

**THE SOVEREIGNTY
OF GOD**

**IN A PASTOR'S
SUFFERINGS AND SORROWS**

BURLEY W. MOORE

**The Sovereignty Of God
In A Pastor's
Sufferings And Sorrows**

All scripture references are taken from the KJV

Copyright © 2016
Burley W. Moore
All Rights Reserved

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT

**Burley W. Moore
2704 Fairway Drive
Greensboro, NC 27408
burleymoore@att.net
336-292-2408**

Please Visit Our Web Site At
www.covenantofgraceministries.com

Cover Design © Morris Publishing

Printed in the United States by Morris Publishing ®
3212 East Highway 30
Kearney, NE 68847
800-650-7888

Table Of Contents

Dedication ...	4
Preface ...	6
Introduction ...	9
Chapter 1	
Abraham, The Fatherly Shepherd ...	12
Chapter 2	
Joseph, The Tried Shepherd ...	20
Chapter 3	
Moses, The Delivering Shepherd ...	29
Chapter 4	
Samuel, The Three Fold Shepherd ...	50
Chapter 5	
David, The Kingly Shepherd ...	58
Chapter 6	
Jeremiah, The Weeping Shepherd ...	67
Chapter 7	
Paul, The Persecuted Shepherd ...	78
Chapter 8	
Timothy, The Young Shepherd ...	99
Chapter 9	
Jesus Christ, The Great Shepherd ...	122
A Summary on Sovereignty ...	138
Final Thoughts ...	147

Dedication

This book is dedicated to our youngest son, Wilson Wade Moore, who has been called by God as a preacher of the Word and a pastor to feed the flock. My wife and I sensed that God's Sovereign Hand was upon his life at a very early age; however, we never tried to persuade him to any particular area of ministry. We knew that if God was going to call him, then in God's timing the Lord would fulfill His plan.

It was about fifteen years ago when I remember Wilson first telling us that God had called him to preach. Shortly thereafter, the local church where he was attending, gave him a ministerial license acknowledging God's call upon his life. Later, while serving as a youth pastor, another congregation ordained him into the Gospel ministry. It became apparent that God's Hand was upon him. I'm not saying this because he's our son, but he is an above average preacher. In fact, he is not only a good communicator, but a great expositor of Holy Scripture.

The path of yielding to his call into the pastorate has not been easy. In fact, I've never met a God-called pastor who didn't struggle with his call. For several years, Wilson worked as a youth pastor saying that he wanted to preach to youth. There's nothing wrong with that whatsoever, except when God has called you to pastor all ages. He is very gifted in evangelism and with the ability of relating to youth. The only problem with that is that he was using it to run from the pastorate which he did for quite some time. He kept telling the Lord that pastoring a church was not for him, until the day that God broke him.

I'll never forget the phone call that we received from him while he was serving as a youth pastor. As he wept, he told us that the Lord had gotten his full attention and he was no longer running from his call to be a pastor. He had run from this for so long because he had grown up in a pastor's home and knew what to expect. Finally, the day came when ye yielded to the sovereign will of God for his life. The song writer expressed it so well

when he penned the words, “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way To be happy in Jesus, But to trust and obey.”

I’ve not only dedicated this book to Wilson, but shared a little bit of his story for a reason. I believe every God-called pastor reading this book can relate to what I’m saying. Circumstances may vary with every individual, but the same struggles prevail. Personally, I can certainly relate due to my similar experiences of struggling with my call many years ago while a teenager.

Yes, there will be sufferings and sorrows unique to being an under-shepherd. However there will also be blessings and rewards that are indescribable. Being at peace with God is worth more than all this world can offer. Wilson found this out, like all other God-called pastors who have learned to rest in the sovereignty of our Almighty Creator.

Preface

The origin of this book dates back to when our son, Wilson, was a student at Fruitland Baptist Bible College. One of his professors was Dr. Scott Thompson who was a tremendous encouragement to him. Dr. Thompson is also the Vice President and Academic Dean of the College. Our son gave Dr. Thompson a copy of my books and after reading several of them, he made a suggestion that I write a book on the Sovereignty of God. At first, the thought was overwhelming. That subject is as deep as God Himself. Where would I begin to tackle such an awesome doctrine? Then, Wilson reflected back upon my pastoral autobiography, *My Life As A Pastor, Shepherding God's Sheep And Herding Goats*, and suggested that I narrow my writing down to *The Sovereignty Of God In A Pastor's Sufferings and Sorrows*. With that being the case, he is the one who actually gave this book its title.

As I addressed the occupation of biblical shepherding in my autobiography, I will begin this book in the same manner. Shepherding was a major occupation in both the Old and New Testaments. When Jesus was born in the flesh and dwelt among men before His crucifixion, He likened His relationship with His people to the Shepherd and the Sheep.

During the time of Christ's earthly ministry, shepherding was a major occupation. There was an invisible, but noticeable bond that developed between the shepherd and the sheep. Because of this bond, Christ used this particular occupation to illustrate His relationship with His people. Even in the Old Testament, Jehovah is pictured as a Shepherd over Israel.

One of the best pictures of an eastern shepherd is found in the famous twenty-third Psalm. With the experience of a shepherd, David likens Christ to a shepherd over His own. He declares that a shepherd satisfies his sheep by saying, "the Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Ps. 23:1). Then he goes on to say that a shepherd gives his sheep rest by making them "to lie down in green pastures" (Ps. 23:2a). Furthermore, he writes that the

shepherd guides his sheep by the way “he leadeth me beside the still waters” (Ps. 23b). He also proclaims the confident assurance of the shepherd’s protection in the fact that “I will fear no evil: for thou art with me” (Ps. 23:4b). When this life is over, we are reminded that our shepherd will bring his sheep safely home to “dwell in the house of the Lord for ever” (Ps. 23:6).

There are many individuals that I could include throughout Scripture in regards to being a biblical shepherd. However, with the exception of my autobiography, I’ve tried to limit my books to around one hundred pages. It’s my opinion that people will be more likely to read a short book rather than a lengthy volume. Therefore, I’ve tried to narrow the people of whom I write to only a few and trust that I’ll say enough to get my point across. God has always called men throughout both the Old and New Testaments that He has chosen to use as shepherds over His people. They all had their own set of problems just like His under-shepherds do today. Some of our problems are similar while others encounter difficulties that are unique unto themselves. The one factor that remains constant is that we’re all in the same battle against the enemy of our souls.

Generally, we have no trouble seeing New Testament pastors as the shepherds, under-shepherds in particular, of God’s sheep. Seldom do we give any thought to the spiritual leaders of the Old Testament saints as also being God’s shepherds over His people. The circumstances of time are different; however the concept of spiritual leadership is basically the same. The term shepherds was used in the Old Testament in referring to Israel’s leaders or rulers (Jer. 2:8, 3:15, 10:21, 12:10, 23:1-4). Some were good, but most were not. They often led the nation into idolatry and all types of evil. In other words, there were a few good ones, but the majority of them were very bad, just like you find today among modern day pastors.

In fact, the KJV translates this passage from Jeremiah by using the word pastors while the NKJV and ESV uses the word shepherds. Both words are referring to the same work. For that reason, I have chosen to refer to the spiritual leaders of whom I write as shepherds. Some were literally shepherds by occupation,

but all were spiritual shepherds by God's own choosing. We can learn much about God's sovereignty in their sufferings and sorrows.

As you can no doubt tell from just getting started in this book, it has been written primarily for pastors. However, I trust that any Christian who reads this book can certainly find meaning and application to his or her own life. Pastors are shepherds over God's sheep, but many of the truths and principles that are applicable in this book relating to the under-shepherds can also apply to the sheep. Years ago, I heard someone say that the same thing that makes little folks grow also makes big folks grow. In the spiritual realm that is so very true. Regardless of age or gender, every Christian needs to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. We refer to this as sanctification and there's not a Christian anywhere who doesn't need to grow in faith and learning how to lean and trust in the great sovereignty of our God (Prov. 3:5). This applies to the under-shepherd of God's sheep as well as to God's sheep. If the under-shepherd is not growing in the Word, then God's sheep to whom he tends will not grow in the Word.

Introduction

To begin with, I'd like to give a definition, to the best of human ability, as to what we mean by The Sovereignty of God. In doing so, I've chosen to quote the words of one of my favorite authors, A.W. Pink, from his book on *The Sovereignty of God*. He writes, "What do we mean by this expression? We mean the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the god-hood of God. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that God is God. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High, doing according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that none can stay His hand or say unto Him what doest Thou? (Dan. 4:35).

To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in Heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will (Psa. 115:3). To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is "The Governor among the nations" (Psa. 22:28), setting up kingdoms, overthrowing empires, and determining the course of dynasties as pleaseth Him best. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the "Only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15). Such is the God of the Bible."

When we speak of God being sovereign, it's like speaking of God being Holy. There are no degrees of God's Sovereignty and no degrees of God's holiness. God is either sovereign over all things or He is not God. Likewise, God is either holy or He's not. If God is not sovereign then He is not God and if He's not holy then He is not God. There is no such thing as God being sovereign over some things, but not all things. Being the sovereign God that He is means that He has ordained all things to the good pleasure of His will.

The doctrine of God's Sovereignty teaches that all things are under God's rule. He is in absolute control over everything that happens. He does not need our permission to do what He does. God works all things according to the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11). Nothing can thwart the divine purpose of our God (Isa.

46:11). Being Sovereign does not mean that God simply has the power or right to govern the universe, but that this is our Father's world and He always does as He pleases. He not only foreknows what will take place, but He has ordained it. This concept literally blows the mind of most people merely because their understanding of the True and Living God is too small.

Just because we cannot understand why He does what He does doesn't change His sovereignty. He is sovereign over our salvation, sicknesses, troubles, trials, difficulties, and downfalls. Nothing takes Him by surprise. He knows us before we're ever born. He has a people that He has sovereignly ordained to eternal life. We cannot take any credit whatsoever for our redemption. God sovereignly grants faith and repentance to His elect. Furthermore, He not only sovereignly calls His people unto Himself, but He calls human shepherds to care for His sheep. It's truly amazing how our Sovereign Holy God will choose frail human instrumentality to do His work among His people on earth.

In this little book, I've chosen several individuals whom God sovereignly chose from both the Old and New Testaments to use for His glory. These were not perfect individuals. In fact, they were all greatly flawed men who knew the sovereign grace of God. There are many that I could have chosen to write about from the Scriptures, but I've narrowed it down to only a few. I've also deliberately not written more about New Testament shepherds because I've already written a book on the Twelve Disciples dealing with their sorrows and sufferings (see my book, *The Twelve Disciples, Learning Discipleship From the Original Apostles*). These original twelve disciples served as the first New Testament pastors until elders could be established in the early local churches. They did not have it easy, to say the least. In fact, there never has been nor will there ever be a time until Jesus comes when a God called pastor (under-shepherd of God's sheep) will have it easy.

For the above reasons, I've limited my writing about New Testament pastors to only two. Since Paul was the human penman that God sovereignly chose to write most of the New

Testament, he claims most of my attention in this book. We can look at all of the different letters that he wrote to the various churches and discover that he had a pastor's heart and a love for all the local churches of his day, even the church at Corinth. Only God can give His under-shepherds a love like that of Paul and Timothy. If God has called you to be a pastor, a preacher of the Word, a minister of the Holy Scriptures, and to serve in a local church, then He will give you the grace to endure all the difficulties that go along with the call. As you proceed in the reading of this book, you'll be reminded just how human these men were and just how sovereign our God is over all things.

Chapter 1

Abraham, The Fatherly Shepherd

Initially, I thought about writing on the Sovereignty of God and confining it to the Book of Genesis, but then I realized how lengthy that would be. Besides, just think about the opening verse of the Bible and the first four words, “In the beginning God” (Gen. 1:1a). That in itself is almost an endless study. The theme of God’s sovereignty begins with this opening verse of the Bible and then page after page of Holy Scripture is filled with God’s sovereignty. Therefore, as I’ve already stated, I have chosen to condense my remarks to only a few individuals who served in a shepherding role. There are many people of whom I could write before we get to Abraham, but for the sake of space, I begin with him. He is indeed a fascinating individual for many reasons in whom God’s sovereignty is displayed.

Just think about it. Abraham was a heathen living in Ur of the Chaldees (Gen. 11:28). He had no interest in God. He was an idolater just like his father, Terah. In sovereign grace, God called this pagan idol worshipper to saving grace when he was not looking for the One and Only Supreme Deity of this universe. Abraham is a beautiful picture of the tulip acrostic (T-total depravity, U-unconditional election, L-limited atonement, I-irresistible grace, P-perseverance of the saints). Let’s pause for a moment and look at several passages of Scripture that lays the foundation and paints this picture.

“And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees.” (Gen. 11:28)

“And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son’s son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram’s wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.” (Gen. 11:31)

“And he said unto him, I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.” (Gen. 15:7)

“Thou art the Lord the God, who didst choose Abraham, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham.” (Neh. 9:7)

Abraham was the physical father of the Hebrew people, but he is also known as the spiritual father of those who are found in the household of faith. Abraham was not only a shepherd by occupation, but he was also a spiritual shepherd to believers in the coming Messiah.

“Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.” (Rom. 4:16)

We are reminded in Hebrews, chapter eleven and verse eight, that Abraham left Ur “by faith.” Now, just where do you think this man who had been a pagan got this kind of faith? Do you think that one day, all of a sudden, he decided that he was going to pump it out of his idolatrous heart? The only way that he could have become a recipient of this kind of faith was from God. Humanly speaking, we sometimes use the word faith in a different way from which the Bible uses it. We might speak of having faith in our doctor, or in our spouse, or in our mechanic. When we use the word in such a way, we’re talking about having confidence or trust in that person. There’s nothing wrong with that except when we speak of having faith in God, it’s not the same type of faith, much less the same level of faith.

The kind of faith that Abraham had was a supernatural trust and belief in the Almighty Sovereign God of the universe. It’s the kind of faith that is from above. Only God can bestow it. Nobody is born with it and nobody can manufacture it on their own. If God had not granted it to Abraham, then he would have

never left Ur and we would not have this story of faith recorded for us in Holy Scripture. The background of Abraham shows us the source of faith that will do you when you're dying. If you don't have God-given faith then you don't have saving faith nor do you have the necessary faith that will victoriously get you through the trying circumstances of life.

Let's remember that Abraham was an old man when God started working on him (Gen. 12:4). Because of this supernatural work of grace and faith, Abraham went contrary to human reasoning and left the pagan land where he had found worldly comfort and ventured out into the unknown. The faith that God plants in a sinner's soul reveals itself in obedience to the Lord (Jam. 2:14-26).

Abraham left everything behind in Ur and journeyed into the Promised Land, but he actually never owned any of its real estate during his lifetime (Gen. 23) except a burial plot. However, the purchase of this plot was an exercise of faith, believing that someday, just as God had promised, his posterity would own the land (Heb. 11:14-22).

There have been many pastors who have left promising worldly careers, perhaps a family business, to follow the Lord in occupational ministry. The world, no doubt, will look at us and think that we're crazy. But, the decision to follow the Lord is like that of the disciples who left their nets and followed Jesus. It's also like that of Abraham when he left Ur into the humanly unknown future.

It was just a matter of time before this man of faith reminds us that our faith will never be perfected on this side of heaven. I'll be the first to admit that there have been more times than I'd like to remember when I did not exercise the faith that God has given me. Every Christian is a work in progress, even pastors, just like Abraham. It probably wasn't all that long after God called him out of Ur and established him as Father of a promised race of people that his faith was threatened. A severe famine forced him down into Egypt (Gen. 12:10-20).

In order to try and save his own life, instead of trusting God to protect him, he told the Egyptians that Sarah was his sister rather

than claiming her for his wife. Knowing that she was a beautiful woman, he thought that they would kill him and take her. A study of this story will show that she was actually his stepsister, but at this time he was not claiming her as his wife because he was trying to save his own hide. His faith was imperfect, but God had made a promise and when God makes a promise, it's as good as done. When Sarah's beauty drew Pharaoh's attention, desiring her for himself, God intervened and sent plagues upon Pharaoh which caused him to realize that this couple was under divine protection. Abraham had made a mess out of things, but God stepped onto the scene and got him out.

How many times has this ever happened to us? If the truth be told, more times than we'll ever know. We can see ourselves in these Bible characters and for that reason, God has recorded their lives for us to read about in Holy Scripture. We just need to learn from their failures in hopes that we'll not fall into the same trap and if we do, we're reminded that our God is true and faithful to His Word. Let this experience of Abraham be a warning to us lest we wonder off down into Egypt and lose our testimony of faith.

Abraham was a man of faith (Heb. 11:8-19), but as we've just seen, his faith was not always as great as it could have been. There were times when he exercised his faith to its fullest and there were other times when his faith gave way to doubt. God had promised him an heir, but with the years ticking away and Sarah being past the age of child-bearing his faith plummeted. He became impatient, took matters into his own hands, and once again made a mess out of things by taking Sarah's handmaid as a concubine who gave birth to Ishmael (Gen. 16:1-16).

Every Christian, especially pastors, must learn to wait upon the Lord and trust His promises to us. We must not try to take godly matters into our own hands, but realize that our sovereign God does not need our help. We need God. It is not God Who needs us. As we all know, Abraham had to suffer the consequences of this lapse of faith the rest of his life and the effects continue to be reaped to this day in history. Never forget the admonition of the

psalmist, “Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth” (Ps. 46:10).

Because God fulfills His promises, this sin of Abraham did not thwart the birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 21:1-34). In contrast to Abraham’s failure of faith, we now look at the triumph of his faith in the offering of his promised son. Isaac was not a little boy, but probably an older teen or young man when he and Abraham made their trip up to the top of Mt. Moriah (Gen. 22:1-24). Abraham’s faith was tested with the offering of Isaac on the altar of sacrifice. We can see it now. Abraham’s knife was raised over the top of the bound Isaac who was about to be sacrificed when the bleating of a “ram caught in a thicket by his horns” got his attention. This animal became the substitute for Isaac upon the altar. This story is a beautiful picture (type) of the Lord Jesus Who became our Substitute in paying the penalty of our sin on the cross in our place.

Sometimes our faith will be tested, like Abraham’s, to the bitter end (so to speak). We could say that it might be tested to the breaking point. When that comes to us as Christians, and especially pastors, will our faith stand the test? It’s not a matter of “if” it comes, but “when” it comes because it will come to every Christian. Trials and tribulations will come to us all. God uses them to strengthen us as believers. Do you remember when you were in school and you had to prepare for a test? I remember some of my teachers giving a “pop quiz.” There are times in life when God will give us a test similar to the way He tested Abraham’s faith.

The Sufferings and Sorrows in the Life of Abraham

Why did God call Abraham to be the first shepherding pastor of Israel? Was it because of his skills, abilities, or godliness? What did God see in Abraham that would merit God calling him to be the Father of the Hebrew people? This answer is a simple, nothing! Only God’s sovereign grace would call such a man like Abraham to fill the role that God had designed for him before the beginning of time.

The same is true for those of you who are pastors reading this book. God did not call you into the ministry because of your worthiness. He does not save on the basis of our goodness and neither does God call us into His service based upon our personal merit because we have none. We're all just a bunch of rebellious idolatrous sinners depraved from the top of our heads to the soles of our feet. Not a single solitary one of us deserve anything except judgment and hell. To be saved is an act of God's sovereign grace. To stand behind the sacred desk and proclaim the precious Word of God is an act of God's sovereign grace. To be the under-shepherd of God's flock is an act of God's sovereign grace.

It's a shame when preachers get the "big head" and act like they are God's gift to humanity. Perhaps you've heard it said that before God will ever use us, He must break us. How true that is as we discover in the life of Abraham. After saving him and imputing unto him His righteousness, God gently led Abraham along through his lapse of faith, poor decisions, and downright episodes of great sin. Like Abraham, we'll quickly discover that we have not arrived at living above sin and will have to deal with the consequences of it in this life.

Perhaps you're so disappointed with yourself because of failure to exercise your faith as you should, that you've even entertained the thought of giving up trying. Let me assure you that such a thought as this is of the devil. When I was in the pastorate, we pastors would sometimes say that we felt like resigning most every Monday morning, but before the week was over, we were ready and raring to get back into the pulpit on Sunday.

The Christian life can be discouraging, especially for pastors. People can fail you, let you down, antagonize you, disappoint you, stab you in the back, threaten you, and even sometimes trample you down. But, to be honest, the number one person that I had problems with was myself and failure to meet the expectations that I had set for myself. I hang my head in shame, confessing that I failed my Lord many times, but my Lord has never failed me. Our God never failed Abraham and He will never fail any of His children. Being the Sovereign God that He

is, He knows our weaknesses and how frail we are in this area of faith. Being the Sovereign God that He is, He is full of love and patience in teaching us how to grow in faith. Being the Sovereign God that He is, He is so very patient with His children. Our God does not tolerate our sin, but He is longsuffering toward His own.

Just remember that when God will put your faith to the test, He has a plan and purpose in doing so. In the New Testament Book of James, the writer wrote under divine inspiration reminding us of these words.

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations (divers temptations means many trials); Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (Jam. 1:2-4).

The apostle Paul also reminds us in the fifth chapter of Romans, verses one through five, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, 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.”

None of us enjoy going through times of testing, trial, or tribulation, but God uses these times to refine us and make us useful vessels. Don't ever forget that God is sovereign over our suffering just like God the Father was sovereign over the suffering of His “only begotten Son” (Jh. 3:16) when Jesus was made a sacrifice for us.

“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the

temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (I Cor. 10:12-13).

Believers in both the Old and New Testaments dealt with the struggles of life and had to learn that sanctification is an ongoing process. Abraham had to learn it in the Old Testament just like Peter in the New (See my book on *The Twelve Disciples, Learning Discipleship From The Original Apostles*). Peter knew about failing his Lord as well as did Abraham, but both men also discovered the sovereign grace of God through all the ups and downs of life. Of all people, God chose Peter to be the human penmen of the epistle that bears his name.

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls” (I Pet. 1:2-10).

Chapter 2

Joseph, The Tried Shepherd

Perhaps the story of Joseph and his coat of many colors has been one of the many favorites for children down through the years. There are so many lessons to learn from the life of Joseph that a very lengthy book could be written concerning him alone. For instance, of all the Old Testament characters Joseph probably has more “types” pointing to Christ as the “antitype” than just about any other person in the Bible (see my book, *On What Day of the Week Was Christ Crucified?*, where I write on the subject of typology in Scripture).

With that being said, it’s rather difficult to pick and choose which of the important areas of Joseph’s life that relate to the Sufferings and Sorrows that came about in his life. Therefore, I’m going to start with the episode of him being sold into Egyptian slavery. The great sovereignty of God in preserving the people of Israel was in motion with the betrayal of Joseph by his brothers and them selling him as a slave.

