. . . Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.**

Hebrews 11:2,16

So let's conclude with this question: "What would cause God to be ashamed of His people?" The answer should be clear, God is ashamed of a people without faith. This includes all those who don't know or won't believe what He has preserved for us in His Word. So, may we help each other to *take up the shield of faith* by learning and placing our faith in the Word of God! More to come.

# Back to the Armor of God

Thursday, April 23:  
Read James 1

Our second aspect of the shield of faith is *The Fiery Darts*. We will discuss what they are and how we quench them. Today we will discuss how Satan makes use of the fallen world to tempt us to sin. The following Scripture in I John makes it clear that the world seeks to entice:

**Do not love the world or anything in the world. . .  
For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful  
man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what  
he has and does—comes not from the Father but  
from the world.** I John 2:15-16

There you have it! The world seeks to stimulate our old sin nature, and does so by the images shown, the appetites tickled, and the pride stimulated.

Have you ever been happily making your way through the day, when suddenly you are taken aback and ask yourself, "Where did that thought come from?" Satan used the world to send a fiery dart of temptation your way, and the flesh responded. James provides some very helpful insight on this matter of temptation:

**. . . each one is tempted when, by his own evil  
desire, he is dragged away and enticed.** James 1:14

The phrase *dragged away and enticed* uses words associated with using a lure or bait to catch game. Satan uses this world to toss shiny objects in front of us, seeking to get our sin nature to prompt us to take the lure. If we do, sin and broken fellowship with God result. No wonder we need something to shield us from such darts. Turns out it is *the shield of faith*. But wait, there is one more kind of *fiery dart* we need to discuss tomorrow!

# Back to the Armor of God

## Friday, April 24: Read Mark 9

Some of the *fiery darts* that come our way are those associated with the enticements of this world. But, there is a second kind of *fiery dart* Satan also employs. He seeks to derail our spiritual lives by getting us to become anxious, afraid, or guilty, and struggling with doubt. When we get bogged down with these things, we tend to forget the call to *walk worthy* of who we are in Christ. We forget that we are in the midst of a spiritual battle, and we forget we are to take every thought captive to obedience to Christ. In short, we become casualties in the spiritual conflict and unable to accomplish what God has called us to do until we can quench those kinds of darts.

So, how do we deal with them? Let's go directly to the Word and work our way through the above list. When we are anxious:

**Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, with prayer and supplication. . .**      Philippians 4:6-7

When dealing with fear: realize that "*perfect love drives out fear. . .*" (1 John 4:18) Couple that with:

**. . .neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.**      Romans 8:39

How about when it comes to guilt?

**But if anyone does sin, we have One who speaks to the Father in our defense. . .**      1 John 2:1

When we are struggling with doubt, it can be very helpful to realize: "*Whatever is not of faith is sin. . .*" (Romans 14:23) This should both turn us to the Word of God, which is how we take up the *shield of faith* and to our knees that we might daily pray:

**I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief.**      Mark 9:24

# Back to the Armor of God

Monday, April 27:  
Read Hebrews 4:1-12

So how do we handle the fiery darts of temptation and doubt that Satan sends our way? Why, we quench them by taking up the *shield of faith*. Let me use two passages of Scripture to show you the quenching power of faith. The first verses are Isaiah 40:30-31:

**Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength. . .**

The word translated *wait* has an interesting background. Among other things, it carries the idea of *to twist together* as when simple fibers are twisted together in order to make a strong yarn or rope. Second, add Hebrews 4:11:

**Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.**

The *rest* spoken of in this great treatise on faith refers to when you cease from trying to manage all the details of life and, instead, turn them over to the Lord—trusting Him to manage better than you ever could. The disobedience we want to avoid is that of the Exodus generation, who failed to trust God and to rest in His promise to provide.

Now put the two together. We all are going to struggle with temptation and doubt from time to time. But, those who consistently take the promises of God—twisting them one with another—will renew their strength with the Lord's strength. In fact, there is a place of rest we can enter and that's the place where we cease striving and start trusting! It is a place where we look to Him to provide and then respond as He leads. And that's the start of how we handle the darts which Satan sends!