“And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. These *are* the generations of Jacob. Joseph, *being* seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad *was* with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report. Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he *was* the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of *many* colours. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him. And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told *it* his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: For, behold, we *were* binding sheaves in the field,

and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf. And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words. And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told *it* to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What *is* this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying. And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed *the flock* in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here *am I*. And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. And a certain man found him, and, behold, *he was* wandering in the field: and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou? And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed *their flocks*. And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan. And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan. And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams. And

Reuben heard *it*, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him. And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, *but* cast him into this pit that *is* in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again. And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, *his* coat of *many* colours that *was* on him; And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit *was* empty, *there was* no water in it. And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry *it* down to Egypt. And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit *is it* if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he *is* our brother *and* our flesh. And his brethren were content. Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty *pieces* of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt. And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph *was* not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child *is* not; and I, whither shall I go? And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; And they sent the coat of *many* colours, and they brought *it* to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it *be* thy son's coat or no. And he knew it, and said, *It is* my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he

refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him. And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard. (Gen. 27:1-36)

The story of Joseph is one of the most exciting biographies in the Bible. He was not a perfect person, but he does stand out as a spiritual giant in his family. Beginning in chapter thirty-seven of Genesis and running through the remainder of this first book in the Bible, we have a record of Joseph's life. Because of the attention that the Bible places on Joseph, it should cause us to take special note of his life. He is a living example of those "things" that are "true ... honest ... just ... pure ... lovely" and "of good report" (Phil 4:8). The entire life of Joseph reminds us of God's sovereign care over His elect. If God has called you to be a leader, an under-shepherd, of His "flock" (I Pet. 5:2), then take heart and learn just what to expect with that calling.

It was very apparent that Jacob's love for Joseph exceeded his love for his other children. This naturally provoked jealousy within the family among the siblings. At the age of seventeen, Joseph was given the task of feeding he flock. In other words, we discover another shepherd at a very young age. Although, he was the youngest, besides Benjamin who was too young to be in the fields, he was made a shepherd over his father's sheep along with his older half-brothers. He would not only tend to the sheep, but report to his father the evil that was done by his brothers. Therefore, they did not like him being loved more than the others and they certainly didn't like him being a tattletale.

The coat of many colors was probably given to Joseph by his father as a symbol of his rank, authority, and favored position. Some have translated this coat to be a long-sleeved robe or an

ornamented tunic that was normally given to the first born son. In resentment of this, it's said that his brothers hated him and could not speak peaceable unto him. It was very evident that Jacob's home was everything but a happy home.

Jacob had never learned the lesson regarding the dangers of family favoritism. If you have favorite children, then you're asking for trouble. I'll be the first to admit that each child has unique needs and that what is done for one may not be needed by another. However, that which is done for the children ought to be done fairly among all the siblings within the household. In the case of Joseph's family, Rebekah, Jacob's mother, had played favorites which resulted in Jacob having to leave home (Gen. 27-28). With Rachel being Jacob's favorite wife, her first-born son, Joseph, was more highly favored by Jacob. Let us learn this lesson! Partiality in the home is not healthy; therefore, parents, and of all people, pastors, must love and treat each child equally and fairly. In fact, that is the way pastors ought to treat all the members within the congregation that he serves. Playing favorites will only get you into trouble. It's true that there will be some people in the congregation with whom you will have more in common, but don't fail to treat everyone fairly.

Joseph was a dreamer and the telling of his dreams angered his brothers. God never appeared to Joseph giving him the covenant promise like He did to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, that doesn't mean God never spoke to him. God spoke to Joseph in the form of dreams. Being a dreamer, he once dreamed a dream of a corn field where his brothers were made inferior to him by the manner in which they made obeisance (bowed down) to his sheaf (bundle). In another dream, Joseph even told his father as well as his brethren how they would someday bow own themselves to him. Both of these recorded dreams had different meanings. The first dream of a field had an earthly setting and

depicted Joseph as physically superior. The second dream of the sun and the moon and the eleven stars had a heavenly setting and depicted Joseph as spiritually superior to his family. These dreams were later fulfilled when his brothers bowed down to him in Egypt during the time of famine (Gen. 42:6).

There is no doubt that Joseph's dreams were divinely inspired, but it is questionable as to whether or not he should have told them to his family. There are some things that are best kept to ourselves because of the way others will misunderstand them. Telling his dreams to his family only resulted in rebuke from his father and envy from his brothers. However, the recording of these dreams lets us know that this story is one of divine sovereignty and not human achievement.

God had His own unique plan and purpose for Israel and He had His own unique method of preserving them as a nation. We must remember that at this time in history, the people did not have the printed Word of God and the Lord did sometimes speak through dreams (Heb. 1:1-2). Today, God does not speak through dreams and our dreams cannot be trusted unless they are in perfect agreement with the Word of God. Holy Scripture is our only reliable infallible guide and authority for life. Our trust should be placed in God's Word and not in dreams and experiences.

There came a time when Israel sent Joseph to Shechem to check on his other ten sons who had gone there to feed the flock. Shechem was about a fifty mile trip from Hebron which meant that it would have taken Joseph about two days in travel time. Once he arrived in Shechem, he learned that his brothers had moved to Dothan which was about twenty miles further. When the brothers saw Joseph coming afar off, their hatred and envy caused them to conspire against him to slay him and sarcastically called him the dreamer.

That which should have been a spirit of brotherly love, turned out to be a spirit of jealousy and revenge. Herein comes to surface one of the problems of a polygamous marriage. The tension and hostility in the home was a result of breaking God's marriage laws and committing polygamy. From this story, we see that hatred in the heart is a dangerous thing because it not only damages the innocent, but it increases the guilt of the sinner. Let me remind you that Jacob (Israel) had two wives, Leah and Rachel, plus their two handmaids that he took as concubines or secondary wives. Between these four women, he fathered twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel.

Talk about dysfunctional and fragmented families, we discover that it's nothing new. It dates back to the very first couple in the Garden of Eden. In today's modern day local church, we pastors are having to deal with more and more problems created by families who are not sold out to Jesus Christ. It's nothing uncommon for parents to defend their wayward child instead of rebuking him for his misdeeds. Pastoring is harder today than it was when I began my vocational ministry forty-eight years ago. That's not to say it was easy back then (see my book on *My Life As A Pastor, Shepherding God's Sheep And Herding Goats*). It takes wisdom from above to be a pastor. Therefore, we need to be constantly praying for it as we deal with mixed up messed up families.

It seems strange that Reuben is the one credited with having tried to save Joseph's life. After Reuben's sin of incest (Gen. 35:22), the birthright was passed on to Joseph. Reuben persuaded his brothers not to kill Joseph, but to put him in a pit. His intentions were to later release Joseph and deliver him to his father. Here is a good indication that Reuben had a change of heart, but unfortunately while he was away Judah talked the other brothers into selling Joseph to a caravan of Ishmaelite's. In

doing so, Joseph would be removed from home, they would not be guilty of murder, and they could even financially profit. We can only assume that the twenty pieces of silver was the average price of a slave at that time. With such being the case, each brother could have received two pieces of silver each.

After dipping Joseph's coat of many colors in the blood of a slain goat, the brothers presented it to Jacob, their father. They lied, saying, "we ... know not whether it be they son's coat or no." They knew whose coat it was and exactly what happened to the person to whom it belonged. Jacob's initial reaction was that an evil beast had devoured Joseph.

These sons were so spiritually callused that it didn't matter to them if they broke their father's heart. A wayward and rebellious child can cause the greatest kind of hurt to a parent. The sad thing is that Jacob himself had played the hypocrite and lied to his father Isaac, years earlier. Now, the law of divine retribution had come home to roost (Deut. 5:9). Jacob had deceived his father with a kid of the goats, making it taste like venison, and now his own sons deceived him with the blood from a kid of the goats. Jacob the deceiver was cruelly deceived by his own sons (Gal. 6:7). Jacob's mourning was so severe that he said that he would grieve until he went to his grave.

It appeared that things were working against Joseph, but in reality God was working in his favor. The brothers intended on doing Joseph harm, but God intended it for good (Gen. 45:5-8, 50:20). God sent Joseph into Egypt to prepare for Israel's preservation as a nation during the coming years of famine. Once the caravan of Ishmaelite's (also called Midianites, the sons of Abraham by Hagar had intermarried with the sons of Abraham by Keturah) arrived in Egypt, they sold Joseph to Potiphar who was a prominent Egyptian official. Twenty-two years would pass before Joseph would be reunited with his family. During those

years, God had to teach Joseph some lessons in humility and patience while he taught the brothers some lessons in repentance and maturity.

The Sufferings and Sorrows in the Life of Joseph

Joseph came from a messed up family, but God remained Sovereign in His promise to Abraham and in His promise to Adam in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15). Joseph's brothers hated him and tried to do away with him, but God remained Sovereign over the affairs that were taking place in Joseph's life. There was coming a day when the very nation of Israel could have perished to death due to a coming famine, but God in His Sovereignty was preparing a way for them to survive by having Joseph sold as a slave into Egypt. God makes NO MISTAKES because our God is SOVEREIGN OVER ALL THINGS.

At the time all of the so-called misfortune was taking place in Joseph's life, he could not see what God had ordained for his future. I'm sure that it hurt him beyond measure for his brothers to hate him so much. Pastor friend, it hurts for people to hate us and seek to do us mischief. Just remember that this world in which we live is no friend of grace. It never has been and never will be. It hurts when people turn against us, especially those in our own family as well as those within a local church. Jesus knows the hurt because, "He came unto his own and his own received him not" (Jh. 1:11). If God ordained the suffering of "his only begotten Son" (Jh. 3:16), then why should we expect to escape it?

After it was all said and done, Joseph declared that what his brothers had done to him, they intended it for evil, but God meant it for good in the long term (Gen. 50:20). Joseph was tried and tested in the furnace of affliction, but he proved that his faith was true and genuine. I believe that Joseph discovered the beautiful truth of God's Sovereignty in the everyday happenings of his life. The sooner we embrace it the more confident we can live in a fallen world.

Chapter 3

Moses, The Delivering Shepherd

What is the first thing that pops into your head when you think of Moses? Perhaps it's the opening of the Red Sea or the receiving of the Ten Commandments. It could be a number of different aspects of his life. In thinking of the life of Moses, I want to take you back to the beginning of his life and how he was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter in an ark of bulrushes.

And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he *was a goodly child*, she hid him three months. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid *it* in the flags by the river's brink. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash *herself* at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened *it*, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, *This is one* of the Hebrews' children. Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give *thee* thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the

water. And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that *there was* no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well. Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters: and they came and drew *water*, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. And the shepherds came and drove them away: but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock. And when they came to Reuel their father, he said, How *is it that* ye are come so soon to day? And they said, An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and also drew *water* enough for us, and watered the flock. And he said unto his daughters, And where *is* he? why *is it that* ye have left the man? call him, that he may eat bread. And Moses was content to dwell with the man: and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter. And she bare *him* a son, and he called his name Gershom: for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land. And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac,

and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto *them*. (Ex. 2:1-25)

A new king of Egypt had determined to quench the growth rate of Israel by having all the boy babies cast into the (Nile) River. This was the scene into which the little baby Moses was born. His parents were ordinary people who found themselves victims to Egyptian slavery. Both the mother and father of Moses were from the Hebrew tribe of Levi which was destined to become the priestly tribe of Israel. Later in the book of Exodus (Ex. 6:20), the names of his parents are given as Amram and Jochebed. Moses is one of the few men in Scripture whose life is recorded from infancy to death. God had already arranged, planned, purposed, and ordained for this future leader of Israel to be born into a godly home and to be miraculously sustained against all the odds of his day.

Upon the birth of Moses his parents recognized him to be a goodly child, meaning that he was beautiful and special in the sight of God. Before Moses was ever born and took his first breath, God had already foreordained the purpose of his life. The Bible tells us that by faith his parents followed the leading of God and hid him three months trusting God to preserve his life (Heb. 11:23). Every parent today with small children needs to follow this example and by faith leave their children under God's control (Prov. 22:6). Parents never know what God has in store for their children; therefore, it's extremely important that we raise them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

Now, that doesn't mean that your children will always automatically grow up to love the Lord and walk with Him. Just look at the first couple, Adam and Eve, and how Cain killed Abel. I also want to remind you of Isaac and Esau who were born into the same household, but Scripture declares that "Jacob have

I loved, but Esau have I hated” (Rom. 9:11-23). The passage from Romans is clearly teaching election reminding us that not everyone within a family is necessarily one of God’s elect.

It’s very common to hear parents talk about the difficult world in which we live to raise children, but let me remind you that it can’t get much worse than the circumstances of Moses’ day. Baby Moses was placed in the very river that had been appointed by Pharaoh as the execution sight for male babies. This is an excellent picture of how our children must learn to grow up in the world, but at the same time remain separate from the world by faith in Jesus Christ.

For the first three months, Moses probably slept much and cried little, but eventually the day came when he could not be hid any longer. Seeking to spare his life, his mother tucked him away in a little ark in the river and had his sister to stand guard over him. After doing all she could she trusted God to take care of her son. Likewise, that’s the way it is with Christian parents today, but we cannot expect God to do for us what He’s given us the ability to do for ourselves.

Of all people, the daughter of Pharaoh found Moses floating in the river when she went down to take her bath. This just goes to prove how the king’s heart (Prov. 21:1) is under God’s control and in this case it was the heart of the king’s daughter. When she opened the little basket, the babe wept and the woman’s heart was filled with such compassion that she could not surrender the child to death.

By divine appointment and God’s sovereign decree, three people (Pharaoh’s daughter, Miriam, Moses) were at the right place at the right time. Moses’ sister had been watching the ark and when Pharaoh’s daughter drew it out of the river, Miriam made her appeal. She suggested that a Hebrew woman be found

to nurse the child which sounded like a sensible thing since the baby was going to need this type of attention.

Naturally, Miriam goes directly to the natural mother of Moses and not only did she get to nurse her own son, but was even paid wages for doing it. Here is a good illustration of how God's ideal is for parents to raise their children. In some cases this might be impossible due to tragic circumstances, but generally speaking God gives children to parents and holds them accountable for their upbringing. The God given calling and responsibility of every mother is to place her family as a top priority next to Christ (Titus 2:4-5). As Moses grew, Pharaoh's daughter claimed this boy as her very own and gave him the name Moses, meaning to draw forth because he was drawn out of the water.

The first forty years of Moses's life were spent in Pharaoh's palace. It was here that he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts 7:20-29), but yet there was something deep down inside of him that was greater than the worldly wisdom of the Egyptians. I personally believe that those growing up years spent with his natural mother were years of spiritual indoctrination. That spiritual training became such a part of him that when put to the test years later, he had to choose between the wisdom of the Egyptians and the wisdom of God (Heb. 11:24-27).

There came a day when he saw an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew and he identified this Hebrew as being one of his brethren. He knew deep in his heart that the cruel treatment given the Hebrews wasn't right and in anger, he slew the Egyptian who was beating the Hebrew slave. His loyalty to the Hebrews is commendable, but his act of murder is questionable. Even though we cannot help but admire his courage and conviction, this episode reveals some of his imperfections as he tried to do what only forty more

years in the desert could train him to do and that is to wait upon God for deliverance.

When it became public knowledge that which Moses had done, he fled from the face of Pharaoh to Midian. It was on the backside of the desert where God would put him through the school of spiritual training and preparation for the years ahead. Before he could deliver Israel from bondage, Moses had to learn that his real enemy was the devil and the only way to defeat him is not with our carnal weapons, but with spiritual power from on High.

After Moses arrived in Midian, he encountered the seven daughters of Reuel, also known as Jethro (Ex. 3:1), who invited Moses to dwell with them. These Midianites were descendants of Abraham (Gen. 25:1-2) who lived near Mt. Sinai and intermarried with the line of Ishmael (Gen. 37:25,28, Judges 8:24). One of the seven daughters was Zipporah who was given to Moses as his wife. In this respect, Moses became a type of Christ because just as Moses took a gentile bride, so has Christ predominately taken a gentile bride in the New Testament Church.

Unto Moses and Zipporah, God gave two sons. The first was named Gershom, meaning stranger indicating his awareness of being in a strange land. The second son was born some time later and was named Eliezer (Ex. 18:3-4). When Moses first arrived in Midian, he defended the daughters from some abusing shepherds. At this point, it's interesting to note that he was recognized more quickly as an Egyptian rather than a Hebrew. As Christians living in an ungodly world, we must not lose our identity with Christ and resemble our heathen environment.

It's recorded that God was going to deliver Israel from bondage for one simple reason! That is because He remembered His covenant made with the patriarchs (Gen. 12:1-3). God wasn't

going to deliver the children of Israel because they deserved it, but because of His gracious promises. They failed God time after time, but God remained faithful to His Word and He always will. God promises to take His people to heaven, not because we deserve it, but because He saves by Grace and is faithful to keep His Word.

The cry's and groaning's of Israel appealed to the heart of God and He set His plans in motion to deliver His people from Egyptian bondage through Moses. During those long and difficult years, God was preparing Israel and Moses for a future deliverance. After learning how to take care of a few sheep, Moses would eventually be shepherding a whole nation of Israelites.

One day while tending his sheep, God got his attention through a bush that burned, but was not consumed. It was at that time God called Moses to the task for which he had been born.

“Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, *even* to Horeb. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush *was* not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here *am* I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest *is* holy ground. Moreover he said, *I am* the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God. And

the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt. And Moses said unto God, Who *am* I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this *shall be* a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain. And Moses said unto God, Behold, *when* I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What *is* his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this *is* my name for ever, and this *is* my memorial unto all generations. Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you,

and *seen* that which is done to you in Egypt: And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The LORD God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God. And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty: But every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put *them* upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians. And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee. And the LORD said unto him, What *is* that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the LORD said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: That they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee. And the LORD said furthermore unto him, Put now thine hand into thy bosom. And he put his

hand into his bosom: and when he took it out, behold, his hand *was* leprous as snow. And he said, Put thine hand into thy bosom again. And he put his hand into his bosom again; and plucked it out of his bosom, and, behold, it was turned again as his *other* flesh. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe also these two signs, neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shalt take of the water of the river, and pour *it* upon the dry *land*: and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry *land*. And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I *am* slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say. And he said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of *him whom* thou wilt send. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and he said, *Is* not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart. And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, *even* he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God. And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs. (Ex. 3:1-4:17)

Although Moses had received a formal education in Egypt, he had not been taught in the school of God. Education has its place, but it can never take the place of sitting in the classroom of God Himself. There are a multitude of preachers today with degrees behind their name, but do not have the calling of God upon their lives. God has His own unique ways of calling and training those whom He has chosen to be His shepherds. For the spiritual training of Moses, God made him turn his back on Egypt and flee into Midian. If progress is to be made with God, we also must learn how to separate ourselves from the world, from the desirable places of comfort, and be willing to go wherever the Lord leads, even to the desert if need be.

We've already seen where Moses tried to deliver a Hebrew from the cruel hand of an Egyptian taskmaster. Since his effort was in the energy of the flesh it resulted in his having to flee Egypt for his life. Now, as Moses stands before the burning bush, we discover that he is empowered by God to do what could not be done in the energy of the flesh. For his spiritual schooling, God took Moses from a palace in Egypt to a sheepfold in the desert. Not only was it a mere desert, but Scripture says that it was the backside of the desert where Moses did business with God.

Only when we put the world behind us and get alone with God will we be able to do business with Him. Horeb was the name of a particular mountain range with Sinai being a very special peak in that range. As Moses went out with his sheep one morning, he had no idea what magnificent encounter was in store for him. On a particular day, Moses un-expectantly met God at a burning bush. This just reminds us to be ready for whatever God has in store for us because we know not what a day may bring forth.

The Angel of the Lord that spoke to him was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He didn't appear in a majestic tree, but in a

lowly thorn bush. This speaks of how Christ came as a humble servant to save those in the bondage of sin's slavery. The Hebrew word for bush is SENEH, which means a bramble or thorny bush. Thorns remind us of sin's curse back in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:18). Also, Christ bore a crown of thorns upon His brow to remind us of His reason for having to go to the cross (Gal. 3:13).

This burning bush that Moses witnessed could have a three-fold significance. It could be a picture of God (Heb. 12:29). Scripture speaks of "him that dwelt in the bush" (Deut. 33:16). The Hebrew word for dwelt is SHAH CHAN speaking of the Shekinah glory of God. As Moses was about to undertake this impossible human task, he needed to be reminded of God's infinite and sovereign power. The bush burned, but was not consumed, thus revealing the eternal and indestructible power and glory of the One Who indwelt it.

The burning bush could also be a symbol of Israel because they had gone through the fire of affliction while in Egyptian bondage, yet the nation had not been consumed. Throughout history, evil men tried to exterminate Israel, but God had predestined "his only begotten son" (Jh. 3:16) to be born into it. God always gives His people grace to persevere even in the midst of persecution. Just as God was in the burning bush, He will be with His people in our fiery trials.

The burning bush was an illustration to Moses of his life. He was at this time a simple shepherd, but by God's grace he was to become a holy fire that could not be extinguished. Before Moses could ever be used of God, the Lord had to bring him down to a position of humility. The beginning of true Christian service for the Master is humble recognition of God's holiness, deity, and sovereignty. A proper vision of God's glory is essential if we are to serve Him acceptably in His sight.

Throughout the entire four hundred years of bondage, God had been watching over the condition of His beloved people. The conditions of the Hebrews pictures the condition of the natural man as he is a bondsman to sin and a captive of Satan. In a world of bondage, trial, and sorrow, God came down in the person of Jesus Christ to deliver men from the power of sin. Before a person can be brought into salvation, they must first be brought out of sin. Please listen to what I'm saying carefully. I'm saying that a person must first come under conviction of sin before they will ever realize their need of a Savior. It is all a work of the Holy Spirit. God had to bring Israel out of Egypt before He could bring them into the Promised Land. Mankind must confess and repent of sin before he can have the assurance of forgiveness.

God is the only One able to deliver from sin's bondage. God had to come down and give Moses power to deliver Israel out of their bondage. The Hebrews could not deliver themselves and neither could Moses in the energy of the flesh. Sinners cannot save themselves so God had to come down in the Person of Jesus Christ to save us. Fifteen hundred years after Moses delivered Israel from bondage, Jesus left Heaven's glory to deliver repentant believing sinners from even a far worse bondage.

There is no doubt that Moses rejoiced to hear of God's promise to deliver Israel from suffering, but the real shock was to learn that he was to be the human deliverer chosen by God. The Lord has always chosen to use human instruments to do His work on earth. He could have sent His angels or appeared in Person, but it was not His method. Human instrumentality is still to this very day God's means of bringing sinners from spiritual bondage to salvation (Acts 1:8). It had taken eighty years of preparation and now God was ready for Moses to respond to a divine call to service. If a special call to divine service came to you, how would you respond?

Following Moses' experience at the burning bush, he was hesitant to accept God's call for this important role of service. He was not as eager at eighty to relieve the oppression of Israel as he had been at forty years of age. Tending sheep for forty years on the backside of the desert had tamed, disciplined, chastened, and humbled him a great deal. It's important to notice that Moses was the first man in Scripture to be formally called by God to engage in a particular service. Today, we need to realize that a definite call from God is essential in order to enter into His work.

A great responsibility hangs upon the church to see that only God called and God gifted men are given a place of service (See my book on, "*Godly Servants, A Glimpse into the Subject of Elders, Deacons, and Deaconesses*"). Once God appeared to Moses and gave him his orders, he began making excuses as to why he couldn't do it. Like Moses, it's still very common to hear people make excuses as to why they can't serve the Lord. We're going to observe some objections that Moses raised concerning God's will for his life.

Objection Number One

Moses stated that he was unqualified for the task to which God had called him. Well, let's stop and think about that. Don't you know that the Lord knew how unqualified he was? God doesn't take those who feel qualified, but those who don't. The first step in being able to serve God is to realize our own personal unworthiness. Hudson Taylor once said, "Remember that you are nothing. It is only what God can and will do through you that will be worth anything." Christians must see themselves as nobodies who are called to exalt **SOMEBODY**.

A man who acts in the flesh is impulsive and sees no obstacles, while the man who acts in the Spirit knows the battles and counts

the cost. Who WE are is not important, but what is important is that GOD be with us in our service unto Him (Jh. 15:5). Just as God promised to be with Moses, He still promises to be with those whom He commissions to service (Heb. 13:5).

Objection Number Two

Moses secondly stated that the Hebrews would want to see his credentials. The most common Hebrew word for God is ELOHIM. It appears over twenty-five hundred times in the Old Testament and is used by Jesus in part as He hung upon the cross (Matt. 27:46). God's personal name of JEHOVAH occurs more than six thousand times in the Old Testament and is closely related to the phrase, "I Am." It was used when God said to Moses, "I Am that I Am." It means, "I Am The One Who Is" or "I AM He Who Exist." The phraseology expresses the unchanging, eternal, and self-existence of God's very being. There is a mystery to His being that none can even begin to imagine. "I AM" is from the same Hebrew root as YAHWEH (YHWH). Therefore, the phrase "I AM" is closely related to God's personal name of JEHOVAH or YAHWEH. The word "Lord" is equivalent to the word JEHOVAH.

The majority of people do not deny the existence of God, but at the same time the majority do not know Him on a personal basis. The English word, JEHOVAH, comes from the Hebrew YHWH which was actually not even a word, but merely four consonants standing for God. YAHWEH became such a sacred name to the children of Israel that they didn't even pronounce it, but substituted other words (such as my Lord) when referring to God. Israel's respect for the name of God is a far cry from that found in our day (Ex. 20:7). It's nothing uncommon to hear the

name of our God taken in vain, used in slang expression, spoken in irreverence, or in downright blasphemy.

In the Old Testament the word, ELOHIM, displays the power of God while the word, JEHOVAH (Yahweh or Lord) designates the nature of God in relationship to man. God Almighty is the One and Only God Who exist. He not only has made us, but desires to have a personal relationship with us without which no man can go to heaven when he dies. It's been said that when God told Moses that He was the GREAT "I AM," it was like God giving Israel a blank check. What I mean by that is that God was saying to His people that He was anything and everything that they needed Him to be. Christ revealed Himself in the New Testament as this same eternal "I AM" (Jh. 6:35, 8:12, 10:9,11, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1-5).

In sovereign grace God singled out Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from a mass of humanity to be His chosen vessels. The sovereign covenant keeping God had promised to give them the land of Canaan for their inheritance. God assured Moses that he would see the results of his mission. It's true that Moses and many Israelites didn't enter Canaan, but God's divine purpose was still accomplished with the nation. In the mind and purpose of God, Israel's deliverance had already been determined and predestined by God. What God says is as good as done and He promises three times in three verses saying, "I am sure" (3:19), "I will" (3:20), and "I will" (3:21). Egypt had taken advantage of Israel for four hundred years, but God permitted Israel to be reimbursed by those whom they had served. Actually, it was almost like the Egyptians paying the Israelites to leave their land. The word "borrow" in the KJV doesn't imply that they intended to pay back, but was really the collecting of back wages while in servitude.

When we are called to do God's work, don't ever forget that His work is not about us, but it's about Him. The only way God's work can be done through us is by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our credentials for Christian service will be recognizable by the spiritual gift or gifts given us by the indwelling Holy Spirit. One does not become a pastor to toot his own horn, but to exalt Christ. Unless we have the attitude of John the Baptist when he said, "He (Christ) must increase, but I must decrease," (Jh. 3:30), then we ought not to be in the ministry. Christian service can only be rendered by the sovereign decree of God or else it's not Christian.

Objection Number Three

Thirdly, Moses stated that Israel would not believe him. Have you ever made an excuse to God? I know that you have, just like I find myself guilty. Excuse making to God is in essence a contradiction of His Word. God had already told Moses that they shall hearken, but Moses tells God that they will not hearken. We need to remember that we're made of the same clay material as Moses, so we need to be on guard and overcome disbelief and rebellion when it seeks to arise from within us.

God uses whom He pleases to accomplish His purposes. If He were to wait for a worthy individual then He would go on waiting till the end of time. Moses was a timid, hesitant, unbelieving, and rebellious man, but God still chose to use him in great grace. God gave Moses three miracles that would convince Israel that he was God's accredited deliverer.

Miracle Number #1

First of all, there was the sign of the rod. God asked Moses the question, “what is that in thine hand?” That is a probing question of self-examination. Isn’t it interesting how God takes and uses that which we have and are if we will but only commit it to Him? Do you remember David’s sling? It became a powerful weapon when David committed it to God. The rod of Moses alone was nothing, but in God’s hand it became a mighty instrument.

With the same hand with which Moses had killed a man, God heals his fleshly weakness and transforms him for His glory. Moses had used this rod as a means of support as he walked, leaned upon it when he was weary, and as a weapon of defense in times of danger. From this rod we can learn the secret to overcoming Satan as we lean on the staff and power of Almighty God. This rod could also speak of governmental authority as it shows how God would be supreme over Pharaoh and all the gods of Egypt.

The changing of the rod into a serpent reminds us of Satan’s appearance in the Garden of Eden. Like Moses who fled from before it, we need to recognize the destructive power of Satan and flee from him. Moses was but a human instrument and he alone was no match for the evil. God alone was able to emancipate Israel from bondage and He alone can give courage to “resist the devil” (Jam. 4:7) and draw strength from the Holy Spirit to live the victorious Christian life. This particular sign symbolizes God’s sovereignty over Satan. As God’s chosen deliverer, Moses threw the rod to the ground and saw it become a serpent. Then, he picked it up to see it transformed back into a rod.

Miracle Number #2

Secondly, there was the sign of the leprous hand. This sign showed that God could deliver Israel as quickly as Moses was healed of his leprosy. Leprosy is a type and emblem of sin picturing it as something horrible and contagious. The word, bosom, is mentioned because it is the abode of the heart and man's basic problem is spiritual and he needs a change from within. It wasn't the hand that affected the heart, but the heart that affected the hand (Mk. 7:14-23).

Cleansing must begin with the heart through confession, repentance, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This leprous heart pictures hidden sin while the leprous hand pictures sin exposed. I remember telling pulpit committees (pastor search committees) that as their pastor, I would not sweep the church's garbage under the rug. In doing so, it would only cover it up and not expose it and correct it. All that would do is come out later and haunt them.

Thus far, we have seen that the first miraculous sign shown to Moses spoke of He Who would overpower the works of Satan while the second miraculous sign spoke of He Who would transform the hearts of men. Unless God transforms the heart, there will be no difference in one's life. Unless God works within a local church, then all other work is a work of the flesh and will come to naught.

Miracle Number #3

The third sign was of the bloody water. The Nile River was Egypt's life source and God would show how He could turn it into their death source. This third sign was to be done if the testimony of the first two were refused. If a man rejects the

testimony of God's Word, it proves that he is under the dominion of Satan and refuses the only One Who can cleanse and deliver his depraved soul from death. Moses did convince Israel by these signs, but we also need to observe and beware that Satan is a master counterfeiter (Ex. 4:29-31, 7:10-25).

Objection Number Four

Last, but not least, we come to Moses' fourth excuse. He stated that he was not a talented speaker. Moses had his eyes on himself and his failures rather than on God and His power. God said, "I AM," but Moses said, "I am not." Moses had to learn like we must learn that there is no excuse making to God. The Lord doesn't have to have an eloquent speaker, only a clean surrendered vessel that can be filled with God's power. All the schooling in the world is useless if God is not with the mouth of the preacher. The same God Who made man's tongue can use it for His purposes. Besides, a man will not be converted by enticing words anyway (I Cor. 2:1).

That which Moses ends up saying is simply, "send anybody but don't send me" (paraphrased). At this point, God grew angry, but His wrath was tempered with mercy. God gave Aaron to Moses as his spokesman, but in some ways he became more of a hindrance than a help. It appears where Moses must have gained confidence because when it came time to appear before Pharaoh, Moses spoke directly to him on numerous occasions (Ex. 8:9, 25, 29, 9:29) whereas Aaron is recorded to have rarely spoken.

I'll have to confess that is one of the areas in which I personally struggled and tell about in my book, ***"My Life As A Pastor, Shepherding God's Sheep And Herding Goats."*** When God called me to preach, I could not stand on my feet and think at the same time. God took this feeble hunk of clay and in

sovereign grace not only called me, but empowered me to overcome the weaknesses with which I was born. Let me remind you that if God can make a donkey talk (Num. 22:28-30), then He can make anyone able to speak for His glory.

The Sufferings and Sorrows in the Life of Moses

What did Moses have to do with becoming the deliverer of Israel from Egyptian bondage? What did he have to do with choosing his parents? What did he have to do with choosing the time in which he was born? As you very well know, he had nothing to do with any of it. God is the One calling the shots (so to speak). He is the One behind the control panels of this universe. He is the One Who is orchestrating all the events, even the birth of babies and the purpose to which they are born.

Like Moses, we are weak, frail, feeble, human creatures who like to make excuses to God. But, the Lord is so longsuffering towards us that he listens to our excuses, but refuses to accept them. Moses grew up in the courts of Egypt, but in fear of his life he fled as fast as he could after killing an Egyptian who was mistreating a Hebrew. He became content being a shepherd on the backside of nowhere when God captivated his attention and commissioned him to be Israel's long awaited deliverer.

Don't ever forget the type of people that God uses. People like Moses who saw himself as incapable. He did not ask for the assignment, but in fact tried to excuse himself and pass the buck (so to speak). If you think that you are God's gift to humanity to save the world and straighten people out, then you're not the man that God can use. God specializes in taking the no-body and making him useable for His glory. If we are not operating in God's strength, then we are operating in the wrong strength (I Cor. 1:27, 3:5-9).

Chapter 4

Samuel, The Three Fold Shepherd

“Now there was a certain man of Ramathaimzophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name *was* Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite: And he had two wives; the name of the one *was* Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, *were* there. And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions: But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but the LORD had shut up her womb. And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb. And *as* he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat. Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? *am* not I better to thee than ten sons? So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the LORD. And she *was* in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head. And it

came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee. And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, *I am* a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto. Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant *thee* thy petition that thou hast asked of him. And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more *sad*. And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her. Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, *saying*, Because I have asked him of the LORD. And the man Elkanah, and all his house, went up to offer unto the LORD the yearly sacrifice, and his vow. But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, *I will not go up* until the child be weaned, and *then* I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide for ever. And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only the LORD establish his word. So the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned him. And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought

him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh: and the child *was* young. And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, Oh my lord, *as* thy soul liveth, my lord, *I am* the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the LORD. For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him: Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there.” (I Sam. 1:2-28)

I’m calling Samuel the Three-Fold Shepherd because he served God as a priest, a prophet, and a judge. The nation of Israel first had priests who would represent the people to God. Then, they had prophets who would speak to the people from God. Eventually, there came a period in the life of Israel when they had judges over them. In the case of Samuel, he was a priest, prophet, and judge. In fact, God used him to inaugurate the period of the Kings that would take the place of the Judges.

The first word in the Book of First Samuel is “now” (I Sam. 1:1). That word introduces us to the closing days of the Judges which was certainly not an ideal time to raise a family. These were days before Israel had a king and everyone did his own thing (Judges 21:25). At the time of Samuel’s birth, anarchy existed in the nation of Israel. Anarchy is the absence of government, lawless confusion, political and general disorder. The Book of Samuel records a transition from a state of anarchy to a state of monarchy in Israel which began to take shape when Samuel anointed Saul to be the first king. God needed a man to serve Him for that difficult time in Israel’s history, and Samuel was chosen to do the job that God wanted done.

The family into which Samuel was born, shall I say, was a divided home. It was divided due to polygamy. His father had

two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Just because the Bible records the practice of polygamy doesn't mean that God approves of it. In fact, quite the contrary. God's design for marriage is a one man and one woman union, but as sin does, it often interferes with God's ideal standard for mankind. There is no such thing as a perfect family. Never has been and never will be. The congregation may expect the pastor's family to be perfect, but they are human just like every other family. That means that the pastor's family will have problems just like everybody else. A pastor needs to set the example in biblically dealing with difficulty in both his home and the local church.

Peninnah had children and ridiculed Hannah for not being able to have any. Hannah made it a matter of much prayer, beseeching God for a baby boy that she could give back to God in service unto Him. In sovereign grace, God granted her request and little Samuel was born. When he was old enough, she gave him back to the Lord by taking him to the priest in Shiloh. It was there that Samuel grew up learning how to serve the Lord from a little child.

The mother of Samuel was a godly woman who recognized God's sovereignty. The simple fact is that if God is not sovereign over ALL things, then He is simply not God. God's program for time includes the issues of life, death, salvation adversity, and prosperity. Hannah recognized that God was well able to take care of His program for both time and eternity as He keeps all things under His sovereign control, even the birth of babies.

We must honestly admit that discouragement affects every Christian at some time or another. It had affected Hannah, but she learned to turn her problems over to the Lord because He alone is capable of handling them. Hannah was able to commit Samuel to the Lord because she had first committed herself to the Lord. Not everyone has the blessing of being raised by godly parents, but it helps. She made a promise to God and kept it.

There is no doubt that she was a dynamic influence upon his life. As she carried baby Samuel in her womb and even before his very conception, God had a plan for his life that made him a mighty tool in the hands of our sovereign God. There came a day when God called him to a lifetime of spiritual service.

“And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; *there was* no open vision. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli *was* laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, *that* he could not see; And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God *was*, and Samuel was laid down *to sleep*; That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here *am* I. And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here *am* I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down. And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here *am* I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again. Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him. And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here *am* I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth. And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all *things* which I have

spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever. And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision. Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here *am* I. And he said, What *is* the thing that *the LORD* hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide *it* not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide *any* thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee. And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It *is* the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good. And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel *was* established *to be* a prophet of the LORD. And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.” (I Sam. 3:1-21)

I remember the time when I used to hear people in the church talk about a divine call into Christian service. Honestly, that is not heard very often today, but unless a man has a divine call to preach the Word, then he shouldn't be doing it. It's true that every Christian has the responsibility of serving the Lord, but there are those whom God calls with a special summons to proclaim the Gospel and feed the sheep. That call can come in various ways, but it must come and when it does, it will be a summons that cannot be escaped regardless of how hard one may

try. From the life of Samuel, we find the call of God upon his life revealed when he was very young.

In the Old Testament, there were occasions when God spoke through dreams and visions. However, today God does not necessarily speak in such a fashion. We are privileged to have God's inspired Word that we call the Holy Scriptures and God speaks to us through His written Word. Now, please listen to me carefully and please don't misunderstand that which I'm about to say. Do I believe that God can get our attention through a dream and use a dream? YES! I believe that God can do anything that He chooses to do and use anything that He chooses to use for His own sovereign reasons. God does not owe us an explanation for why He does what He does. Remember, if God can use a donkey (Num. 22) and cause it to speak, God can do whatever He pleases. That means He can also use dreams to get our attention. However, if God is the One using a dream or whatever else it might be, I can assure you that whatever the message, it will be in agreement with Scripture because God never contradicts His Word.

The Sufferings and Sorrows in the Life of Samuel

Samuel was born into a polygamous home. He did not get to pick and choose his parents. Neither did you nor me! God in His great sovereignty orchestrated our conception and birth. We often hear of dysfunctional families. I've got news for you, there is no family that is not dysfunctional. Sin entered the human race with Adam and Eve and every family thereafter has been affected by sin. There is no such thing as perfect parents. Jesus was perfect, but He did not have perfect parents. But yet, God in His sovereignty, planned for Christ to be born and raised in the midst of a depraved couple in order for God's eternal plan and purpose to be accomplished.

Since I'm primarily writing this book to pastors, let me remind you that you did not grow up in a perfect family and neither will you have a perfect family. You will have the same hurts and heartaches as anyone else. The pastor and his wife are not exempt. In spite of the fact that you grew up with depraved parents, God placed His call upon your life. You are not in the ministry today because of what you, your parents, nor any of your ancestry did, but because God in His sovereignty has chosen you to preach the Gospel of saving grace.

Now, if you have not received the divine summons of Almighty God to preach and to be His spokesman, then that's another story indeed. God has a plan and purpose for every Christian to serve the Lord in and through the ranks of the church. That is why God bestows upon His children spiritual gifts. But, when it comes to being an under-shepherd, it requires a call like unto that of Samuel which one cannot escape. It's been said that if you can be happy and content doing anything other than preaching the Word of God, then most likely God has not called you to do it. The bottom line is that God is the One Who calls and the reason He does can only be found in His great sovereignty. We're not called because of anything that we've done, or that our parents have done, or anyone else has done. It's because God in His sovereignty has chosen us in sovereign grace.

Samuel was reared a priest, called to be a prophet, and also served during the time of the Judges as a judge in Israel. Shall we say that he was multi-gifted? Some of God's servants are like that, having numerous major talents. I remind you that a talent is something with which you are born, but a spiritual gift is granted to the believer for him or her to use to edify the body of Christ. Regardless of how many talents or gifts that God gives you, use them all for God's glory. Once again, I remind you that not everyone has the same abilities. Some people have many and some have few. What is it that makes the difference? It is the sovereign determination of our Creator God. Thank God for the abilities that He has given you and trust Him to do in you and through you what only He can accomplish.

Chapter 5

David, The Kingly Shepherd

“And the LORD said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons. And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear *it*, he will kill me. And the LORD said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will shew thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto me *him* whom I name unto thee. And Samuel did that which the LORD spake, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice. And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD'S anointed *is* before him. But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for *the LORD seeth* not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The LORD hath not chosen these. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all *thy* children? And he

said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he *was* ruddy, *and* withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this *is* he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah. But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him. And Saul's servants said unto him, Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubleth thee. Let our lord now command thy servants, *which are* before thee, to seek out a man, *who is* a cunning player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well. And Saul said unto his servants, Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring *him* to me. Then answered one of the servants, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, *that is* cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the LORD *is* with him. Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David thy son, *which is* with the sheep. And Jesse took an ass *laden* with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a kid, and sent *them* by David his son unto Saul. And David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly; and he became his armourbearer. And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, Let David, I pray thee, stand before me; for he hath found favour in my sight. And it came to pass, when the *evil* spirit from God was upon Saul, that David

took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.” (I Sam. 16:1-23)

God told the prophet Samuel to go to the city of Bethlehem and select a son of Jesse as Israel’s next king. Saul was currently serving as Israel’s first king and was in that position because the people wanted a king like all the surrounding heathen nations. They had rejected God; therefore, God gave them what they wanted in judgment against them. But now, God is about to intervene in great mercy upon a nation that had done nothing to deserve God’s grace.

From the above text, we are reminded that in God’s own mind, the son that Samuel was looking for had already been selected by the sovereign councils of the Almighty. God’s choice would be revealed to Samuel once he arrived in the home of Jesse. This just reminds us that God does not lay out every detail of His future plans for us, but gently leads us along and reveals what we need to know as we travel this pathway of sanctification.

In the case of David, this selection was to be different from the selection of Saul because Saul was given to the people in judgement whereas David was to be given in mercy. Just as Israel’s first king chosen by God came from the city of Bethlehem, so was the King of Kings, the Lord Jesus Christ, predestined to come from the same city (Lk. 2:4). You may shy away from the lovely biblical doctrine of predestination, but please don’t let the devil rob you of that precious truth. It is clearly taught throughout Scripture and cannot be denied. David was predestined by God to be king; therefore, the devil and all the host of hell could not prevent it from happening.

Samuel's job was probably difficult since it is said that he "mourned" over Saul's spiritual condition. His primary purpose in going to Bethlehem was to anoint David, but if that had been known to Saul, then the prophet's life would have been in jeopardy. The prophet took a sacrifice as a surface reason for going on this trip, but the underlying reason was to anoint a new king in the home of Jesse. It wasn't uncommon for the priest to offer sacrifices in the various towns; therefore, Saul had no reason to question that which Samuel was doing. It appears that Samuel was not only a prophet, but a priest and judge over Israel. With this in mind, there was nothing suspicious about Samuel going to the home of Jesse.

Usually, a sacrificial meal was held in someone's home after the sacrifice was offered. On this particular occasion, it was held in the home of Jesse, who was the grandson of Boaz and Ruth, thus making David their great grandson. We learn a valuable lesson from this story regarding outward beauty and charm. Neither are a basic qualification for godly service. Samuel should have remembered from the selection of Saul that outward appearance wasn't everything (I Sam. 10:24).

It's been said and rightly so that beauty is only skin deep. The only way to see and know the real person is to look deeper than the surface of the skin and observe their attitude of heart and disposition of spirit. Verse seven in the above text has been literally translated to read, "Man sees the eyes, but God sees the heart." God sees and knows us better than we can possibly know ourselves. We have a tendency to fool ourselves, but God sees us in the raw and it's impossible to cover anything up from His sight.

Each one of Jesse's seven sons were examined and dismissed by Samuel before David was brought in from the

field. The exact age of David is not known at this time, but it's believed that he wasn't more than twenty years old. All that we know about David at this point and time is that he was the youngest of Jesse's sons and that he was highly trusted by his father. He was out keeping the sheep which was a most responsible task for such a young man. The occupation of being a shepherd was an honored and important position in those days. In fact, we've already discovered from a previous chapter that another one of God's great Old Testament servants, Moses, also was employed as a shepherd.

At first glance, David impressed the prophet and God made it clear that he was to be anointed future king of Israel. The word, "ruddy," that we find in the KJV is believed by some to mean that he had red hair. If so, it was most unusual for a Jew to have red hair. Others believe that this was merely a reference to his complexion and pleasant appearance. However, God did not choose him because of the color of his hair or his complexion, but because God had sovereignly made him to be a "man after" God's "own heart" (Acts 13:22).

It was customary for the Jews to practice the ceremony of anointing to important offices. In the early days, all priests were anointed (Ex. 40:15, Num. 3:3), but in later times, anointing was reserved only for the high priest (Ex. 29:29). Occasionally, prophets were anointed to office and it became the principle ceremony in inaugurating a king. That which we read about in the above text was the first of three times that David was anointed king of Israel. The second time that he was anointed, he was made king over Judah (II Sam. 2:4). His third anointing was when he was chosen king over Israel (II Sam. 5:3).