# Back to the Armor of God

## Tuesday, April 28: Read II Peter 1

Just one more thing about the *shield of faith*—a small thing, but I trust you will be blessed by it. Ephesians 6:16 starts by saying,

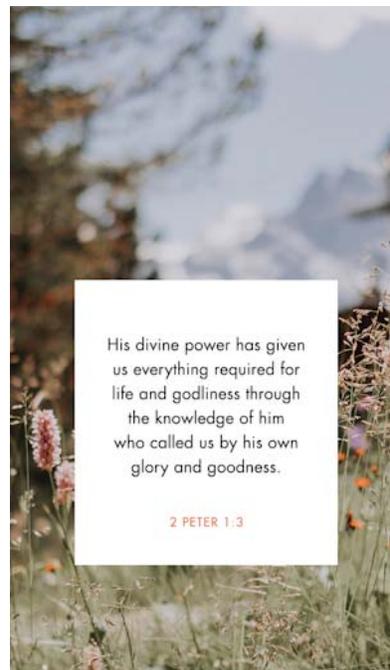
. . .**above all, taking the shield of faith.** . . .

The word translated *taking* literally means to *take up*, and is usually translated that way. That makes sense in the context, for a Roman soldier would normally carry his shield strapped to his body and wouldn't *take it up* until danger threatened. How about for the Christian? What truth are we to extract from this little idea of exercising faith at a moment of crisis? Consider the following:

- From God's side, He has provided everything!

**His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness. . . He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.**

II Peter 1:3-4



# Back to the Armor of God

Tuesday, April 28: Read II Peter 1  
(Continued)

- Then, failure must reside on man's side when it comes to knowing and taking up God's promises! Will we, over time, be diligent to collect promises from God's Word and will we allow them to loom larger in our thinking than circumstances during a time of crisis?
- Is there anything more common to failure than a lack of faith? Consider all the Biblical examples: Adam and Eve, the Exodus generation, Israel at the First Coming of Jesus.
- Then, is there anything more noteworthy in practice than the exercise of faith? Consider Abraham trusting in the promise of God and being declared righteous and Job commenting:

**Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.** Job 13:15

- And, what is the reward for faith? It is the blessedness of hearing a judgment day declaration from the Lord Himself:  
**"Well done, good and faithful servant!"**  
Matthew 25:23
- In many ways, we can reduce our spiritual lives to this: will we face each challenge that comes our way by turning to the Lord in faith and then taking up His promises and holding firmly to them?

# Back to the Armor of God

## Wednesday, April 29: Read Isaiah 30

Just a few more items to note on *taking up the shield of faith*—beginning from where we left off yesterday:

- Trusting in the promises of God's Word is part of the defensive nature of the entire armor metaphor. In other words, we are to *stand firm* in the faith, *rest* in faith, *receive* that which prompts our faith, and *wait* in faith. This is beautifully summarized in Isaiah 30:15:  
**This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength. . ."**
- We have spent quite a few days on faith! Here's why: it is possible to be justified before God and yet spiritually defenseless. That is exactly the situation if we fail to take up the shield of faith by leaving the promises of God unclaimed! It is possible for us to have peace with God and yet succumb to temptation—that's what happens if we fail to extinguish Satan's fiery darts with the *shield of faith*.
- It is possible to be seated with Christ in the heavenly realms and yet walk in an unworthy manner—perish the thought. You see, faith is the *modus operandi* of the Christian. Learning to live dependently upon the sovereign, omnipotent, loving Creator of all things is what *shields* us from temptation and doubt in enemy territory. Furthermore, to be in fellowship with other saints who are likewise *taking up the shield of faith* is what allows us to stand firm despite the winds of politics, persecution, worldliness, and the like.

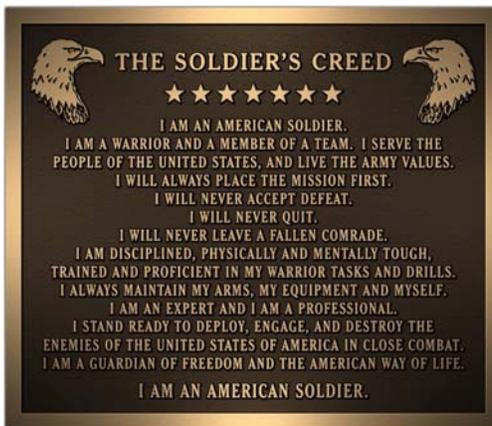
God's people are not meant to be scattered by the drama of this world but united in taking up the *shield of faith* as we hold fast to the Word of God! And all God's people said, "Amen!"