This first anointing was in all likelihood a private anointing with David being selected from among his brethren. The

“spirit of the Lord” that came upon David at the time of his first anointing was no doubt an empowerment for service, but also the guiding and protecting presence of God. I believe that God’s promise given to the saints in the New Testament, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5), was also an assurance to the Old Testament saints. God never forsakes His people.

It’s apparent that the spirit of God’s grace and holiness had already come upon David. This empowerment differed from Saul’s in the fact that it was not only one for physical service, but for spiritual service. The spirit of the Lord that came upon David at this time was not one of occasional empowerment, but it was “from that day forward.” This is not a reference to regeneration, however, there is no doubt that David was a regenerated man (Ps. 51:11).

As the spirit of the Lord came upon David, Scripture says that it departed from Saul and an evil spirit came upon him. This evil spirit that plagued Saul is believed to have been a spirit of gloom, doom, depression, melancholy, and judgment. It has even been speculated that Saul acted like a demoniac, one possessed with the devil. The devil is very real and we must never underestimate his power and the harm he can do. God had previously warned him that his kingdom would be taken away which in and of itself was bad news (I Sam. 15:28).

Soothing music has always been good to calm the nerves and promote relaxation. But, at its best, music is only a temporary remedy when the root of the problem is rebellion against God. No music, regardless of how good and spiritual it may sound to the ears, is an automatic remedy to man’s sin problem. There are many who like to substitute music for the

Word of God and all they do is satisfy their emotions while the spirit of man remains unchanged.

In the above text, we cannot help but see the sovereignty of God preparing David for the king's court. It wasn't an accident that David was mentioned to Saul as a harp player. In fact, when you stop to think about it, there are no accidents with God. It was the method that God used to introduce David to the king's surroundings and begin his first stage of education in preparing him for his kingly responsibilities. Saul was so pleased with David at this time that the king made him an armor-bearer, or in other words, he was given a privileged position in the king's court.

The Sufferings and Sorrows in the Life of David

What was there in the life of David that caused God to choose him to be the future king? In other words, what did David do to deserve the position of king? Absolutely nothing! He was nothing but a shepherd boy tending sheep out in the field. He did not grow up in a royal household. His own father did not even consider him worth examination by the prophet until pressed to do so. In the eyes of Jesse, his youngest son, David, was not even in the running (so to speak) for the position to which Samuel was searching. When you stop to think about it, David was a no-body in the eyes of his earthly father. The reason I say this is because Jesse did not bring David to Samuel at the same time he brought the other sons. Why did he leave David out of consideration and why did Samuel have to ask about the son in the field tending the sheep?

Most often God chooses His servants from among people that the world considers with disdain. Under divine inspiration, Paul put it this way in First Corinthians, chapter one, and verses twenty- six through thirty-one.

“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

Regardless of how much education you may have, unless the spirit and power of God is upon you, then you do not have the credentials necessary to do Christian ministry nor pastor a church. There are many instances in David’s life when the spirit of the Lord was clearly evidenced. When he faced the giant Goliath, he declared that “the battle is the Lords” (I Sam. 17:47). Whenever you serve God in the power of the Holy Spirit, you can expect the devil to be hot on your trail and we must realize that we’re no match for the devil. We also must declare like David that “the battle is the Lords.” In other words, when the devil rings your doorbell, send Jesus to answer it!

Don’t forget the many years when David literally ran from Saul trying to avoid confrontation. His attitude was that he did not want to do the king any harm because he was the Lord’s anointed (I Chron. 16:22). However, we must learn as did David that confrontation is inevitable even when we have the right attitude. Regardless of how hard we try to avoid conflict, it will come looking for us. David was truly a man who wanted to be harmless and peaceable, but at the same time stand for truth and defend it with all his might. So must any God called servant as we see ourselves as Christian soldiers of the cross. As we serve the Lord of Glory, there is no sounding the trumpet of retreat.

Remember there is no armor to cover the back in Ephesians, chapter six, and verses ten through twenty.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Chapter 6

Jeremiah, The Weeping Shepherd

“The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that *were* in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: To whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month. Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, *and* I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I *am* a child. But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I *am* a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I *am* with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD. Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant. Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see a rod of an almond tree. Then said the LORD unto me, Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten my word to perform it. And the word of the LORD came unto me the second time, saying, What seest thou? And I said, I see a seething pot; and the face thereof *is* toward the north. Then the LORD said unto me, Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the

inhabitants of the land. For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the LORD; and they shall come, and they shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah. And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands. Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I *am* with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee. (Jer. 1:1-19)

During the days of Jeremiah, the northern kingdom of Israel had been conquered by the Assyrians and Judah had forsaken the Lord having turned to the worship of heathen gods. Judah was well on its way to defeat and ruin, spiritually, morally, and politically. In judgment, God removed His protective hand and unleashed the power of ungodly nations against them, just like He had done against Israel.

Jeremiah was sent by God to minister for over forty years to an obstinate people that hated and persecuted him for preaching. He was called by God to proclaim the doom of his people and is a great example of how the God called preacher is to remain faithful while living in an increasingly hostile environment. Jeremiah was born into a priestly family, but we have no record

of him ever serving as a priest. However, having been born into a priestly family, he was aware of the holy standards of God's law.

The ministry of Jeremiah began under Josiah who was the last of Judah's God fearing rulers. This king tried to unite Judah with what was left of the northern kingdom of Israel in worshipping the Lord according to the Law of Moses. He tried to overturn the decades of paganism that had dominated Judah, but after his death, Judah fell back into her old pagan practices. Eventually, the day would come that God would use the Gentiles to punish Judah and take them away captive, but until that day came, God used Jeremiah to warn them of the error of their ways.

Before Jeremiah was ever born, God predestined him to be a prophet. When God told Jeremiah that "I formed thee," it clearly teaches that God is the Creator of life. Jeremiah did not ask to be born nor did he become a prophet of his own choosing. Furthermore, God told him that "I knew thee," proving that the fetus is life and that God had plans for him before he was ever conceived. By divine election, God gave him both physical and spiritual life with the assignment to be God's spokesman during a most difficult time period in history.

Furthermore, please notice how God said to him, "I sanctified thee," meaning that God had set him apart for a special purpose. Even prior to conception, God recognized Jeremiah as a future personality with a special destiny. This should cause anyone to shutter at the very thought of today's common place abortion. The modern abortion clinics are no more than legalized murder chambers which indicate to us the depraved state of our society much like Jeremiah's day.

When the Lord sanctified Jeremiah, it not only tells us about the sacredness of human life, but the sacredness of being a designed spokesman for God. A man who enters the gospel ministry of his own accord is not worth the powder that it would

take to blow him up. Unless a person has the divine sanctifying call of God upon his life, then he had best not enter the vocational ministry. Serving God is hard at its best, but without the authoritative hand of God upon you, it is impossible to do anything for God. There are many who enter the ministry and do much for the glory of themselves, but nothing to the glory of God. Lest we think that size of our ministry is the measuring rod of success, let me remind you that Jeremiah had few if any converts. He even ended up in the pit of a prison because he was faithful to his calling. His life was threatened, he was placed in stocks, humiliated, thrown in a dungeon, and lived a lonely life filled with ridicule. We know Jeremiah as the weeping prophet because, although he preached judgment, his heart was filled with compassion.

God told Jeremiah that “I ordained thee,” referring to his commission and appointment as a spokesman for God. Being of priestly descent, he could have represented sinful man before Holy God. But, as an ordained prophet, he could represent Holy God before sinful man. He not only would speak to Judah, but also to Gentile nations (Jer. 46-51).

No doubt, there were times when Jeremiah was frustrated and wanted to quit. He was human. In his humanness, there were times when he probably questioned what God was doing. However, as he thought back on how God “formed” him, “knew” him, and “sanctified” him no doubt sustained him in some of his toughest times. Don’t ever forget, preacher man, that our God is faithful to His people. He keeps His Word. He is Sovereign over ALL things and He will sustain us when the going gets hard. He will be there for us even when people hate us and seek to destroy us. The wicked can do nothing to us unless the sovereign hand of God allows it.

In humility and a feeling of inadequacy, Jeremiah was reluctant to accept God's call to service. His basic response to God was that he was too young. Let me remind you that an Old Testament prophet was a messenger of God that spoke what God told him to say. Being aware of his own human weakness, his immediate response to God was, "I cannot speak." The first step in being truly used by God is recognition of our human inadequacy just like it was with Moses when he stood before the burning bush (Ex. 4:10) and with Jeremiah when God called him. Being a spokesman for God is an awesome responsibility that no person can accomplish in human strength.

Well, just like Moses who kept making excuses to God, Jeremiah did much the same thing. Jeremiah's second excuse was based on inexperience and immaturity like that of a "child." The word "child" refers to one from infancy to manhood. Jeremiah was probably an older teenager at this time, somewhere possibly between the ages of seventeen to twenty years old. A young priest usually began their apprenticeship at twenty-five years of age and would perform actual service at thirty years old (Num. 4:23, 8:24). Serving God and His divine call has NO age requirements or restrictions.

God is not interested in our ability, but in our availability, commitment, yieldedness, and dedication. Always remember that human weakness is no obstacle to God. There were certain individuals who were to hear Jeremiah's words and his specific message. As an Old Testament prophet, God would give him the wisdom with which to speak. Today, the preacher is called to "study" to show himself "approved" (II Tim. 2:15).

Jeremiah was encouraged not to fear opposition. God knew that it would come and it will come to you also, my dear pastor friend. It's easy to be afraid when we lose focus of WHO is in charge and allow fear to grip our hearts. Jeremiah was not to be

intimidated by a hostile people nor soften his message just because it was not going to be well received. Likewise, in a day of liberalism and apostasy in the visible churches around the world, we need to be reminded of God's promises as we stand on the Word of God. The Lord does not promise to keep us from danger, but He promises His divine presence and power (II Tim. 4:18). The assurance of God's presence can calm our fears, just like it did for David when he faced Goliath (I Sam. 17) and for Daniel when he was thrown into a lion's den (Dan. 6).

Yes, Jeremiah did make excuses to God, but in response to those excuses God touched his mouth and removed all his excuses. This symbolic act signified the divine gift of inspiration that this prophet would be God's mouthpiece to the people. His personal predictions and opinions were not relevant because God was going to put His words in the mouth of Jeremiah. Today, God calls and consecrates His spokesmen to "study" and "preach the word" (II Tim. 4:2-5).

Jeremiah was called of God to preach a message that would be both destructive and constructive. When the Bible says that he was called "to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down," it shows that his message was basically one of judgment. Today, we need preachers to "root out ... pull down ... destroy ... and ... throw down" all that is evil in our society. It will be such things as abortion, pornography, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, or even apostasy within the visible institutionalized churches. We're living in days when people want their "itching ears" (II Tim. 4:3) tickled within the ranks of Christendom. However, the God called spokesman must be faithful to preach the whole council of the Living Lord. All that Jeremiah had to do was pronounce judgment and God would execute it. When I look at the spiritual condition of our country, the United States of America, it appears that we also stand on the

brink of God's judgment. I confess that we deserve it after many years of spitting in the face of Almighty God, but I continue to pray for His mercy and grace.

The words that are recorded in this first chapter of Jeremiah, "to build, and to plant" emphasizes a message of hope. That is a message that we need to keep preaching because the only HOPE of this world is JESUS CHRIST. Prior to the building and planting, there must come judgment due to the many sins of the nation against God. Just as an almond tree blooms after a barren winter, God's grace would soon bring national healing to Judah (Jer. 31:28). Although, Judah would go into exile, the Lord had already planned for their return and restoration. Talk about sovereignty and predestination, it's plastered throughout Holy Scripture every way you turn.

Our God is a covenant keeping God and the promise that He had made of a MIGHTY DELIVERER would be in the ultimate hope of the coming Messiah from the kingdom of Judah. Actually, the God called spokesman of today has a ministry like that of Jeremiah in the sense that God's judgment is pronounced against those who are comfortable in their sin, but there is also the promise of hope to those who repent. The man of God must preach the whole council of God's Word and not just some selected topics. We need expository preaching in the pulpits all across the world. The subjects of love, mercy, and grace are more delightful to preach, but Scripture also teaches that God hates sin and that He is a God of wrath and judgment.

To confirm his call, God gave Jeremiah a vision of a "seething pot." This pot was a vessel used for cooking and the contents of the pot were boiling. Scripture lets us know that the pot was facing away from the north or in other words, tilted southward. God warned of a foreign invasion from the north. The attacker would not be a godly people, but quite the contrary. God would

use an evil nation as an instrument of judgment against Judah. Many thought that the city of Jerusalem was indestructible, but God would prove otherwise. The people fell into great wickedness, they had forsaken the Lord, burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped idols of their own making. Judah's national calamity came as a result of their spiritual corruption and they rejected the preaching of Jeremiah.

If God has you in a place that's giving you a hard time and seems to be rejecting your preaching, just remember that you're in good company. If God judged Judah for their sins, then what makes us think that God will not judge our land today and the churches therein (I Pet. 4:17)? The God called spokesman can expect the same treatment that Judah gave to Jeremiah.

Because God is sovereign, He not only knows all things, but has ordained all things. He knew that the prophet's message would be resented. Therefore, he told Jeremiah in advance, "be not dismayed." Jeremiah was not to appear before his adversaries in timidity and run from his call as did Jonah. Courageously, in faith, Jeremiah was to be prepared for hostility and conflict and so must we.

God assured Jeremiah of His presence even in the midst of opposition. God promised to make Jeremiah as a "defenced city" that cannot be overtaken, an "iron pillar" that cannot be shattered, and "brazen walls" that can withstand the enemy. His enemies included "kings ... princes ... priests" and his very own people. Sometimes, it's easy for us preachers to develop the complex that nobody likes us. Like Jeremiah, we also will make enemies if we do what God tells us to do. Therefore, don't be surprised when people "fight against" you. Never forget that in the end they will not prevail because our God will deliver us in eternal victory. The world may hate us and persecute us, but it can never destroy the soul of a saint. Even unregenerate people

in the ranks of a local church can do all of these things to you, but just remember that it was the religious crowd of Jesus' day that had Him nailed to a Roman cross.

God's promise to Jeremiah was not immunity from trouble, but someday ultimate deliverance beyond the grave. Serving the Lord Jesus Christ and preaching the precious Word of God never has and never will be an easy assignment. Like Jeremiah, the God called spokesman needs a tough hide, but a tender heart. There may come a time when we feel much like the man who got up one Sunday morning and told his wife that he didn't want to go to church. He started giving her one excuse after another, concluding that the people didn't like him and for her to give him just one good reason why he ought to be going to church service. The wife simply replied, because you're the preacher. Yes, there may very well be times when the preacher does not feel like preaching, but in such a time we need to remember the admonition of the apostle Paul.

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (II Tim. 4:2-8)

The Sufferings and Sorrows in the Life of Jeremiah

I don't suppose there has ever been a God called preacher who did not try and make excuses to God as to why he should not preach. I remember struggling with my call and some of the excuses that I gave God. In fact, one of my excuses was the absolute truth. I could not stand on my two feet and think at the same time (see my pastoral autobiography, *My Life As A Pastor, Shepherding God's Sheep And Herding Goats*). However, I wasn't telling God something that He didn't already know. He took my weaknesses and empowered me with His strength. That's the way He does it with His preachers whom he divinely calls.

Jeremiah is known to us as the weeping prophet. The condition of Judah tore out his heart as he was filled with compassion. As a pastor, I discovered that I was more concerned about many of the people in my pastorate than they were about themselves. In fact, my wife and I spent many sleepless nights over wayward professing believers. There is an old song that goes something like this, "Tears are a language that God understands." This life is filled with tears, even in the life of a Christian and especially those of us in pastoral ministry. However, one of these days, all our tears will be wiped away (Rev. 21:4). Until then, God would have us to be faithful to our calling, stay focused on our risen Lord, and wait patiently for His glorious return. It will be worth it all when we see Jesus.

Much like Jeremiah, we're living in a day of turmoil when God's Word is being ignored, even within many local congregations. Christian values are being ridiculed. Many, so called Christians, are conforming to the standards of the world. Greed, immorality, murder, theft, and injustices are all around us. Great apostasy is manifesting itself within the ranks of Christendom. However, God is still calling out His spokesmen to be His mouthpiece to an ungodly world and to congregations that have gone to sleep spiritually.

God was with the stammering Moses, the flawed King David, and even the reluctant Jeremiah. We can be certain that He will be with us, if we go forth in obedience to His call upon our lives and in the power of the Holy Spirit as witnesses of our crucified and risen Savior. Our Sovereign Lord has promised to “never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). There may come a day when we, like Jeremiah, will have to suffer for believing and preaching God’s Word. If so, we can rest in faith that God will give us the same resolve and peace that He gave to Jeremiah.

Chapter 7

Paul, The Persecuted Shepherd

“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, **Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?** And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, **I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*** And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord *said* unto him, **Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.** And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought *him* into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, **Ananias.** And he said, Behold, *I am here,* Lord. And the Lord *said* unto him, **Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for *one* called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting *his* hand on him, that he might receive his sight.** Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all

that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, **Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.** And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard *him* were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let *him* down by the wall in a basket. And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought *him* to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake

boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.” (Acts 9:1-31)

Did Saul (Paul) go looking for God? Did he get up one morning and decide to let Jesus come into his wicked heart? What happened to Saul on the Damascus Road? Did he have anything to do with the miraculous change in his life? Did he make it happen or cause it to happen? If not, what brought about such a glorious conversion?

It's very obvious that Saul had nothing to do with the transformation in his life. He did not go looking for it. He did not even desire it. It was the furthest thing from his mind. All he wanted to do was put the followers of Jesus Christ to death when he himself became a disciple of the Lord of Glory. It's very obvious that Sovereign God overpowered his depraved will and gave him a willing heart to believe the very thing that he had been against. Only God can do that for any sinner. The psalmist made it perfectly clear that only God in His sovereignty can “prepare” a wicked “heart” to trust Christ and “cause the ear” to “hear” (Ps. 10:17).

We could say that the conversion of Saul was not only a turning point in his own personal life, but also in the nation of Israel. I say this because for the most part, the Hebrew people remained lost in their sins having rejected Jesus Christ as God's Promised Messiah. Even though the nation had been deeply religious, they received not the Lord Jesus when He came “unto His own” (Jh. 1:11).

Christianity defers from mere religion in the fact that it demands the regeneration of the inner man. A lost sinner can be religious and even moral and at the same time follow a course that will lead him straight to Hell. A genuinely “saved” (Rom. 10:9) “born again” (Jh. 3:3) believer is not one who has reached sinlessness, but one who has been transformed by the wonder working power of God’s grace, indwelt with the Holy Spirit, and trusted Christ alone by faith alone as personal Lord and Savior.

Saul had been a sincere, faithful, and religious Jew, but he didn’t know Christ until his Damascus Road conversion. His Hebrew name was Saul, but after his salvation he became better known as Paul which was his Roman name. He was born in the Roman city of Tarsus with his mother and father both being Jews and from the tribe of Benjamin. For this reason, he later referred to himself as “an Hebrew of the Hebrews” (Phil 3:5). In Jerusalem, Saul studied divinity and Jewish law under the famous teacher of his day by the name of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). His occupation is believed to have been tent-making which was common among scholars of his day (Acts 18:2-3).

The life of Saul exemplifies the possibility of being religiously lost in sin while living in pretense of serving God. As a devout Jew, his conscience was so hardened that he became an enemy and persecutor of Christians. We’re first introduced to Saul when he took part in the stoning death of Stephen (Acts 7:58, 8:1). Our text records Saul’s dramatic conversion from the life of a sinner into the life of a saint. We quickly discover that like everyone else whom God has saved from sin and converted to Christ, Saul had nothing to do with what happened to him. It was all a sovereign work of God’s grace.

If we were to read no further than verse one in Acts, chapter nine, it would appear to us that Saul would have been a most unlikely prospect for salvation. Prior to his conversion, Saul’s

business was that of persecuting and killing Christians. He surfaces as a ringleader in the brutal persecution activities that fiercely opposed Christianity. There is no doubt that Saul was so religiously confused that he must have thought he was doing God a favor. Speaking of being confused, we must remember that Satan is the author of confusion (I Cor. 14:33). The devil thrives on religious confusion in hopes of robbing people of genuine spiritual blessings. Preacher friend, if there is confusion in your congregation then it is of the devil.

Saul's hostile persecutions were directed against the disciples of the Lord. We must admit that there is a certain degree of persecution in the threatening's that may come our way. But, his persecutions went much deeper in what is called the "breathing" of "slaughter" (death) upon believers. After hearing that there were a group of Christians in Damascus, he desired permission from the high priest to launch a rebellion against them. Before his conversion, Saul was a rebel of the vilest sorts (I Tim. 1:15). Just like Saul, all of us are rebellious sinners until we're converted to the Lord Jesus Christ. Only the wonder-working power of God's grace can tame a wild rebellious heart (Rom. 3:9-12, 23).

When persecution scattered the early church, Saul went looking for the Christians to bring them back to stand trial in Jerusalem. He went before the high priest to get extradition letters to bring back any of this way, either men or women, to stand trial in Jerusalem. It appears that Saul's goal was to literally exterminate Christianity. The reference to those "of this way" (Acts 19:9,23, 22:4) is a description of New Testament believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. It probably came from Jesus' description of Himself as being "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jh. 14:6).

While traveling a murderous path, God's grace arrested Saul and transformed him into a new man (II Cor. 5:17). He was not in search for God, but in search for Christians so that he could try and silence them from teaching what they believed about God and His revelation to man in the Person of Jesus Christ. It was at the most unexpected time in Saul's life that God turned the searchlight of heaven on this rebellious burglar as he was about to rob the Damascus church of her living treasure. When God got a hold of Saul, then from that moment on, Saul became a "prisoner of Jesus Christ" (Philemon 1).

As a proof that salvation is instantaneous and not a process, God dealt with Saul very suddenly. There is no doubt that the testimony of Stephen (Acts 7:60) had an impact on Saul, yet when it was time to be "born again" (Jh. 3:3) it happened suddenly. It's possible and most likely that God works in a sinner's life over a period of time in preparation for salvation and bringing conviction of sin. However, when salvation itself is realized, it comes suddenly just like the birth of a baby. It's impossible for a sinner to set the date for his spiritual birth simply because conviction and conversion is the business of God alone.

Saul's conversion experience resulted from seeing a light and hearing a voice. God's way of converting a sinful rebel is by revealing the light of divine "Truth" (Jh. 14:6) through the "Holy Spirit" (Jh. 16:13-14). Like Saul, every sinner is in the dark, spiritually speaking, until the light of God shines on him from the voice of God's Word (Rom. 10:17). One of my favorite ways in referring to Holy Scripture is calling it, God's printed voice.

Following his conversion encounter, Paul reported that this light was brighter than the noonday sun (Acts 26:13). From the Greek, this word is PHOS, referring to anything emitting light. It could have been a flash of light from heaven that got his

attention. One thing is for sure. When God's glorious light penetrates the darkness of our hearts, then and only then, we can see ourselves as the miserable sinners that we are.

In the same way that Saul humbly fell before God, a sinner must fall in submission to salvation. It's also interesting to notice where this conversion of Saul actually took place. Conversion is certainly not limited to the inside walls of a church building! In fact, most true conversions probably take place outside of the organized assembly. I say this because that is where evangelism is mainly to occur. Don't forget, there were no formal facilities in which to meet for the Samaritans (Acts 8:14) nor the Ethiopian (Acts 8:37) to get converted. In the case of Saul, he was saved (Rom. 10:9) on a highway that led to Damascus. Wherever Saul went, he could not escape the all-seeing eye of Almighty God and neither can you nor I. God knows about each and every one of us and, in fact, He knows more about us than we know about ourselves. God is sovereign over all things. There is nothing that He doesn't know.

Before God made a saint out of Saul, He choose for him to see himself a sinner by asking, "why persecutest thou me?" God always convicts us of sin and then converts us from being a sinner. Saul had not been merely fighting against the New Testament church, but against God Himself. Herein, we learn a very important lesson how "Christ and the church ... are one" (Eph. 5:31-32), like a husband and wife become "one" (Matt. 19:5) in holy matrimony. To hurt a man's "wife" is to hurt the man himself and so it is with the "Bride" (Rev. 21:2) of Christ. When Saul hurt the "body" (I Cor. 12:12-27) of Christ, he also hurt the "Head" which is "Christ" Himself (Eph. 5:23). The very thought of this should give us a new appreciation of the "church" and make us mindful of the privileges and responsibilities of church membership.

There are many pastors who are being hurt by their congregations. You may be one of them. If so, just remember that you're in good company. That doesn't lessen the pain, but it reminds us that if the world crucified the Lord Jesus Christ (Jh. 15:18, I Jh. 3:13), then we can expect the same treatment. The sad thing is that there is so much of the world in the modern day church that you can hardly tell the church is in the world. Many church people are so full of religiosity, but know nothing about a transforming encounter of salvation through Christ. For that reason a local church ought to practice discipline and seek to maintain a regenerated membership.

Saul himself was a religious Jew persecuting Christians when God saved him and taught him that to persecute Christians is the same as persecuting Christ Himself. Therefore, when you feel the hurt of a dagger in your back by some depraved deacon or the ridicule of a loud mouth demon possessed women, just remember that it's not you they are doing it to, but to Christ. The Jews in the Old Testament could not get their hands on God, so they took out their frustrations by the way they "murmured against Moses" (Ex. 15:24, 16:2, 17:3).

Saul had been a dedicated religious Jew being faithful to the synagogues and to the Jewish law. However, he didn't know Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit until his Damascus Road conversion. Under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, he recognized the supreme authority of this heavenly voice by calling Him, Lord. For a person to become a genuine Christian, Jesus must be both Savior of soul and Lord of life. Because of the fact that Jesus is Lord, no man, not even Saul, could stop Christianity from spreading. When the Bible says, "to kick against the pricks," it was referring to an animal that kicks against the sharp sticks used by his master to prod him along.

This expression is simply telling us that Saul was under conviction, apart from which there will be no conversion to Christ or getting right with God.

Each conversion is somewhat different because every person is different, so don't think that you have to have a Damascus Road experience like Saul's in order to get saved. Some people remember the time and place when they came to realize their need of Christ, while others do not. The important thing is that a person becomes a new creature in Christ (II Cor. 5:17). In the case of Saul, his conversion was very dramatic. He was trembling because he saw his filthy sin in light of God's holiness. He must have been astonished because of God's willingness to forgive such a sinner.

Calling Jesus, Lord, meaning Master, was Saul's time of acknowledging surrender to Christ. There was no doubt in the mind of Saul Who it was that appeared to him on the Damascus Road and with Whom he was dealing. Saul knew a great deal intellectually, but he did not know Jesus and apart from knowing Jesus, there is no eternal spiritual life. After conversion, there was a definite change in his life as he became willing to do whatever God required. True conversion to Christ involves the total surrender of ourselves to God.

After getting saved, God does not tell us everything we need to know all at one time. Like He did with Saul whom he renamed Paul, God leads his dear children along the daily road of sanctification. As we study God's Word and mature in the Faith, we'll understand more about His will as we grow in Christ. No genuine Christian should have any problem with the doctrine of God's sovereignty. Salvation is not about us, but the sovereignty of God. Serving God in Christian ministry is not about us, but the sovereignty of God.

It's most interesting to notice that the men who traveled with Saul heard a voice, but apparently did not understand what was being said. Herein is a beautiful picture of the biblical doctrine of election as God chose to deal with Saul and not with the others. The question that we naturally like to ask as inquisitive humans is, "why did God chose to speak to Saul while not making Himself know to the other men?" The answer to that question is one that God alone in His divine sovereignty can answer and all we can do is rest in "faith" (Heb. 11:6) upon the teaching of Holy Scripture. God's Word is not for us to figure out, but to accept in faith. Any way you look at it, this scene in our text magnifies the great "grace" (Eph. 2:8-9) of God in saving such a wicked sinner like Saul of Tarsus. Although, God closed Saul's physical eyes for three days, He opened his spiritual eyes for all eternity.

Whenever God does a work in our lives, He works in all directions and on both ends of the line. While preparing the heart of Saul, He was also preparing the heart of Ananias. Here is another example of how God uses human agents as "vessels" (II Cor. 4:7) through which to do His work. Indication of Saul having a new heart and yearning for fellowship with God is seen in the fact that he prayed. As a religious Jew, prior to his conversion, he had previously said his prayers. But now, as a born again (Jh. 3:3) believer he knew what it was to pray his prayers. A young convert once said, "Before I was converted, I prayed to myself, but now I pray to God." Communion with God through prayer is an act of worship that does not originate from the lips, but from the heart. Prayer to the Christian is like breath to the lungs; therefore, a Christian who doesn't pray is like a man who doesn't breathe.

At first, Ananias seemed a bit reluctant about approaching Saul due to his bad reputation and evil escapades. But, God calmed his fears by telling him that Saul was a chosen vessel to the

Gentiles. He had been used by Satan as a vessel of destruction, but the transforming grace of God was going to turn him into a chosen vessel of honor. Saul's life was destined by God's sovereign decree to become an earthen vessel that would house and carry forth the gospel message of Jesus Christ. This former persecutor was predestined to suffer persecution for the sake of his Lord and Savior. The fact that Ananias addressed him as "Brother Saul" confirms that he was saved on the Damascus Road and three days later was filled for service.

Immediately following salvation should come baptism, public declaration, and spiritual sight, meaning some degree of understanding into spiritual things. The reason why a carnal man cannot understand the things of God is because the scales have never been removed from his eyes. Man is born with sinful scales that can only be removed by the power and grace of God in salvation and conversion to Christ. When a sinner is converted to Christ, the scales of the world fall from his eyes and he can see the wrong of sin that he previously could not see.

The converting grace of God opened the eyes of Saul so that he was saved from his religious Pharisaic blindness. Whenever God saves a soul, He changes and transforms the life (Rom. 12:1-2). The change in Saul was remarkable, because before his conversion he was killing Christians, but afterwards we see him in fellowship with the disciples. To fall in love with the Lord Jesus Christ is to fall in love with His people, "the church of the living God" (I Tim. 3:15). Anyone who tells you that he is right with God, but who is not right with His church is not telling the truth (I Jh. 3:14).

God worked a miraculous change in the life of Saul just like He does in the life of every truly regenerated believer. We need to examine our own hearts to see if God has ever worked this kind of life transforming change in us (Titus 3:4-7). If one has never

known the “washing of regeneration,” then he does not know what it means to repent, confess, and trust Christ as Lord and Savior and to pass from “death unto life” (Jh. 5:24).

It was not uncommon for people in the Bible to be known by more than one name, especially once they came to be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Such was the case with Saul of Tarsus. In the thirteenth chapter of Acts and verse nine, he is referred to by the name of Paul. Actually, Saul was his Hebrew name and Paul was his Gentile name. Since God called Paul to be “the apostle of the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:13), he used his Gentile name which actually meant small or little. Some have tried to speculate that he was small in stature, but regardless of his physical size, he was a spiritual giant that God used in a mighty way. There is no doubt that his desire was like that of John the Baptist when John said that, “He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease” (Jh. 3:30). God used Paul as the human penman to write much of the New Testament.

The Sufferings and Sorrows in the Life of Paul

Did Paul know anything about suffering for Jesus? Well, just listen to what he wrote to the Corinthian believers and judge for yourself. Very few if any of us have ever had to suffer to the extent of the apostle Paul.

“Would to God ye could bear with me a little in *my* folly: and indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or *if* ye receive

another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with *him*. For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles. But though *I be* rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been throughly made manifest among you in all things. Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely? I robbed other churches, taking wages *of them*, to do you service. And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all *things* I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and *so* will I keep *myself*. As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia. Wherefore? because I love you not? God knoweth. But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. I say again, Let no man think me a fool; if otherwise, yet as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little. That which I speak, I speak *it* not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also. For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye *yourselves* are wise. For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour *you*, if a man take *of you*, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face. I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit

whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? so *am* I. Are they Israelites? so *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so *am* I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I *am* more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; *In* journeyings often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils by *mine own* countrymen, *in* perils by the heathen, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.” (II Cor. 11:1-33)

There were false apostles in the early days of the church just like there are hirelings in church pulpits of today. A godly servant will not be like “an hireling” (Jh. 10:12) and leave God’s sheep without care, but will suffer for their sake if necessary. The false apostles that Paul found in Corinth had Jewish blood in their veins, but that didn’t mean they had been washed in the precious “blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14). Paul was more of a

godly minister than all the false apostles who ever lived and he proved it by the way he willingly suffered for the cause of Christ and bore his battle scars (Gal. 6:17).

The apostle Paul knew hardships that none of us of today have ever experienced for the sake of Christ. Five times he had been beaten to the limit of the law, meaning with thirty-nine stripes. Three times he had been beaten with rods. At Lystra he had been stoned and left for dead. Three times he suffered shipwreck and on one occasion he drifted in the sea before being rescued. During his travels, he faced dangers from robbers, attacks from both Jews and Gentiles, and knew what it was to be in pain, be tired, cold, hungry, and to go without proper clothing.

Many people had died from such things as Paul experienced, yet he lived until God called him to his eternal home. All of these things recorded in our text are the sufferings that he had endured up to that particular time and did not include those which followed later in his life. Eventually, it's believed that Paul paid the ultimate price by being martyred. After writing so much of the New Testament and experiencing much suffering and imprisonments, tradition tells us that Paul was beheaded by the wicked Emperor Nero in Rome in 67 AD.

In addition to all his physical hardships and personal abuse, Paul carried upon his heart the burden of "all the churches" (II Cor. 11:28). When a pastor carries the weight of only one church upon his heart, we wonder how Paul could have stood up under the load of "all the churches." Problem churches, like the church at Corinth, must have borne especially heavy upon Paul's heart. Some of you pastors who are reading this book are pastoring problem churches. I had my share down through the years before my retirement from the pastorate (see *My Life As A Pastor, Shepherding God's Sheep And Herding Goats*). My wife and I

have said many times that we have stayed awake at night more concerned over the congregation than they are about themselves.

From the very beginning of Paul's ministry, there were those who tried to kill him, but his friends let him down by the wall of the city in a basket through a window (Acts 9:16-23). This must have been a mighty humbling experience for a grown man like Paul. Many times he escaped death by the sovereign will of God, and continued to faithfully serve his Lord and Savior (Phil 3:10) without delay. Throughout Paul's entire ministry, he knew nothing but suffering and persecution (II Tim. 3:12). Today, there are extremely few people who are willing to suffer in order for Christ to be glorified. If you're looking for an easy road, then the Christian ministry and the pastorate in particular is not for you. A call into the Christian ministry, including pastoring a congregation, is a call to suffer. The same sovereign call that separates you to serve the Lord of Glory will grant you the sovereign grace to persevere.

The false apostles of Paul's day are just like the self-appointed authorities within the institutionalized church of today. They want a rich, easy, and rewarding life free from the troubles and trials that go along with Christian combat. A true follower of Jesus Christ will face difficulties, dangers, and hardships. Anyone who preaches that the Christian life is all sunshine and roses is preaching another gospel.

Following and serving Jesus Christ requires a life of dedicated discipleship (Lk. 14:33). Many people in the organized church of our day are not legitimate followers of Jesus Christ and they're hiding behind a mask of religious pretense. It's a problem that dates back to the early days of the New Testament church and a problem with which we'll have to contend with until Jesus calls His bride away and separates the "wheat" from the "tares" (Matt. 13:24-30).

Paul had an encounter with God that he writes about in the twelfth chapter of Second Corinthians. He calls the “third heaven” where God transported him, “paradise.” He also says that what he saw was “unspeakable” and “not lawful” for him “to utter.” It’s an amazing thing that people come along in this day and time and claim to tell us something about heaven that God didn’t permit Paul to tell us. Holy Scripture records only a few wonderful things about heaven; however, the little bit that we know assures us that it’s a prepared place for a prepared people and no words can adequately describe it’s splendor.

“It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but *now* I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me *to be*, or *that* he heareth of me. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, **My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds. For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except *it be* that I myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong. Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved. But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile. Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you? I desired Titus, and with *him* I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? *walked we* not in the same steps? Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but *we do* all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying. For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and *that* I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest *there be* debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults: *And* lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and *that* I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.”

(II Cor. 12:1-18)

To keep Paul from becoming proud and feeling elevated over this unusual third heaven experience, God gave him a thorn in the flesh. His encounter with God in the third heaven cost him a price that he would have to live with the rest of his life. This thorn certainly contradicts the modern day teaching of a health and prosperity theology because whatever it was, Paul never recovered from it. Exactly what this thorn in the flesh was, has been the subject of much debate. Some believe that it could have been false teachers, bad eyesight, malaria, or some other physical malady. The truth of the matter is that no one knows what it was simply because the Bible doesn't tell us.

That which we do know is that it was used to buffet him. This KJV word, "buffet," means to throw a blow as with a fist. God permitted Paul to be harassed and humbled by a messenger of Satan lest he be exalted above measure. We need to always remember that whenever God permits Satan to take a jab at us, it's not without purpose and his attacks are limited (Job. 1:12, 2:6). Until we know what it's like to be in pain or to be hurt, we'll not know how to sympathize with suffering and hurting people. Therefore, let's never forget that even our sufferings and sorrows are ordained by our sovereign God.

Whatever Paul's thorn, it was so unpleasant that he besought the Lord three times to remove it. But, rather than removing it, God gave him GRACE that was SUFFICIENT to bear it. Here, we discover that God's grace becomes a tremendous gift that enables us to bear a testimony of His glory while suffering from life's infirmities. Anyone can praise God when the circumstances of life are going in our favor, but only a radiant believer can take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake. In fact, God uses life's difficulties to make us strong in the faith. Regardless of what our thorn might be, God has a purpose in permitting it to

come our way. Only when we realize how weak we are, can we draw power from God's strength.

I think that Annie Johnson Flint captured the truth of what Paul was saying in this chapter when she penned the following words.

“He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase:
To added affliction He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.”

“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 horded resources,
Our Father's full giving is only begun.”

“His love has no limit 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!”

Just like Paul, we discover that the Christian life is not a bed of roses and after getting saved, we quickly find out that the devil is our continual adversary (I Pet. 5:8). In fact, I believe that the more sold out we are to Christ and the more involved we are in serving Him, the greater will be Satan's attacks against us. That is no doubt why our enemy attacks the God called pastor and his family so severely.

We can expect thorns to crop up all along the way in this pilgrim journey and throughout our ministry as a pastor. For the under-shepherd it might be a load mouth woman who loves to make life miserable for you. It might be an evil minded deacon

that you must face every Sunday. It might be a closed-minded congregation that refuses to be taught God's Word and spiritually grow up. It might be a rebellious son or daughter or a non-supportive wife. Possibly, you're dealing with personal health issues yourself. It could be any number of things that you would call your thorn in the flesh.

We just need to remember that along with thorns, there will also be roses. God's GRACE is like the beautiful rose that grows on the thorny stem of affliction. May God help us to learn that along with the sufferings and sorrows of life also comes the grace that is sufficient to see us through them victoriously for His glory. Sufferings and sorrows are inevitable for the man of God, just as the apostle Paul found out. The sooner we learn that those sufferings and sorrows are under the control of our Sovereign God, the better we'll be able to deal with them.

Chapter 8

Timothy, The Young Shepherd

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, *which is* our hope; Unto Timothy, *my own son in the faith*: Grace, mercy, *and* peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: *so do*. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and *of* a good conscience, and *of* faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. But we know that the law *is* good, if a man use it lawfully; Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. *This is* a faithful

saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, *be* honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.” (I Tim. 1:1-20)

The epistle of First Timothy was written to the church of Ephesus where Timothy served as pastor. It's believed that after two years of Roman imprisonment, Paul was released and along with Timothy visited this Ephesian church. Upon their arrival they apparently discovered an invasion of unsound doctrine. Therefore, when it came time for Paul to travel on, he left Timothy there to help rid the church of false teaching. Later, Paul wrote back to Timothy an urgent letter of encouragement which makes up the Book of First Timothy.

The early history of this church is recorded in the Book of Acts (Acts 18-19). It was a church, just like most congregations of today that faced a number of difficult problems which could have divided the people and disheartened the pastor. At the time of this writing, it's believed that Paul had cared for Timothy for some twenty years as a spiritual son in the faith. As Timothy matured and proved himself spiritually responsible, he was entrusted with greater ministerial responsibilities.

The church at Ephesus was known for the way it stood for doctrinal truth. Paul had spent three years indoctrinating them and grounding them in the Word of God (Acts 20:17-31). He had warned that after his departure, grievous wolves would enter the flock and try to devour them. Just as Paul predicted, we learn from First Timothy that is exactly what happened.

There never has been nor will be a local church without problems. As long as the church remains in the world, there will be congregational problems and most of those problems can only be correctly dealt with by seasoned saints who rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. That which we need to overcome our problems is wise council from God's Word and humility to respond accordingly. Unless we yield ourselves to the authority of Holy Scripture, we'll never witness a dynamic moving of God's presence in our midst nor see Him solve our problems for us.

God has instituted the local church to preserve and propagate His truth in the world. Nothing can take the place of a local church along with her divinely appointed officers. However, it's a sad thing indeed to see so many local churches neglecting and abusing their divinely appointed position. The epistle of First Timothy teaches the church how to conduct herself before a holy and righteous God. It also gives us a little insight into the life of Timothy, a young pastor. These pastoral epistles are so up to date that you would think they were written just last week. The instructions which Paul gave to Timothy are as pertinent today as when he wrote them under divine inspiration. Although, Timothy was the personal recipient of these letters, the message found therein should be applied to all pastors and churches throughout history.

The very first verse of this epistle makes it perfectly clear that Paul's letter carried the weight of apostolic authority. God had

committed unto Paul the trust of apostleship. There was a time when God commanded Paul to become an apostle and for that reason he was boldly able to declare the gospel wherever he went. Paul had been entrusted with a ministry and was under divine orders to serve his God. Any man who is going to speak for God should do so under His divine authority. If you are a pastor reading this book, may I ask you a question? Has God called and ordained you to preach the Word? If so, then expect hand to hand combat with the devil and all the demons of Hell.

The word, “commandment,” that we find in the opening verse of this chapter is a military term that refers to an order that has been passed down the line. As we’re about to see in our text, God had entrusted the gospel to Paul who passed it on to Timothy. Unless we adhere to the truth that has been passed down to us, we’ll not have a hope to pass on to the generation that follows us.

Yes! It’s believed that Timothy was pastoring the church at Ephesus at the time Paul wrote this epistle. However, Timothy was not at Ephesus merely because Paul put him there, but because God had entrusted to him the work of that local ministry. Pastor friend, why are you in the pastorate where you currently find yourself? Hopefully, it’s because God Almighty put you there and if He put you there then he will see you through the difficulties that you’re facing and are about to face.

The word, steward, doesn’t actually appear in our text, but that is exactly what Timothy was in reference to his ministry. A steward is a person who is to properly manage that which has been entrusted to him. If one is not called of God to serve Him in ministry, then he had best not attempt to do so. The name, Timothy, simply means HE WHO HONORS GOD. Paul referred to him as “my own son in the faith.” He was not speaking in the physical sense, but in the spiritual sense. Timothy had been

converted and disciplined in the Christian faith under Paul's ministry.

The assignment given to Timothy as pastor of the church at Ephesus was to prevent the spread of false doctrine. There has never been any such thing as an easy pastorate, not even in the early days of the church. Unique problems have always been present to challenge the pastor and the church. In Timothy's day, Ephesus was a bustling metropolis which spawned a lot of new strange ideas. It had a reputation of being a major center of pagan worship. Located in the city of Ephesus was a magnificent temple dedicated to the goddess, Diana (Acts 19:28). In this temple was practiced such things as fertility rituals and religious prostitution. It was in such a heathen environment that the Ephesian church was threatened with the invasion of false teaching.

We don't know for certain, but can't help to wonder if Timothy was giving some thought to resignation and moving on when Paul told him to "abide." That word, "abide," simply means to stay put and the word, "charge," means to take a strong stand. Almost every pastor and Christian worker has wanted to quit at some time or another, but we must never forget that it's always too soon to quit when we're doing God's work. Discouragement has always been one of Satan's most popular tools against the church.

Most pastors probably live with discouragement if the truth be told and if they were honest enough to admit it. As Christians we must learn how to claim victory, even over discouragement, and take a stand for what is right in the sight of God relying upon the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill our calling. Taking a strong stand for the Word of God never has and never will be easy, but that is the expectation of God-called pastors known as spiritual "overseers" (Acts 20:28).

The charge that Paul gave to Timothy to “teach no other doctrine” meant to hold on to the fundamentals of the faith and teach nothing contrary to it. It’s the same charge that God is giving to all His pastors. Failure to uphold “sound doctrine” is to rob the gospel of its message of grace. The phrase, “teach no other doctrine” literally translates from the Greek to mean “to teach doctrine of a different type” (Gal. 1:6-16). “Other doctrine” includes teaching that is in contrast to the Gospel of Grace. Not only do the cults preach a message of works, but so do many who claim to be followers of Christ.

If you believe that a person must contribute something to his salvation, then you are guilty of believing a salvation by works. Some believe that grace is God’s part and faith is man’s part when it comes to salvation. That is unsound theology simply because a depraved man has no saving faith to pump from his unregenerate heart. Unless God regenerates and gives the lost sinner faith to believe then he will never discover salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not believe in salvation by works, but a salvation that works through the blood of Calvary’s Lamb. Sinful man is not saved by his works, but once saved, he will bear evidence of his salvation by his works (Jam. 2:17-26).