# Mission and Disciplines

## Thursday, April 30: Read Genesis 1

*We are going to review a series we did some time ago called *The Mission and Disciplines of the Christian Way of Life*. By the nature of this kind of study, we will not be working our way through any particular book, but rather through a number of topics. Nonetheless, we will continue with reading a selected chapter a day and focus upon reminding ourselves of the singular mission given to us by our Lord and the many disciplines with which we must become familiar in order to accomplish the mission we have been given. I think you will find these reminders to be very helpful. We won't do them all at once, but spread them out in several sessions during the course of the coming year.*

Does it help an organization to know its mission? Apparently the U. S. Army thinks so, because for many years it has fostered a *Soldier's Creed*. The mission-mindset it attempts to foster is clear in the following excerpt from the Creed:



*I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the United States of America in close combat.*

Now, as we turn to the pages of Scripture, it becomes clear that God has, on a number of occasions, given a

Continued on the next page.

# Mission and Disciplines

Thursday, April 30: Read Genesis 1  
(Continued)

mission to mankind. For example, consider Genesis 1:28:

**So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."**

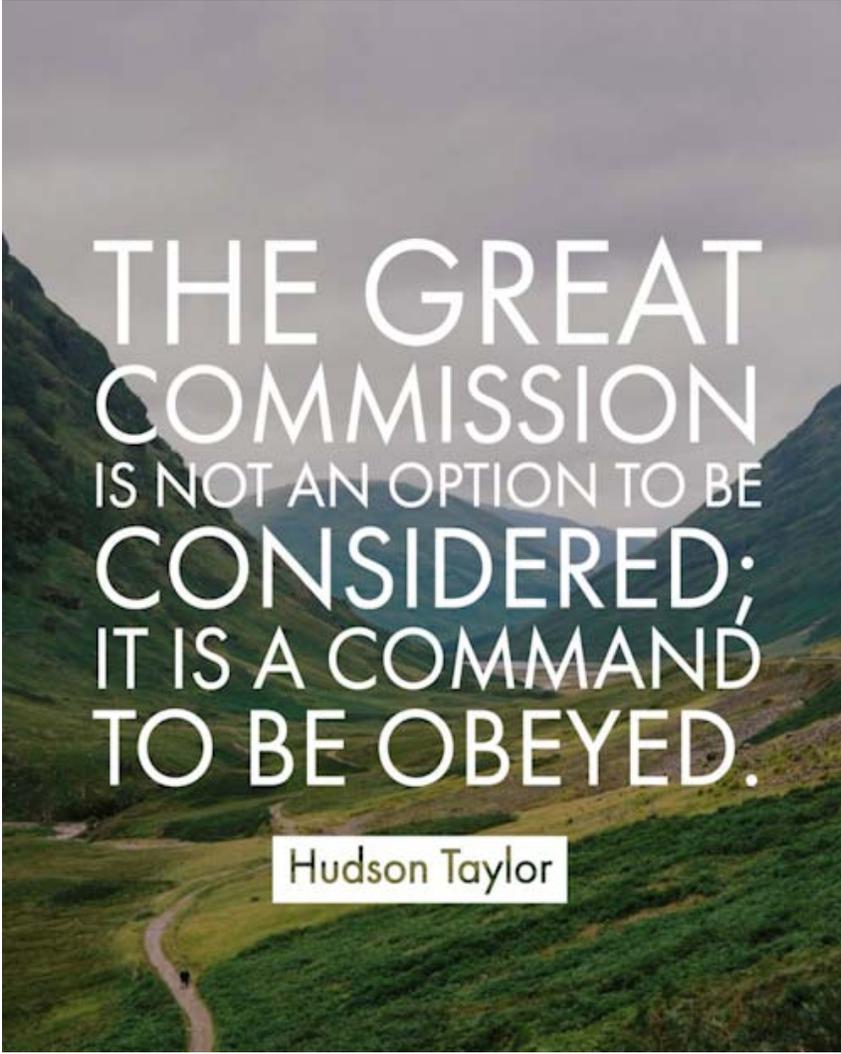
Now it is true that was a long time ago, so what about now during the time period when God is working through the Church? Our mission couldn't be more clear as it was given by Jesus Himself:

**"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."**

Matthew 28:18-20

Notice that Jesus first establishes His authority, and then gives one command—to make disciples!

Does the Church seem to you like it is fully engaged in its mission? Are the lost being converted and then taught everything that Jesus taught and revealed to us in His Word? I would suggest that we have lost our focus, that we have a *mission problem*. That is one reason why recent studies indicate that 78% of the people in America, who claim to be Christians, don't seem to hold values or live lives compatible with Biblical Christianity!

A scenic landscape of a mountain valley with a winding path and a person walking. The text is overlaid on the image.

THE GREAT  
COMMISSION  
IS NOT AN OPTION TO BE  
CONSIDERED;  
IT IS A COMMAND  
TO BE OBEYED.

Hudson Taylor

VISTOSO  
  
Community Church

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

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