One of the hardest things to deal with in the church is a mixture of truth and error. I just recently read where a well-known preacher once made the comment, “The destiny of your own soul is in your own hands by the CHOICE you make.” That may sound good and appealing to the human ear, but it’s just not so! The truth of the matter according to Scripture is that God is sovereign over all things, including salvation (Jonah 2:9). If the choice is up to us then salvation would be of works which is in absolute violation to the teaching of Scripture (Eph. 2:8-10). Man is a depraved sinner who is totally incapable of ever choosing God. It was not Adam who went looking for God in the Garden

of Eden, but God that went looking for Adam. Unless God in sovereign grace overcomes the human will and makes us willing, then no sinner will ever get saved.

There is a story of a nagging woman who insisted upon her husband going to the doctor and getting his hearing checked because he seemed to never listen to her. After the examination the doctor declared that he had no hearing problem, but a divine gift. We also must become so knowledgeable of God's Word that we'll readily recognize it and turn a deaf ear to any teaching that does not measure up to the Word of God.

Proud intellectualism as opposed to humble faith will threaten the doctrinal purity and unity of a local church. Giving "heed to fables" is nothing more than the teaching of myths. Mythology may captivate the curiosity of man, but it can never satisfy the longing of his soul. Just because a philosophy may sound good, including some of the modern day church growth philosophies like the seeker-sensitive movement, it doesn't necessarily mean that it's doctrinally sound.

Ephesus was the heartland of the mystery religions of that day and time. Today, there are still people who have a fascination with mythology and at the same time deny the miracles recorded in Holy Scripture. Even within the ranks of professing Christians there are people who teach that the Book of Genesis is a myth and the miracles of the Bible are not real. It's nothing unusual for the critics of Scripture to call those of us who believe the Bible, "unlearned and ignorant" (Acts 4:13).

There's nothing wrong with keeping a record of your genealogies, but you cannot depend upon your ancestry to get you to heaven. Paul was a devoted Jew before he got saved on the Damascus Road, but he was lost outside of the saving grace of Jesus Christ (Phil 3:4-10). It's foolish to trust in one's family

background or spiritual affiliation to get to heaven without a personal faith in the Son of God.

God's love can only spring forth from a "pure heart and a good conscience and of faith unfeigned." Scripture says that, "the end of the commandment is charity" with the word charity being "love" translated from the Greek word Agape. Some who claim to believe the Bible and contend for the faith do so with a down right contentious spirit. It's so very sad that many who hold to the doctrines of grace are not very gracious. Unless we have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus, we'll not be able to "love the brethren" as we ought (I Jh. 3:14).

Even though we don't dot every "i" and cross every "t" just alike, we still need to learn how to "love one another" (Jh. 15:12) in the body of Christ. I'll have to admit that some brethren are easier to love than others. After salvation we're still living in a body of flesh that is not yet perfected. For that reason, we can all say that living with the saints above will be glory, glory, glory. But, living with the saints below, well, that's another story. We've got to WORK at loving the brethren! The truth of the matters is that some professing believers are not very loveable.

Paul told Timothy that what is taught in the church should produce "love out of a pure heart." A pure heart stands in direct contrast to the old nature with which we are born. Both love and faith should be lived out in a believer's life following his salvation which in turn should produce within us a sensitive tender conscience. Unfortunately, many consciences have been "seared with a hot iron" (I Tim. 4:2) and are insensitive to right and wrong.

Every person has a conscience of some type, but the only conscience that can be trusted is one that has been educated by the Word of God and controlled by the Holy Spirit. No man can have a good conscience without unfeigned faith. What is

unfeigned faith? It is faith that is not hypocritical or in other words one that's genuine and not merely acted out on the stage of pretense.

To turn aside from God's revealed truth is to become caught up in "vain jangling." Vain jangling is empty talk or foolish details that have nothing to do with one's spiritual growth in the Lord. The discussion of pointless topics, such as claiming to know the time of the Lord's return, is foolish and is of little value simply because God alone knows the answer to that question. To major on human wisdom rather than the word of God is to be turned aside from biblical truth. Preacher friend, don't talk just because you like to hear yourself speak. Study the Word, preach the Word, and feed God's sheep the Word (II Tim. 4:2).

The error of legalism not only plagued the early New Testament church, but has remained a threat down through church history. We can simply define legalism in terms of Christian theology as a teaching of man that is elevated above the teaching of Holy Scripture. It magnifies a rigid code of man above God's sovereign grace. Jesus was accused by the Pharisees of breaking their religious man-made laws (Matt. 12), but He never broke any Law of God (Matt. 5:17). There were some in the Ephesian church who were desiring to be teachers for the wrong reasons. They were attempting to promote legalism within the assembly which only saps vitality from the message of grace of which they had no understanding.

It's a bad thing when the listener doesn't understand what the teacher is saying, but even worse when the teacher himself doesn't biblically understand what he is trying to teach. Unless we have a proper understanding of the Old Testament law, we might be victimized by those who preach it and try to bring us back under it. Teaching that one must walk down a church isle in order to be saved or that one can lose his salvation is all a form

of legalism (Eph. 2:8-9). The Mosaic Law could not save from sin, but it could only reveal to the sinner the penalty of sin apart from faith in Jesus Christ. What the law could not do, the Gospel of Grace can do (Jh. 1:17). The misuse of God's Law has been a problem throughout Christendom.

The law is good if used properly, but if used improperly it can become a stumbling-block to Christ. On more than one occasion, Paul spoke to those who misused the Old Testament law (Rom. 3:19, 7:17, Gal. 3:24-25). The law is God's moral code that establishes right from wrong and shows the sinner his need of a Savior. Only Christ has ever lived up to the requirements of the law and in so doing He became "sin for us" (II Cor. 5:21) in paying the penalty of our sin in His death upon the cross.

The purpose of the law was not to save, but to reveal to us our sinfulness. The law wasn't given to the righteous man, the man made right with God through faith in Christ, but to the lawless. The New Testament believer has been called to a much higher level of living that can only be experienced through sanctification.

Sound doctrine is not the practice of legalism, but the practice of grace which had been committed to us as a trust. The word "sound" comes from the same Greek word from which we get the word hygiene. Sound doctrine literally means clean healthy teaching. Just as we don't want to take a bath in someone else's dirty bath water, we should not want to accept a teaching within the church that is not sound. The opinions, arguments, and philosophies of man only frustrate the grace of God.

The "glorious gospel of the blessed God" is the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ apart from any works of self-imposed righteousness. God is sovereign and everything He does is sovereignly done. We ought to be preaching sovereign grace. If we're going to preach grace, then we should practice it

rather than trying to bring believers back under the yoke of the law and cause them to think that they have anything whatsoever to do with their salvation. Tainted doctrine and the infiltration of legalism has been a threat upon the church since her very beginning. Salvation is not a decision that you make, but it's an act of God in choosing a people unto Himself because of His sovereign grace.

Paul used himself as an illustration of God's transforming grace in writing to young Timothy. We're reminded from this passage that it's God's place to call and place men into the ministry. No man can make himself a true minister of the gospel simply because it's God's business to issue a divine call for Christian service. Attending a college, Bible School, or seminary cannot make a minister out of someone whom God has not called. A preacher called, parent called, or grandparent called preacher will not last in the ministry. We need to be sensitive and responsive to God's call whenever it comes, but the bottom line is that the call must come from Him.

In searching out an under-shepherd, a local church should look for a man who has the sovereign call of God upon his life and settle for nothing less. The young people in our assemblies ought to consider God's will for their lives and as a result, we ought to see people called out of our congregations into the ministry. What I'm about to say will most definitely make some people mad as a wild rabid dog, but I'm going to say it anyway because it is the truth. When I read church advertisements of a congregation in search of a pastor, the majority make me sick to my stomach. Putting strings and restraints upon God is a concept straight out of the pits of Hell. Telling God the type of pastor you want is near to blasphemy. It is God who tells us the kind of pastor that He wants us to have and He spells that out very clearly from His Word (I Tim. 3:1-7). Telling God that the

prospective candidate must have at least five years of pastoral experience and that he must be a man with seminary degrees is a lie of the devil.

The word, ministry, comes from the same Greek word from which we get the word, deacon. Unfortunately, the word, ministry, is a much misunderstood term today. Most of the time we only think of someone like a preacher being in the Christian ministry. But, the truth of the matter is that all believers ought to be involved in the ministry of full time Christian service. Just because God calls some into the ministry of preaching and teaching doesn't mean that all other believers have no spiritual gifts to exercise within the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-8). Every Christian has some spiritual gift to perform in service unto the Lord. There is no such thing as a part time Christian because every Christian has been called unto salvation and to service.

If God's grace could and did transform Saul of Tarsus (Acts 21:39) into Paul the apostle as we saw in the previous chapter, then there is no limit as to what His grace can do for us today. Paul reminded Timothy as he reminds us today that before his conversion, his conduct was inexcusable and criminal (Acts 9:1-8). He had been a blasphemer in word and a persecutor in deed. As a blasphemer, he had argued that Christ was a phony and Christianity was false. As a persecutor and injurious person he had taken out his vengeance on the church by violently attacking believers in Christ.

Paul was telling Timothy that he deserved eternal punishment for being injurious to his innocent victims, but instead he obtained mercy from the Lord Jesus Christ. Following his conversion, Paul admitted that what he did was done ignorantly in unbelief. As an unbeliever, he did not understand the claims of the gospel because the Holy Spirit had not yet opened his spiritual eyes (I Cor. 2:14). Even though, we like Paul, may

sometimes sin ignorantly, ignorant sin is still sin, but may not carry the same weight of judgment as sinning against revealed truth (Jam. 4:17).

The manner in which Paul described himself in these verses was in direct contrast to the legalistic attitude of the Pharisees (Lk. 18:11). The Pharisees placed their trust in keeping the law. Paul placed his trust in the mercy (the kindness of God in withholding from him the judgment he rightfully deserved) which he had obtained from the sovereign council of God.

Paul wanted Timothy to know about the three motivating forces in his life that should compel every believer to go forward in Christian service, especially pastors. The three forces are grace, faith, and love. All of these replaced the religious hatred that had once dominated the Pharisaical heart of Saul. God's sovereign grace enables a believer to serve the Lord. God's sovereign faith empowers a believer to serve the Lord. God's sovereign love motivates a believer to serve the Lord. Without the sovereign hand of God reaching down from heaven's glory, then there is no sinner who will ever be able to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you think that you're the greatest thing since sliced bread or that you're God's greatest gift to a congregation, then you need to examine your life and question your calling. From the life of Paul, he tried to make clear to Timothy that regardless of a man's past sins, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). Paul appreciated God's grace and He not only wanted Timothy to know it, but us also. Do we appreciate it and do we let others know that we do? It's very apparent from the salutations of Paul's letters that grace became the theme of his ministry. A genuine Christian life and true New Testament church must be built upon the emphasis of grace.

The early church held a high regard for God's revealed truth and referred to it as a "faithful saying." In the absence of the completed canon of Scripture, there were authoritative statements of faith that were called "a faithful saying." The purpose of the church is to uphold God's Word and proclaim that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." There is no question that Christ Jesus was the world's greatest Teacher and Moral Example, but His coming into the world was to save sinners.

From the life of Paul and the instruction that he gave to young Timothy, we learn that the enormity of a person's past sins is no barrier to Christian service. When we think of Paul, we think of a great persecutor who became a great preacher, but he saw himself as "the least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8). He had been a self-righteous legalistic Pharisee, but after coming to Christ he saw himself as chief of sinners (I Tim. 1:15). Paul is proof that God's grace is greater than all our sin (Rom. 5:20). In the case with Timothy, he most likely did not stoop to the depths of depravity as did Paul, but the same grace that saved and called Paul did so in the life of Timothy.

Despite our past, we, like Paul or Timothy, can only come to personal faith in Jesus Christ by obtaining God's mercy. In the life of Paul, God demonstrated the extraordinary longsuffering (patient) nature of divine mercy. In so doing, God made Paul's life a pattern (example) for those who would also trust Jesus Christ for forgiveness of their sin. In this respect, Paul became a living illustration of how "Jesus came into the world to save sinners," even the worst of sinners. Sinners like Timothy and sinners like you and me. If you're a believer today, then your life also should be an object lesson of how God's grace can transform a sinner into a saint. God wanted Timothy to know this as well as us. There are some local churches today that will not

allow certain men to be deacons or pastors because of their past sin (see my book, *“Godly Servants, A Glimpse into the Subject of Elders, Deacons, and Deaconesses”*). Aren’t you thankful that we have a God in Heaven Who can make the vilest sinner clean and usable for His glory?

As Paul thought of all that God had so mercifully done in his life in writing to Timothy, he broke out in a song of praise. We’ll never be able to praise God enough for what’s He’s done in our lives. Remembering the kind of person that he had been, caused Paul to glorify God for his redemption. Likewise, we also should be stirred to heart-felt praise unto the Lord for the things that He has done for us.

Being a Christian is not easy, much less being a pastor. Paul wanted Timothy to know that being a Christian and a pastor is not a playground, but a battleground. I tell in my pastoral autobiography, *“My Life As A Pastor, Shepherding God’s Sheep And Herding Goats,”* how I thought when I took my first pastorate that it was going to be heaven on earth. Well, it didn’t take me long to discover that it could be like a hell on earth. Paul reminded Timothy of the “charge” that has been committed unto every God-called pastor at the very outset of one’s ministry.

This word “commit” is a banking term that means to deposit, and it speaks of the trust given to us in upholding God’s Word of Truth. Like a good soldier, Timothy had to defend the Truth of God and “war a good warfare” against the enemies of God. There is a war that has been declared by the enemy of our souls and he sees to it that the believer is constantly engaged in spiritual warfare. Being a Christian and a pastor involves not only blessings and rewards, but also wounds and bruises. The closer we live to Jesus Christ, the more intense we’ll discover the warfare. In the Second Epistle that Paul wrote to Timothy, he

was reminded that it was God Who had “chosen him to be a soldier” in the Lord’s army (II Tim. 2:3-4).

It is at this point that we once again need to be reminded that God is sovereign over all things. In fact, we must learn to live with the thought of God’s sovereignty in every breath that we take. He is sovereign in salvation, those whom he saves. He is sovereign over those whom He calls unto service, pastors anointed to preach the Word. If you are saved, then you didn’t go looking for God. If you have been divinely called to preach the Holy Scriptures, it’s because God in sovereign grace has placed His omnipotent Hand upon your life and given you a summons to service.

Every Christian warrior and especially the pastor ought to be “holding faith and a good conscience” lest he become a spiritual shipwreck. The believer is in a spiritual battle that cannot be fought with carnal, but spiritual equipment (Eph. 6:11-18). The sooner we pastors learn this, the better off we’ll be! “Faith and a good conscience” are two pieces of equipment that are indispensable. Faith relates to what we believe and conscience relates to how we behave. The flesh would have us react to the circumstances of life in a negative way, while the indwelling Holy Spirit empowers us to react supernaturally. There have been many times in my pastorates when I would have loved to grab somebody by the throat and chock the living daylights out of them or give them a piece of my mind. But, thanks be to God for the restraining power of the Holy Spirit.

A man’s conscience can only be kept clean by the confessing of his sins (I Jh. 1:9) unto God. It’s a dangerous thing for us to make excuses for our spiritual inconsistencies. Such behavior can cause us to develop a “conscience seared with a hot iron” (I Tim. 4:2). It’s possible to maintain good doctrine and at the same time live in secret sin and fail to practice what we know to be right.

Doctrine and deportment are both important and should produce a blend of sound belief and holy living from any Christian, much less a preacher. A result of failing to live and practice sound doctrine is spiritual shipwreck.

Down through the years, I've never ceased to be amazed at how we in the church try to avoid calling out troublemakers in the local assembly. I don't think pastors ought to go around acting like spiritual police officers, but when it becomes necessary to deal with a problem, then we must face it. I told pastor search committees on more than one occasion that if I became their pastor, then I would not sweep their garbage under the rug because all it will do is come out later and haunt you. One reason troublemakers flourish in a local assembly is because of the manner in which they get by with their mischief.

I've said all of that to call your attention to the way Paul wrote to Timothy giving him and modern day pastors an example of how to deal with troublemakers. Paul names two men who apparently did not genuinely exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and were "delivered unto Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme." Paul did not merely side-step the issue by referring to them as two men, but he named called them. They are identified in Holy Scripture (as Paul wrote under divine inspiration) as "Hymenaeus" and "Alexander." Paul wanted Timothy to be aware to them! These two men are examples who wandered off course doctrinally and had to be disciplined in hopes that they would call out to God and repent.

Unfortunately, today's church is so hungry for numbers that discipline has become a thing of the past. The average congregation will accept almost anything that breathes. Numbers seem to be the name of the game with many local churches. Shame, shame! Most Baptist by-laws state that a person ought to be saved prior to church membership, but our visible churches

are filled with people who don't know anything about the new birth. Church discipline is biblical and it serves as a reminder and warning to the church of God's "chastisement" (Heb. 12:8) upon a believer who lives in sin. Not only do church members need to be disciplined who live in willful and habitual sin, but we need to disciple ourselves to such things as Bible Study, Prayer, Faithfulness, Giving, and Witnessing.

Pastors must stand for sound doctrine if the purity and power of God's Word is to be preserved in the local church. No doubt, there would be less false teaching today, if the church had withstood the false teachers of yesteryear. The only way for a church or an individual to be a clean vessel is for Christ to be in control and on the throne. Jesus did not come into the world merely to teach or set a perfect example, but to die for our sin.

Man's greatest need is to be saved (Rom. 10:9-10). And then learn how to be a Steward, a Servant, and a Soldier of the cross. From the life of the apostle Paul and the epistle that he wrote to young Timothy, we learn that no sinner is too sinful to be saved and serve the Lord. Regardless of what man tells you, God can make a spiritual Steward, Servant, and Soldier out of the vilest sinner on the face of the earth. For that reason, we too can break out in a doxology of praise "unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible" giving Him "honor and glory for ever and ever."

The Sufferings and Sorrows in the Life of Timothy

Throughout both epistles of First and Second Timothy, Paul encouraged young Timothy to remain faithful to God and fulfill His high calling to preach the Word. A good minister will not argue or debate biblical issues. He will not lead people in a discussion and let them form their own conclusions, but he will feed the sheep God's truth. Although, at the time this epistle was written, Timothy was no child, physically speaking, but he was a

God called child of the King. He might have been considered young to fill the role of a pastor and perhaps that is the reason he was told not to let anyone take advantage of him, intimidate him, or despise him due to his age. We can perhaps learn from Timothy's suffering and sorrows as a young man in ministry that youthfulness is no disability when it is surrendered to Christ. Youth don't have to sow their wild oats and give their parents reason to grieve, but they can be a radiant witness for the Lord Jesus. Regardless of a pastor's age, respect must be earned, not demanded.

Timothy was admonished to let nobody "despise" him for being young. It's been speculated that perhaps Timothy was shy, bashful, or timid. Others have thought that perhaps his spiritual authority was being questioned by the older elders in the church at Ephesus due to his young age. In writing to Timothy, Paul sets the record straight if any of the above was the case. God uses introverts and extroverts. God uses pastors, young and old alike. God uses those whom He sovereignly chooses regardless of pedigree, age, or anything else.

This one thing we do know and that is how Satan likes to get people to "despise" God's men. Despise means to have contempt for someone, to reject and put beneath another, to think little of, or to think nothing at all of a person. I've heard people within a church congregation make reference to their pastor as "our little preacher," or "the little pastor." Whether they realize it or not, that is an awful put-down and it's an attitude of despising.

Nobody can say for sure exactly how old Timothy was at the time Paul wrote the epistle of First Timothy. This one thing we know is that, humanly speaking, Paul was a spiritual mentor to Timothy and that there was no doubt a rather large age difference between them. Nevertheless, God chose to use both as pastors in the early church. I've heard it questioned and debated as to how old a man ought to be before becoming a pastor. There is no age requirement found in Scripture, but something is said about his spiritual maturity (I Tim. 3:1-7). Down through history, we've discovered God calling out men at a very early age and using them mightily.

We also discover in Holy Scripture of God's sovereign call upon the lives of young men. Remember from Samuel that age was no factor in him serving the Lord in the Old Testament and neither was age a problem with John being called as one of the original apostles. God is sovereign and He calls whom He chooses. As I've already mentioned, He does not have to ask permission and approval from anyone. I find it rather sickening to read many of the modern day "church advertisements for pastors." Most of them are telling God what kind of pastor they want instead of asking Him to send them the pastor of His choosing. The majority of pastor search committees are requiring the candidate to have at least five years' experience.

This matter is a very sensitive issue with me for many reasons. Personally, I entered full time Christian ministry at the age of twenty-two and became a full time pastor at the age of twenty-three. I'm thankful that I didn't have to meet no man-made requirement of five year's pastoral experience. But, it does remind me of an article that I read many years ago and have saved it to remind me of the stupidity of the modern day church.

The article is entitled, "the Perfect Pastor" and this is the way it reads. "He preaches exactly twenty-minutes and then sits down. He condemns sin, but never hurt anyone's feeling. He works from 8 AM to 10 PM in every type of work from preaching to custodial service. He makes \$60 per week, wears good clothes, buys good books regularly, has a nice family, drives a good car, and gives \$30 per week to the church. He also stands ready to contribute to every good work that comes along. He is twenty-six years old and has been preaching for thirty years. He is tall and short, thin, and heavy-set, handsome. He has one brown eye and one blue; hair parted in the middle, left side dark and straight; the right brown and wavy. He has a burning desire to work with teenagers and spends all his time with older folks. He spends all his time with a straight face because he has a sense of humor that keeps him seriously dedicated to his work. He makes fifteen calls a day on church members, spends all his time evangelizing the unchurched, and is never out of the office."

Well, I'm sure that you're able to tell how dated the above article is, but the truth of the matter is that some things never change. To prove my point, I'll share one more article that I also saved down through the years. It's entitled, "Calling a New Pastor."

The article goes something like this. The pulpit committee of the local Baptist Church was in search of a new pastor and was interviewing a candidate who had just graduated from seminary. The chairman of the committee said, "Son, do you know the Bible?" The young preacher replied, "I'm a seminary graduate. I've been to Bible College, of course I know the Bible." The chairman of the committee asked, "Which part of the Bible do you know best, the Old Testament or the New Testament?" The candidate said, "I know it all." Then the chairman said, "If you know the Bible so well, how about telling us one of your favorite Bible stories. For instance, do you know the story of the Good Samaritan, and if so how about telling us that story?" Confidently, the young preacher replied that he'd be happy to and then he began. "There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, who went down to Jerusalem by night. The next day, he fell upon stony ground, and the thorns nearly choked him half to death. And he said, what shall I do? I will arise and go to my father's and so, he arose and went through the Eastern gate and down the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza, climbed up in a sycamore tree, and got his hair caught in a limb, and hung there forty days and forty nights, and he was a hungered. The next day, the ravens came and fed him some loaves and fishes till he was satisfied. Later on, Solomon and his wife Gomorrah came by, shaved his head, got him out of the sycamore tree, and accompanied him on his way to Jerusalem. When they got there, they found Delilah sitting on the wall, and he said, Chunk her down boys. And they said, how many times shall we chunk her down, seven times? And he said, nay, but seventy times seven. And so, they chunked her down four hundred and ninety times, and she burst asunder in their midst, and they picked up twelve baskets full of the fragments which were left, and in the resurrection whose wife shall she be?" The chairman looked

around at the rest of the committee and said, “Folks, I believe we ought to hire him. I know he’s young, but he sure does know his Bible!”

My first comment to the above story is that it sounds like they were deserving of one another. The truth of the matter is that there are many pastors in pulpits today similar to this candidate. Seminary graduates, but ignorant of God’s Word and there are a multitude of local churches who are absolutely ignorant of God’s Word. God calls pastors to feed Gods sheep. Unless a pastor, regardless of his physical age, is a student of God’s Word and is being taught by the Holy Spirit, then the congregation that he pastors will not be taught how to rightly divide the word of truth (II Tim. 2:15). Physical age is not the issue. It’s a matter of spiritual maturity and the calling of God upon a man’s life.

With that I remind you that the Sovereign Hand of God was upon the life of young Timothy and the human vessel that God used to instruct him was the apostle Paul. As I close this chapter, I want to leave you with these verses of Scripture and an old song that I have cherished since my days as a young person.

To encourage young Timothy, Paul said to him, “Let no man despise thy youth: but be thou an example of the believer, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (I Tim. 4:12-16). “These Things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee” (Titus 2:15).

Give of Your Best to the Master is a song that I’ve always loved and cherished. It was written by Howard B. Grose (1851-1939) and Charlotte A. Barnard (1830-1869). It’s truly a goldie oldie but beautiful.

“Give of your best to the Master,
Give of the strength of your youth;
Throw your soul’s fresh, glowing ardor
Into the battle for truth:
Jesus has set the example,
Dauntless was He, young and brave;
Give Him your loyal devotion,
Give Him the best that you have.

Give of your best to the Master,
Give Him first place in your heart;
Give Him first place in your service,
Consecrate every part:
Give, and to you shall be given,
God His beloved Son gave;
Gratefully seeking to serve Him,
Give Him the best that you have.

Give of your best to the Master,
Naught else is worthy His love;
He gave Himself for your ransom,
Gave up His glory above;
Laid down His life without murmur,
You from sin’s ruin to save;
Give Him your heart’s adoration,
Give Him the best that you have.

Give of your best to the Master,
Give of the strength of your youth;
Clad in salvation’s full armor,
Join in the battle for truth.

Chapter 9

Jesus Christ, The Great Shepherd

In the Old Testament, we could say that the sheep died for the shepherd as we think about the system of animal sacrifices that pre-figured in typology the coming of Christ's all sufficient sacrifice. But, in the New Testament, we discover that the Shepherd died for His sheep in sacrificial atonement. In that regards, Jesus is referred to as a "lamb" (Jh. 1:29,36) and more specifically the Supreme Passover Lamb (I Cor. 5:7). However, Holy Scripture also uses another analogy and refers to the Lord Jesus Christ as a Shepherd. He is called the "great shepherd of the sheep" in Hebrews 13:20 and the "good shepherd" in John 10:11. For the purpose of this study, I've chosen to confine my remarks to the passage from the Gospel of John and point out several aspects of His shepherding ministry.

Christ is the True Shepherd

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them" (Jh. 10:1-6).

The truths of which Christ spoke must be understood within the context. The closing verses of the previous chapter revealed the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees (Jh. 9:39-41). In contrast to these false shepherds of Israel, Christ presented Himself as the

True Shepherd. Immediately after Christ's encounter with these critical Pharisees, we are taught about the sheepfold, the thief, the robber, the shepherd, and the sheep. The thieves and robbers of whom Jesus spoke were the false shepherds who preyed upon God's sheep. Since we continue to live in a world of false shepherds, we need to note some of their characteristics whether it be a modern day television personality or in a local pulpit.

False shepherds are out for themselves. They are full blown narcissist. They are selfish, being in the ministry for what they can personally get out of it. They destroy and tear down that which is good, pure, and truthful. They are hypocrites, having no genuine love for God's people. They damage others as well as themselves by spiritually leading people astray from biblical truth.

When Christ came to the fold of Israel and called His elect, they came out of the sheepfold of Old Testament Judaism into the sheepfold of the New Testament Church. Being more steeped in tradition than truth, the Pharisees for the most part felt threatened by the ministry of the Lord Jesus. They were more interested in preserving Judaism than spreading Christianity and declaring that Christ was the fulfillment of their Promised Messiah. The same is true today of many churches, religious groups, and ministers who would rather live a lie and be popular than to be true and suffer.

During the time of Christ, it was common for several shepherds to bring their flocks to one central sheepfold for the night while they passed through the various towns and villages. The person who was left in charge of the sheep for the night was called a porter. When the shepherd returned the following morning, he would give his own special call to which his sheep responded. Perhaps we can liken this to a telephone call from someone with whom you are well acquainted. Immediately you will recognize their voice without them having to identify themselves.

Christ emphasized the very personal relationship that existed between Himself and His sheep by saying that "he calleth his own sheep by name ... and the sheep follow him for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from

him: for they know not the voice of strangers.” Jesus is not sitting back wondering who will respond favorably to the Gospel invitation and make a decision (Matt. 11:28). Scripture clearly states that Christ knows His sheep and in turn those sheep know His voice (Jh. 10:14,27). Paul also reminds us in Second Timothy 2:19, that “The Lord knoweth them that are his.”

Is it possible for true believers to ever get confused by false teachers? I think that it is possible and for that reason, God’s sheep need to be constantly fed a proper spiritual diet. In the last chapter of John’s Gospel, we find Jesus telling Peter to “feed my sheep” (Jh. 21:16,21). God’s sheep want and need sheep food. Without a steady diet of the Word of God, even the Christian can fall into error. That is one of the reasons why we are admonished in Scripture not to forsake “the assembling of ourselves together” (Heb. 10:25). God calls pastors to be under-shepherds to study the Word of God and “feed the flock of God” (I Peter 5:2). If pastors are not doing that, then they are hirelings. Christians who are growing in the grace and knowledge of God’s Word can be guided by the Holy Spirit with the ability to detect the false and the true (I Jh. 2:19).

Christ is the Good Shepherd

“Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (Jh. 10:7-11).

In this passage, Christ likens Himself to the “door” of the “sheepfold.” When out in the countryside at night the shepherd usually led his sheep into a rough enclosure with only one entrance. After all the sheep were bedded down, the shepherd

would lay down across the door which kept the sheep in and the predators out. In other words, the shepherd became the “door.” The only way anyone or anything could come through the “door” was by way of the shepherd. A door is that which provides entrance into a given place. Jesus Christ is not merely a door, but He is the “door.” He is the only “door” into eternal safety. He is the only means to salvation from sin. I remind you that in the Old Testament the sheep died for the shepherd, but in the New Testament the Shepherd died for His sheep. I remind you that the blood sprinkled way is the only “Way” (Jh. 14:6) for the forgiveness of sin and a home in heaven. The blood of Jesus is the only all sufficient payment that will satisfy the righteous demands of God the Father.

Jesus clearly taught that He was to die as the sinner’s Substitute by saying that the “good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” The word “for” in verse fifteen specifically tells us that Christ took our place and died in our stead. The shepherding work of Christ is based upon His substitutionary death. He became our Substitute in suffering our sin in our place on the cross. Not only did Christ lay down His life, but He had power to “take it again” (v.17-18) which is a direct reference to his glorious resurrection. Apart from the resurrection, there would be no gospel message (I Cor. 15:1-4).

Christ is the Only Shepherd

“But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (Jh. 10:12-16).

There is a great contrast between a shepherd and a hireling. A genuine shepherd has a personal interest and love for his sheep because he has purchased them and owns them. A hireling on the other hand was hired to watch the sheep, but would run away in the face of danger. Whenever the dangers of life come our way, then one's true character will come to surface in the manner in which he responds to crises. Regardless of one's profession, the truth of the inner man is revealed by the way he endures his tests.

A Christian needs to understand that he doesn't belong to himself, but to Christ (I Cor. 6:19-20). For Jesus to "know" His sheep involves more than intellectual knowledge, but personal acquaintance. The word "mine" (v.14) teaches that believers are God's property. By His election, God's sheep are hand-picked by the Lord. By His redemption, God's sheep are purchased by the atoning blood of Christ. By His possession, God's sheep are indwelt and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

The extent of Christ's saving grace is seen in the universality of the gospel message. When a person responds by faith to Christ, he bears witness of having been placed into the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:13). Christ's flock is His body of believers that is gathered out of all nations and nationalities. The "other sheep" (v.16) refers to the Gentiles who were outside the fold of Israel. As we glean this truth, this passage becomes a tremendous encouragement to missions and evangelism. A good indication of how God's grace is irresistible to the convicted sinner is evidenced in the words, "them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice."

Christ is the Faithful Shepherd

"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said,

These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind? And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one" (Jh. 10:19-30).

Those whom God calls will respond and come to Him. We know this because the Bible says so. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." There are many people who will hear the external call of a gospel message and reject it. However, when God's elect hear the internal call of the Holy Spirit, they will respond favorably to it.

Sinners are saved by the free "gift" of God's grace (Eph. 2:8-9). We are not saved nor kept saved by our works, but by the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. When Jesus said that His sheep "shall never perish" then that is exactly what He meant. In the Greek it literally means "shall never in any wise at all perish." There are two great omnipotent faithful hands that keep a Christian eternally secure. You'll never find a stronger affirmation of eternal security, the perseverance of the saints, and God's faithful keeping of His sheep than in this passage of scripture. To disbelieve that God can and will keep His own purchased property secure forever is to deny His power and love over His sheep.

Christ is the Rejected Shepherd

“Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him. Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand” (Jh. 10:31-39).

After conveying such dynamic truths found in this passage of scripture, one would expect the Jews to warmly embrace Christ. Unfortunately, Jewish animosity was triggered when Christ claimed to be God. In the Old Testament, the Jewish magistrates had represented God in judging the people. However, in the New Testament Jesus came to represent God to sinful men and be judged in the place of sinners.

The very high regard which Christ possessed for “scripture” (v.35) is noted in His statement that “it cannot be broken.” Holy Scripture is not merely the work of men nor a record of man’s search for God. It is a holy message from the Lord Himself full of truth, faith, justice, accuracy, dependability, divinity, unity, and indestructability. To reject the written Word of God is the same as rejecting the Living Word of which the Jews were guilty.

The Sufferings and Sorrows in the Life of Jesus Christ

Jesus knows more about sufferings and sorrows than any human being who has ever lived. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah paints the picture vividly clear in the fifty-third chapter as to how much the Lord Jesus Christ suffered for the sins of His people. The text below is considered by many to be the mountain peak of Old Testament prophecy. Isaiah's pen portrait of the Suffering Servant is a Messianic prophecy that is referred to many times in the New Testament. Scripture makes it perfectly clear that the person to whom Isaiah is referring is no other than the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 8:30-35). Seven hundred years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God foretold of His life, His rejection, His sufferings, His sorrows, His sacrifice, and His glorious resurrection.

“Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath born our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he

made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (Is. 53:3-12)

Salvation is free, but it's not cheap. The price of our redemption was extremely costly to our Savior. It required the death of our Lord on the cross in voluntary atonement. Isaiah said that “many were astonished (astonished)” at Him because “his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men” (Isa. 52:14). The marred “visage” of Christ spoke of the brutal treatment that He received before being nailed to the cross. His actual atonement for our sins began with His beatings and ended with His death on the cruel cross. He was hit with a mock scepter on His face so many times and a crown of thorns crushed His brow until His features were not easily recognizable. It's generally understood that the scourging of Christ was of such that the flesh was cut away from His breast and back.

The very people to whom the Messiah was promised rejected their Deliverer (Rom. 10:16). Isaiah opened this chapter with a question, “Who hath believed our report?” It's a question of explanation rather than interrogation. Israel failed to see Jesus as the One Who would bring them salvation from their sins. They were looking for one who would deliver them from the political oppression of Rome. Because of Israel's persistent rejection of Christ, a prophetic question is also asked, “to whom is the arm of

the Lord revealed?” The Gospel was first preached to the Jews, but after their rejection then it turned to the Gentiles (Jh. 1:11). This “arm of the Lord” to which Isaiah spoke is referring to the Person of Jesus Christ. Apart from personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, there never has been and never will be salvation for anyone of any race including the Jews.

As a “tender plant” and “a root out of a dry ground” describes Jesus coming through the ranks of humanity, being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a Jewish virgin. Growing from childhood into manhood, the life of Christ was the wondrous blossom of perfect humanity. When Isaiah said that there was “no form nor comeliness” about Him does not mean that He was ugly or repulsive in appearance, but that mankind as a whole simply didn’t recognize the moral loveliness of God incarnate. These words do not apply to His physical characteristics, but to the scorn upon which He was looked by a corrupt humanity.

The world “despised and rejected” Jesus because people were made uncomfortable by the very presence of Holy God in their midst. The Hebrew word for “sorrows” that is found in this text can also mean pain. The pain and sorrow that Jesus experience in this world is beyond human comprehension because it was greater than any mortal man has ever suffered. The Hebrew word for “grief” can also be rendered sickness or disease. The curse of sin back in the Garden of Eden ushered sickness, pain, disease, grief, and death into the human race. When Jesus came into the world, He associated Himself with the effects of sin upon mankind and showed compassion by healing the sick. In fact, His great compassion and love for “his people” (Matt. 1:21) moved Him to the cross of Calvary to become our Substitute in suffering the penalty of our sin.

Jesus did not die merely to heal us from our physical illnesses, but to heal us from our spiritual disease of sin. Sickness and death are the result of sin and it was for our sin that He died. However, the good news is that because of His death on the cross, we can find forgiveness of our sin and be assured of someday having a glorified body that is free from the curse with no more sickness, suffering, and sorrow. In other words, the

Christian will someday have a perfect body that is healed completely. In this world, sin has affected both body and soul. The seat of sin is in the soul. The body is merely the instrument that participates in the sin. As a result the body must suffer the consequences of sin. All bodily infirmity can be traced to sin. For instance, leprosy is seen in the Old Testament as a type (a study of typology) to teach us a great spiritual truth about sin. In other words, what leprosy was to the body, sin is to the soul.

Unfortunately, when Jesus came, Isaiah prophesied that Israel would not respond favorably to Him. That is why he wrote, “we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” We know that this prophecy was fulfilled because when Jesus came, Israel for the most part had no respect, regard, nor appreciation for the Son of the Living God. The Jews were the ones who shouted, “crucify him” (Mk. 15:13-14), when Pilate gave them a choice between Barabbas (Mk. 15:7) and Jesus. Likewise, many people even today hear the Gospel with the outer ear, but do not have “ears to hear” (Matt. 11:15); therefore, it has no positive effect upon them.

So, with all that being said thus far, let us be reminded as pastors and other Christian disciples of the Lord Jesus that we can expect the same kind of treatment. The sad thing is that we often find it within the doors of our local churches. When we do, it tells us just what kind of local congregation it really is. The treatment that I sometimes received by the hand of so-called church people is what I would have expected by a hostile world. Apostasy is on the rise within the ranks of Christendom. When Jesus came to the religious Jews in fulfillment of being their Promised Messiah, He was persecuted. Therefore, pastor friend, if you discover a congregation that rejects your faithful preaching of the Word of God, don't be surprised.

This was one of the biggest shocks that I received when I first entered the ministry (see **My Life As A Pastor, Shepherding God's Sheep And Herding Goats**). I was expecting everybody to love me, but instead I found that there were people who were just waiting to gnash on me with their teeth, stab me in the back, hate my guts, unjustly criticize me, and try to destroy the

ministry to which God had called me. I learned that in the long run, I was in good company because it was the company of Jesus and He reminded me of what He had told His followers.

“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore, the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also” (Jh. 15:18-20).

Notice what Jesus said, “If the world hate you.” Pastor friend, you might be saying that Jesus was talking about the “world” and not the church. That is correct, but herein lies a big problem with many if not most modern day congregations that call themselves churches. They are full of the “world.” In fact, I repeatedly preach loud and clear that today’s church is so full of the “world” that you cannot even tell that the church is in the “world.” We are not to conform to this world, but lean to live in it without being like it. Let us never forget the words that the apostle Paul wrote under divine inspiration to that worldly Corinthian church.

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (II Cor. 6:14-18).

With that being said, let's move on a little further into the Gospel of Isaiah and when we do we'll discover that those who persecute us in the local church often think that they're doing God a favor. That's the way it was with Jesus when Isaiah wrote that "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." This ungodly world, including the self-righteous Jews of His day, considered the sufferings of Christ a well-deserved punishment for "blasphemy" (Jh. 10:33). He was accused of being a "devil" (Jh. 10:20) and was called "Beelzebub" (Matt. 10:25). In ridicule, Jesus was called by His rejecters, "gluttonous and a winebibber" (Matt. 11:19). Before He ever felt the pain of physical torment, He was smitten with verbal abuse as false, unkind, hateful, indignant words were directed toward Him. After a long night of mock trials, the Lord Jesus Christ was "scourged ... stripped ... spit upon ... smote ... mocked" (Matt. 27:26-31).

Christ endured all this abuse because He came as our Substitute. Notice how Isaiah describes His sufferings by using the personal pronoun "our." The prophet speaks of Christ being "wounded for our transgressions ... bruised for our iniquities" and "the chastisement of our peace" being "upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." This word, "our," is teaching the beautiful doctrine of Substitutionary Atonement. The word, Substitution, is not found in the Bible, but it simply means to take the place of another. Scripture teaches that Jesus Christ endured the judgment that "our" sins deserved.

Pastor friend or fellow brother or sister in Christ, have you ever been falsely accused? If you are trying to follow the Lord and do His bidding, then false accusations will come to some degree. It happened to Jesus, the Perfect Son of God. Isaiah even foretold about the mock trials where Jesus was condemned unjustly to die as a felon. The prophet described it this way by saying that Jesus will be "brought as a lamb to the slaughter." During my pastoral career, I felt this way myself to some extent more times than one. In the case of Jesus, eventually "he was cut off out of the land of the living" by being nailed to an old rugged cross. Then, "he

made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.” He died between two thieves and was buried in a rich man’s borrowed grave (Lk. 23:53). Aren’t you glad that He only needed a borrowed grave? In “three days” (Jh. 2:19-22) “Joseph of Arimathaea” and “Nicodemus” (Jh. 19:38-40) could have it back. Hallelujah!

As a pastor, I knew what it was for the devil and his church crowd to come gunning for me and not only hurt me, but my wife and children. They will tell anything that they want to tell, say anything that will serve their purpose, and try their best to crucify you. If you are a follower of Jesus, remember that you can expect the same treatment by even the religious crowd. In fact, that religious bunch are the very ones that shouted, “crucify him” (Mk. 15:13-14). Our sufferings and sorrows will never begin to compare with those of our Blessed Redeemer. Just remember when you are under attack by the enemy, that Jesus also was and that He can “be touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb. 4:15).

The Sufferings and Sorrows of Christ were divinely ordained “since the foundation of the world” (Heb. 9:26). The divine justice of God was satisfied in the death of “his only begotten Son” (Jh. 3:16). Isaiah points out that His “soul” as well as His body went through the terrible ordeal of bearing the judgment of our sin. Isaiah said that He made “his soul an offering for sin.” God the Father placed the judgment of our sin on His Son in love for us. Ephesians, chapter five, and verse two admonishes us to “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.” Jesus suffered in His innermost being as His holy spotless “soul” became the great sin offering unto the Father.

This word, “offering,” used in our text refers to a trespass offering which differed from other Old Testament offerings. It represented sin or guilt as a debt and the sacrifice as making compensation. The unusual thing about Christ is that He not only was the Sacrifice, but He was also the Priest Who offered that

Sacrifice. Christ was not an unwilling victim of circumstances, but willingly laid His life down for us, His sheep (Jh. 10:17-18).

Just as a lamb begets lambs, the “Lamb of God” (Jh. 1:29) begets “sheep.” In this analogy of Christ, we discover that He is not only “the Lamb of God,” but also the very “Shepherd” of His sheep. In the closing verses of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, the prophet refers to the “seed” of Christ and speaks “of the travail of his soul.” The countless multitude of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, God’s elect, who become the spiritual posterity of Christ is called, “his seed.” The only way that the new birth of a sinner’s soul is possible is by “the travail of his soul.” This word, “travail,” refers to one kind of suffering. It speaks of birth pangs. Jesus suffered the spiritual birth pangs necessary for us to be “born again” (Jh. 3:3-13).

Isaiah made it perfectly clear that the blood Jesus shed on the cross would “justify many.” Just because Jesus died doesn’t mean everyone is going to heaven when they die. Isaiah said that when Christ died, that “he shall bear their iniquities.” Who are the, “their?” The word, “their,” is referring to the “many” whom Christ will “justify.” Those whom God has “chosen ... before the foundation of the world ... having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good plassure which he hath purposed in himself” (Eph. 2:4-9).

The closing verse in Isaiah fifty-three pictures the Suffering Servant as a Mighty Conqueror. By conquering death, hell, and the grave, the power of Satan is defeated. Satan is indeed a very strong enemy, but his strength will never supersede the power of Almighty God. In conquering death, Christ pictures His glorious and victorious resurrection. Because Jesus “was numbered with the transgressors,” He is presently making “intercession for the

transgressors” as our Great High Heavenly Priest at the right hand of the Father (Rom. 8:34, Heb. 7:22-28).

The Gospel is not simply that Christ died, was buried, and arose. His death and resurrection are recorded facts of history. In order to be saved from sin and hell, we need to be transformed by the power of God’s grace by faith and in so doing we’ll realize that Christ died for “our” sins in “our” place on the cross as “our” Substitute in paying “our” penalty. Jesus Christ experienced sufferings and sorrows not because He was bad, but because we are bad. God’s plan of redemption in calling out a people unto Himself required that He wrap Himself in a body of flesh and come down to this earth and do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

When we follow the footsteps of our Lord, then we can expect sufferings and sorrows. God never promised that the Christian life would be easy, much less the life of a pastor. But, from the life of Christ we learn that God has a purpose in whatever sufferings and sorrows that come our way. I’ve learned that some of life’s greatest lessons and experiences come from the classroom of difficulty. That’s when we must step out beyond ourselves and trust God by faith to see us through. Not every problem is going to be solved nor will ever trial be victorious in this life. But, my fellow pastor friend and Christian pilgrim, don’t ever forget that the Best Is Yet To Come. When we get to heaven, we can sing, “it will be worth it all when we see Jesus.” There are sufferings and sorrows in being a pastor, but there is also joy unspeakable. Serving our Lord Jesus Christ carries with it benefits and eternal rewards that are out of this world.

A Summary On Sovereignty

There is no way that I can even begin to adequately write about God's Sovereignty much less summarize it. However, I would like to try and bring this book to completion with some final words dealing with this majestic subject. Hopefully, it will help some poor struggling preacher to fix his eyes upon the One Who has called him to such a high calling.

In the year this book is written, we have a national campaign going on with a heated battle for the presidency of the United States. Only God knows the outcome of the elections that will take place in November. But, this one thing I know with great certainty. God has already ordained who will be president. I'm convinced from the Holy Scriptures that God will allow nations to have rulers either in judgement against them or in mercy. Such was certainly the case with King Saul when the people wanted a king like all their heathen neighbors. Later, God raised up David in an act of mercy and great grace. David was no perfect man, but he was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22).

God ordained civil government for the welfare of the citizens. Unfortunately, many rulers have misused their power. We are admonished in the Bible to pray for our judicial leaders. Timothy wrote, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (I Tim. 2:1-2). Proverbs, chapter twenty-one and verse one, reminds us that, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." There is no king, president, or earthly ruler anywhere on the face of planet earth that can do anything without the sovereign permission of God.

Most of the kings that governed Israel in the Old Testament were bad. Down through history, we've had tyrants like Hitler. In the USA, we've had a slew of presidents that have been less than desirable leaders. There were times in the life of Israel that God permitted them to have a good king and in my lifetime we've

occasionally had a president that had the best interest of our nation in mind. I've said all of this to introduce to you a passage of Scripture that shows us how God can do as He pleases, even in the heart of a king. God is sovereign over all things, even earthly rulers. Regardless of who is in the White House of the United States or on the throne of some other country, our sovereign God will always be ruling the universe from His Heavenly throne.

“And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan. 4:35)

The story of Nebuchadnezzar shows how the realization of God's sovereignty can change a man's perspective on life. King Nebuchadnezzar was not only a great warrior, but also a great builder. Chapter four in the Book of Daniel tells about a dream that Nebuchadnezzar had of a great tree which symbolized his selfish pride. After no one else was able to interpret the king's dream, Daniel was called in and immediately explained the meaning of it. The message of the dream was that the king would be disposed from his throne due to a mental disorder which would cause him to act like an animal for seven years. Following this period of time, he would be humbled and confess that it is God Who rules the world and sets up kings as He pleases.

It appears that Daniel pleaded with the king to repent so that this judgment might be averted, but Nebuchadnezzar's pride was too great. Twelve months later while walking in his palace, the judgment of God fell upon him just as God had predicted. Just because God's judgment is not always immediate doesn't mean it won't come. God's warnings of a future judgment are as inevitable as if they have already occurred (Rev. 20:10-15). In Nebuchadnezzar's case, he was driven out into a field to eat grass and act like an animal. The great Nebuchadnezzar who once ate the finest of foods eventually found himself eating grass

like oxen. The great Nebuchadnezzar who had been manicured like a king grew hair like eagle's feathers and nails like bird's claws. What a pathetic sight that must have been!

There is a debate among theologians as to whether or not Nebuchadnezzar truly professed faith in Almighty God. Some believe that he did while others question or deny it. Personally, from the inspired hand of Daniel the prophet as he penned the words found in this chapter, it sounds to me like he became a believer in the One True and Living Sovereign God. When Nebuchadnezzar learned the lesson of his littleness and God's greatness, he blessed and praised the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. From this passage in Daniel, we learn that God is able to humble the heart of the proud. But, also from Nebuchadnezzar's personal testimony, we learn of God's sovereign dealing among the affairs of men.

This king ended up declaring that God doeth according to His will. Scripture makes it clear that God has a will to do what He knows best and His will determines His actions (Eph. 1:9,11). There can be only ONE will in God because there is only ONE God. God foreknows what will be, simply because He declares "the end from the beginning" (Isa. 49:9-10). He foreknows because He ordains. Knowing and doing the will of God is the supreme duty of man. We have no right to dictate to God in what manner He shall do His work. However, we are obligated to seek His will and obey it.

God's Will is Sovereign in Heaven Dan. 4:35a

Whatever God does is according to His purpose that is eternal, unchanging, and perfect. Since God is unchangeable, so is His will (Mal. 3:6). God would not be Omnipotent if He failed to accomplish His will. Being Omniscient means that God knows all things and is perfect in knowledge. Being Omnipotent means that God is all powerful and knows no limitations. Nothing happens by chance or coincidence with God. In other words, there are no accidents with God. From the human perspective we often refer to something as an accident, but not so with our

Sovereign God. God has an end in view in whatever He does and He acts according to His divine plan. We can rest assured that God makes no mistakes because His acts are determined by His perfection. Also, let's remember when thinking about God's sovereignty that our God is too kind to do anything cruel, too wise to make a mistake, and too deep to explain Himself.

God had a purpose when He created the world which was a part of His "eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:11). Prior to the creation of man was the creation of the angels (Isa. 14, Ezek. 28). When given an opportunity, the anointed cherub (Lucifer) sought to dethrone God and became known as the Devil with one-third of the angels becoming his evil agents (demons) following his rebellion. In accordance with His sovereign plan, God permitted evil to exist in order for man to be created as a free moral being. God is not the author of evil, but He does permit it.

We also discover from the creation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden that when man exercises his free will that he will always choose sin. Unless God in His sovereignty overpowers man's free will and gives him a desire for Christ, then depraved people will never turn to the Lord Jesus. Satan is powerful, but he is not all powerful. We could say that Satan is the second most powerful force stationed in the heavenly sphere. Scripture refers to him as the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). God remains sovereign with absolute control over Satan's final destiny.

God's Will is Sovereign on Earth Dan. 4:35b

Man is the ultimate object of God's love. God saw each day of His creation as "good," but on the sixth day it was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Upon earth, God placed man and fellowshiped with him until sin separated their relationship. As a result of sin, God's seventh day of rest was interrupted and God had to perform a work of redemption through Christ that was only complete when Jesus said upon the cross, "it is finished" (Jh. 19:30). Although, God doesn't approve of sin, it can only occur by His permission. This doesn't mean that God works contrary to

His nature. I repeat, God is not the author of evil. He does permit it, but He is the author of the good that He has created.

The modern tendency is to reject divine sovereignty for the rights of human will. Even though God's sovereignty includes our failures, God still holds us accountable for our sins. While not approving of our sin, God works His will in spite of our sin. God doesn't endorse sin; therefore, His purposes can never make Him the author of it. Sin entered the world not because God created it, but because He made man a free moral agent and permitted him a choice between good and evil. Like Adam, all of his descendants are accountable to God and are given a will to choose.

When left to ourselves, we'll always choose evil just like Adam. God didn't make man a robot or a machine, but an intelligent person who keeps his liberty under God's sovereignty. Man's natural will is enslaved to do evil; therefore, the only way a person can come to God is for the Holy Spirit to overpower man's depraved will. This is done by a supernatural work of God's grace thus giving the sinner the gift of faith and repentance. Scripture clearly teaches that divine sovereignty and human freedom cooperate in perfect harmony. Unless God gives you a desire for Him, then you'll never have it, want it, and know it in transforming redeeming grace. The biblical doctrines of man's free will and divine election have been likened to parallel lines of a railroad track. When looking down the track, they appear to meet, but the truth of the matter is that they never meet, but always run parallel.

The subject of God's sovereign election cannot be understood by the mortal mind. It can only be accepted by faith as a part of God's eternal "purpose" (Eph. 1:4-7). Had it been God's purpose to save all the human race, then there would be no "elect" (I Pet. 1:2). Redemption is not universal! According to God's will, redemption is secured by the death of Christ only for those who will believe and a sinner will not believe until God regenerates the soul. God's purpose in saving sinners includes only the "whosoever believeth in Him" (Jh. 3:16). The angel announced prior to the birth of Christ that He would "save his people from

their sins” (Matt. 1:21). Only those who trust Christ with God given faith to save them from their penalty of sin will receive the “kingdom prepared” for them “from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). Those who never experience the new birth will remain lost and die in their sin to suffer in the eternal torments of Hell. In judgment, God sends some to Hell. In mercy, He takes others to Heaven. Since God is JUST, He allows evil to exist. Since God is GRACIOUS, He is willing to forgive and save some.

The sovereign election of God’s people is based upon His grace and not on the superiority of the people. All three persons of the Godhead are active in the salvation of sinners (I Pet. 1:2). Election is ascribed to God the Father. Redemption is ascribed to God the Son. Sanctification is ascribed to God the Holy Spirit. Sinners can only be saved by grace and not by merit (Eph. 2:8-9). Therefore, even salvation is a matter of God’s sovereignty. Jonah declared that “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9). God plants saving faith in the heart of a sinner when they are “born again” (Jh. 3:3). To all who trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, God promises the forgiveness of sin. It is the will of God that the Gospel be preached to every person and that every individual who believes shall receive everlasting life. Just as God is sovereign in creation and redemption, He is sovereign in the distribution of His gifts (I Cor. 12:11).

Some have been chosen by God to particular offices such as that of a pastor (Eph. 4:11). If you are a God-called pastor, then the sovereign Hand of the Almighty has chosen you to the highest calling in all the land. Isn’t it truly amazing that God would use any of us in His service? We are such frail feeble human vessels dealing with our own personal struggles and imperfections.

God has given you the same charge that Paul gave to Timothy, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (II Tim. 4:2). You may be a pastor who’s thinking about “throwing in the towel” (so to speak) for whatever the reason. Let me remind you that God has not forsaken you and that the “gifts and calling of

God are without repentance” (Rom. 11:29). If you are a saved God-called preacher, the sovereign God of creation is in the process of refining you and making you a vessel of honor in the midst of your sufferings and sorrows. Before God can ever use a man, He must first break him. God knows how to humble us and cut us down to size, making us totally dependent upon Him.

Every believer has a spiritual gift to use for the good of the body, but the call to preach and teach the Word is a call to edify the body of Christ so God’s sheep can grow in grace. According to God’s sovereign pleasure, He divides His gifts unto His children to be used for His purpose. The same Holy Spirit that saves sinners, equips us for spiritual service. As we witness for Christ, we’ll talk to many people who hear the external call of our testimony. However, only the Holy Spirit can issue the internal call that brings forth life and light. That’s why Scripture says, “if any man have ears to hear, let him hear” (Mk. 7:16).

God’s Will is Sovereign Without Question Dan. 4:35c

God is accountable to no man; therefore, nobody has the right to question His sovereignty. God is sovereign in doing what He pleases, uncontrolled by any other being. No superior being exists who can dictate to the Almighty Creator. Jehovah God is not accountable to anyone or anything for what He says, thinks, or does. Just because there are mysteries in the divine nature of God which are too deep for us to fathom doesn’t mean that we are to question His sovereignty. Our obligation as creatures made by the Creator is to bow before His sovereignty. When we are the least able to understand His doings, it pleases Him for us to exercise faith and stand in total confidence upon His Word (Isa. 55:8-9). Most people find it easy to talk about trusting God, but very difficult to actually trust Him when adversity strikes. The term, “trust God,” has become a Christian cliché with little meaning behind it. Trusting God involves more than an emotional feeling, but the surrender of our minds and hearts.

There is no biblical doctrine more questioned and fought against than that of God’s sovereignty. Perhaps that is why the

discipline of trusting God is so little practiced today. If God is sovereign, which He is, then why can't we trust Him? God's sovereignty declares that He is in control of ALL things. Even though we don't know God's reasoning He has a reason for what He does. Therefore, we need to learn how to trust Him regardless of the circumstances and situations of life. In the midst of personal tragedy, it's possible that we may acknowledge God's sovereignty, but at the same time question His love. If He is to receive the glory due His name, then we must learn that His sovereignty and love cannot be separated. The job of the church is not to question His authority, but to demonstrate to the world that there is a living loving sovereign God Who is in charge of ALL things.

As the Creator and Ruler of the universe, God is sovereign and nothing can come to pass apart from His divine approval regardless of calling it His permissive or perfect will. If we understand that God has all things under His control, then there is no need to panic over the threat of nuclear holocaust or any other such catastrophe. Being convinced of God's sovereignty should take the fear out of facing personal tragedy (Rom. 8:28). Recognizing the sovereignty of God makes all the difference when we face the sufferings and sorrows of being a pastor or a believer struggling with everyday difficulties.

You may be saying, "Well preacher, it sounds like you believe that whatever will be will be." Let me respond by saying that, "Whatever God wills ... will be." King Nebuchadnezzar had to find that out the hard way. The sooner we embrace this mighty spiritual truth, the sooner we'll find the burden of living being lifted off our shoulders and the beauty of trusting our sovereign God. Nebuchadnezzar was a high headed self-righteous ruler who didn't think he needed God. In grace, the Lord taught him who was really in charge. When we acknowledge that God is the One calling the shots, then there will be no room in our hearts for pride, boasting, nor worry. That is because, like Nebuchadnezzar, a recognition of God's sovereignty will bring peace and tranquility to the soul.

Only when the flesh is humbled and God is exalted will the cross of Christ be elevated to its proper perspective in our lives. Every sinner must come to Christ on the same level. Aren't you glad that there is level ground at the foot of the cross? The rich, poor, educated, uneducated, nobles, and peasants must all come to Christ without any distinction of rank. We're all sinners in need of a Savior and the only Savior is Christ Jesus Who stepped out of Heaven, came to earth, took our place on the cross, and died for the penalty of our sin. Everyone must meet Christ on His terms or else not meet Him at all.

Since God is sovereign, He can get our attention in any way that He chooses. If there's a want to in your heart, a genuine desire for Christ to be your Lord and Savior, it's because God has placed that longing within you and you'll not find peace no more than did Nebuchadnezzar until you acknowledge God's sovereign saving authority over you. Acknowledging the sovereignty of God means, submitting to His authority, surrendering to His will, and serving Him in gladness. We cannot call Him, Lord, in sincerity without recognizing His sovereignty. We must yield everything precious in our lives to His control. We need to realize that He is the reason for our very existence. All that matters in our lives is that our Sovereign Lord is glorified, even in our sufferings and sorrows.

Final Thoughts

As I started writing this book and gathering my thoughts, I received a phone call that nobody wants to get. It was Monday before Christmas, 2015, when my doctor called to give me the results of my recent prostate biopsy. He told me that out of the twelve biopsies, five were cancer. Three were slow growing and two were fast. He also informed me that I would have two options, radiation or surgery, and that he wanted me to read as much as possible on the subject before coming in for consultation.

Have you ever been told that you had cancer, the big “C” word? If you have then you know everything that begins going through your mind. If you haven’t then you cannot even begin to imagine what it’s like. The more I studied about prostate cancer the more I realized that it’s serious business. Of all cancer deaths among men, prostate cancer ranks number two. Like it is with most other cancers, early detection is so very important. All I knew was that I had to make a life-changing decision and as for me, I just wanted to know what God wanted me to do. I also knew that although this took me by surprise, it came as no surprise to my sovereign God.

As the months quickly passed, I underwent surgery and had a remarkable recovery. It was no walk in the park, but I don’t believe that it could have gone any better. Our biggest surprise came three months after my surgery when we discovered that my wife had a growth in a parotid (salivary gland). Due to the possibility of it being cancer, she had it removed two weeks after diagnosis. The pathology report came back benign. For his grace upon us both, we give Him the praise and glory. I’ll be going back periodically for my blood work and my wife will patiently wait for her never damage to heal if it be God’s will. I’ve mentioned all of this simply to say that we never know what the next bump in the road is going to be, but God does. We are fallen creatures living in a fallen world. The curse of sin abounds, but the sovereign grace of our God abounds more.

I believe that God has fixed the time of our deaths from our conception. In fact, I believe that I was in the mind of God from the beginning. That's a mighty big thought, but we have a sovereign God Who knows everything from the beginning. I don't know how long I'm going to live, but I want to live as long as God wills and serve Him until my last breath on earth. Then, do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to serve my Lord throughout all eternity. I plan to do all that I can to care for my health and hopefully see a complete cure with many more years to live, but only God knows my future. In fact, our God not only foreknows the future, but He has sovereignly ordained it. Perhaps there are people reading this book who do not believe this, but just because you don't believe it, doesn't change the Truth about our Sovereign God.

Scripture declares in the Book of Lamentations that "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die" (Ecc. 3:1-2). Hebrews also reminds us that "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). That word "appointed" in the Greek means reserved. Just Who do you think it is that has set the "time" of your birth and "appointed" (reserved) that day of your death? It is the same One Who gave you life to start with! God determines your day of birth and your day of death because we have a sovereign God. He is in charge. I like the old song, This is my Father's World. He created it and He is totally in charge of it. He's not in charge of some of it or part of it, but all of it and every aspect of what takes place therein. Our God is sovereign over all things, even salvation (Jonah 2:9)!

Life will sometimes get difficult for us all, even for the pastor who tries to serve as an under-shepherd of God's sheep. When people hate you, despise you, mock you, abuse you, and persecute you then just remember that you're in good company because that is the manner in which the world treated Christ. Talking about suffering, no mortal man has ever suffered like Christ as He bore the torments of our Hell in His "own body" (I Pet. 2:24). From the very beginning of the human race (Gen.

3:15) God promised the Coming of Christ to atone for the sins of His people. That coming did not take place until the “fullness of the time” (Gal. 4:4) on the calendar of our sovereign God. Our God is never too late and never too early, but always on time. For that reason, we must learn to “wait upon the Lord” (Ps. 37:9, 132:2, Isa. 8:17, 40:31).

Our problem is that we often try to run ahead of Him or sometimes lag behind Him. In other words, we become impatient like Abraham and take matters into our own hands and make a mess out of things. But, God in His majestic sovereignty allows us to do that in order to put us through the school of hard knocks. Those hard places in life are used to teach us lessons along the way as we journey this pilgrimage of life. I don't know about you, but I'm a slow learner, but those lessons that I've learned by making “mistakes” are some that I'll never forget. One sure fact is that I don't want to make the same “mistake” again. God knows best and I'm learning to trust Him by waiting upon Him with the patience of faith.

When I was at one of my lowest points in life, a pastor friend used the phrase, “the patience of faith.” It has stuck with me ever since because I had to learn that patience and faith go together like hand and glove. You cannot have godly patience without faith and neither can you have godly faith without patience. As a pastor, I've been so low that I had to look up to see bottom. It seemed from the human perspective that everything was hopeless.

It's interesting to look through the Bible and discover how many times these two words are used together, “but God.” The enemy may be closing in around you. Your health or the health of a loved one may be failing, finances may be lacking, the deacons may be jumping down your throat, someone may have just chewed you up and spit you out, or perhaps a lie has been smeared against you. Regardless of how negative things look to the natural eye, I've got good news for you, “but God.” Our God has promised never to leave nor forsake His children (Heb. 13:5). There is light at the end of the tunnel for the Christian. The best is yet to come. We're not living for time, but for the sake of

eternity when we'll see Jesus face to face and behold Him in all His glory. When that day comes, all that matters is to have lived in such a way that we can hear Him say to us, "well done thou good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21).

The little sheep as portrayed in the Gospel of John is a perfect picture of a Christian. Just think about it! Sheep are considered in biblical terms as clean animals just like Christians who have been cleansed from their sin. Sheep like to flock together like Christians who have a desire to fellowship with God's people. Sheep are harmless creatures like true Christians who are to be meek, humble, and peace loving people. Sheep are given to wandering just like Christians who must battle the flesh to keep from going astray. Sheep need the care of a shepherd as do Christians who need protection, guidance, and feeding. Sheep were used in sacrifice like Christians who are to present themselves a living sacrifice in the service of Christ.

I've said all of this to say that is the reason Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd of His sheep came down from Heaven's glory to a sin infested earth. The Divine Shepherd gave Himself for His sheep and pledges unto them eternal life and that He will keep them eternally secure in His loving care. As the "great shepherd" (Heb. 13:20) He cares for His sheep. As the "chief shepherd" (I Pet. 5:4) He will come again in glory. When He comes again, will He come for you? Is He your Good Shepherd and are you one of His sheep?

In this book, we've looked at how God used Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Jeremiah, Paul, and Timothy as earthly shepherds over His people. Then, we took a look at the Great Shepherd Himself and His sovereign love for His sheep. We have learned that the sufferings of this world are inevitable.

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are not worthy to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18)

“For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation. And our hope of you *is* stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so *shall ye be* also of the consolation.” (II Cor. 1:5-7)

“Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.” (Phil. 3:8-10)

“Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church.” (Col. 1:24)

“For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” (Heb. 2:10)

“Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” (I Pet. 1:11)

“But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” (I Pet. 4:13)

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle *you*. To him *be* glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” (I Pet. 5:1-11)

God knows when we have a heavy heart and when we're overcome with sorrow. He cares for us just as surely as He did for Israel when they were in bondage and as He did for David, Jeremiah, and all of His shepherds throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

“And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows.” (Ex. 3:7)

“And David spake unto the LORD the words of this song in the day *that* the LORD had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul: And he said, The LORD *is* my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; The God of my rock; in him will I trust: *he is* my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence. I will call on the LORD, *who is* worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies. When the waves of death compassed me, the floods of ungodly men made me afraid; The sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me.” (II Sam. 22:1-6)

“The LORD *is* my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, *and* my high tower. I will call upon the LORD, *who is* worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me.” (Ps. 18:2-5)

“*When* I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart *is* faint in me.” (Jer. 8:18)

“Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?” (Jer. 20:18)

From the shepherds that we've studied in this book, we've discovered God's Hand of Sovereignty from the very beginning of their conception until their entrance into eternal Glory. Nothing that occurred in their lives took God by surprise because He ordained and orchestrated every event that took place. Just as we learn this mighty truth from these biblical characters, we ought to be leaning it from our own personal lives.

Regardless of the sufferings and sorrows of life, God is sovereign and uses life's difficulties to mold and make us into the person He wants us to be. Sufferings and Sorrows will come to every Christian. Pastors are not exempt, and in fact will most likely know them better than anyone else. Therefore, we need to keep our eyes fixed on the sovereignty of God. If we don't, then we'll fail to live the Spirit empowered victorious Christian life to which we have been called. Discouragement in ministry is one of the greatest weapons in Satan's arsenal against a pastor. It alone can bring a great deal of suffering and sorrow to which I can very well attest. Therefore, we must keep our eyes fixed on the great sovereignty of God and remember that "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (I Jh. 4:4).

It's been said that presently, God has two construction projects underway for every Christian. He is not only preparing a "place" (Jh. 14:1) for us, but He is also preparing us for that place as we travel the road of sanctification. Part of the preparation process includes sufferings and sorrows. It may take the form of sickness, heartache, trial, or all sorts of trouble. Throughout life's sufferings and sorrows, we need to learn how to humble ourselves and pray for God's sovereign will to be accomplished in us. I can promise you on the authority of God's Word that all the sufferings and sorrows that we've had to endure for Christ's sake will be worth it all when we see Jesus.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth. Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:28-39)