

EVIL, SUFFERING, DEATH: WHY?

Lesson 4.

"BEYOND HUMAN COMPREHENSION"

INTRODUCTION:

NO MORTAL MAN can know how close and familiar the relations are which he sustains to the invisible world! Though it is true that our final home, associates, and employments are measurably hidden in mystery, and that there is but little revealed of that future beyond the veil, *at least we need not hide from that information that IS revealed!*

I want to go to heaven. I want to be with the redeemed of all ages. I want to be with that throng that praises the Lord forever. AND RIGHT NOW, TODAY, I WANT EVERY SAMPLE, EVERY FORETASTE, EVERY GLIMPSE OF HEAVEN GOD WILL LET ME HAVE! *I truly believe that every taste of heaven I can get right now will help me lay my claim to that eternal abode!*

I'm particularly afraid that we're much too engrossed with this world and what IT has to offer. We think not enough and too superficially of those things of the invisible world that are only slightly obscured! It may be safely affirmed that nothing now visible is eternal, or destined to endless existence. Paul says that the things which are seen are **TEMPORAL**, and that settles the question! **2 Cor.4:18-** (NKJV) *"while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."*

I. "FOR WE WALK BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT!" -- 2 COR.5:7

- A. Isn't it just amazing to you to realize to how great an extent we live by faith? To what a great extent the principle of faith permeates all the divisions of our lives? To know how predominantly we trust in the unseen?
1. I cite an illustration from Lard's Quarterly of 1866 in which one of the authors speaks of the unseen, quickening part of the body in these words: *"I have a companion. This companion I call my spirit, my life. This spirit has been living with me more than 30 years. Sleeping or waking, it has never for one moment left me. This spirit, the subjective I, has made my body the instrument of all that has ever been accomplished and attributed to the objective me. This spirit dwells in what is called my body, but really it is the spirit's body. The body becomes weary; it seeks rest. Not so the spirit. I do not think that my spirit has ever slept or rested for one second! And yet I have never seen it."* However vague it may be, we still hold on to it, cater to it, and find out all we can about it, don't we?
 2. Another demonstration of our **living by faith** is seen when we consider the physical universe in which we live. We don't see the secret forces, the hidden powers, that control and propel this magnificent machinery.
 - a) There is a hand that moves the planets in their appointed orbits, and turns the seasons around, and we believe it's there, but we've never seen this hand!
 - b) I pay monthly for and avail myself of the use of electricity and, though I've never seen it, I still believe in and appreciate its existence!
 - c) No one can look upon these and a thousand other exquisite exhibitions of the Lord Almighty, **by** and **in which** we *walk by faith*, and find fault in carefully considered

observations of the aura and contemplated glory of that throne which is only slightly enshrouded in clouds and darkness to our weak senses!

- 1) The miser may occasionally think of government, social or intellectual progress, art, literature and religion; maybe even occasionally of angels and demons, or of heaven and hell; but his **focus**, his *home thought*, is of his money!
- 2) The sinner may sometimes think of the man called JESUS, and perhaps occasionally even of mercy or pardon or heaven; but his **focus**, his *home thought*, is of the world and the things of the world; of its pleasures of sinful indulgence; of the follies of this transitory life; and he will finally set his course in a stubborn rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 3) The Christian's **focus**, his *home thought*, is on that relationship he sustains with his Lord Jesus.
 - i. To him all earthly knowledge is valueless, except as it strengthens his wing for his heavenly flight.
 - ii. Is it any wonder then that he often contemplates that heavenly abode, which is just out of his conceptual visions, **perhaps just barely** beyond human survey?

B. In fact, what is the Bible but a grand record of the things of the unseen world?

1. It's a divine depository of facts concerning persons and places that but few mortal eyes have ever seen --- and we're asked to ACCEPT THEM BY FAITH!
2. It's only when our FAITH is manifested in our love and actions that we truly are drawing closer to the LORD!

II. SINCE FAITH COMES BY THE WORD OF GOD, WHAT'S IN IT TO ENLIGHTEN US ABOUT THAT UNSEEN WORLD?

A. We now point to some passages of scripture that, hopefully, will make that ethereal home of the soul more meaningful and sure, more real and closer to us, and make it even more to be desired and allow us a surer hand to lay hold on it!

1. **II KINGS 6:8-17:** (NKJV) "Now the king of Syria was making war against Israel; and he consulted with his servants, saying, "My camp *will be* in such and such a place." 9 And the man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are coming down there." 10 Then the king of Israel sent *someone* to the place of which the man of God had told him. Thus he warned him, and he was watchful there, not just once or twice. 11 Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you not show me which of us *is* for the king of Israel?" 12 And one of his servants said, "None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who *is* in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom." 13 So he said, "Go and see where he *is*, that I may send and get him." And it was told him, saying, "Surely *he is* in Dothan." 14 Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. 15 And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" 16 So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who *are* with us *are* more than those who *are* with them." 17 And Elisha prayed, and said, "**LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.**" Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. **And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.**
 - a) The young servant of Elisha could see with physical awareness the great horde of the enemy encompassing the city, but in answer to Elisha's prayer the Lord revealed also to him the mountain covered with horsemen and chariots of fire and warrior-angels that excelled in strength, a great force of God, invisible to mortal eyes, and ready to assist as God may decree.
 - b) It is my understanding, **and I accept it by faith**, that we are subjects of interest to those dwelling in the unseen world; that angelic beings are constantly aware of our physical situations; that occasionally some are permitted to see those bright

ministers before death; and that if it were in keeping with God's will He could open our eyes to see shining hosts of saints and angels standing thickly all around us!

2. **ACTS 7:54-56:** (NKJV) "When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth. 55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, **GAZED INTO HEAVEN AND SAW THE GLORY OF GOD**, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56 and said, "**Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!**"
 - a) This was not a miracle, but a vision; a special revelation to Stephen, as the first Christian who died a violent death for the cause of Christ. It was for the purpose of attesting to the truth of the message and the fiery invective against those wicked and rebellious Jews, and to strengthen Stephen's purpose to remain firm to the end!
 - b) All this was lost to the crowd! Only to Stephen it meant something -- and to all who live as Stephen lived, and die in the faith in which he died!
 - 1) Jesus died without so much as a hand, human nor divine, to support His drooping head.
 - 2) But not so with His saints! No Christian dies beside whom the Savior does not stand, and over whose sinking body He does not bend. While the ties of heart-strings are breaking and nature's encasement of the immortal is dissolving, Jesus is still whispering the words: "*Fear not, I am with thee, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*"
3. **LUKE 16:22-24, 27-28:** (NKJV) "So it was that the beggar died, and was **carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom**. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 "And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and **saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom**. 24 "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. 27 Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'
 - a) Though this scene is depicted in parabolic language its impact is not lessened one whit, for even in parables the Savior would never suppose nor describe something impossible to occur.
 - b) He tells us the angels of God were bearing away this ransomed spirit to the realms of light; and, if Lazarus, why not all the saints? Don't we all need the assistance of attending angels? [The following four quotes are "conjectures" by some, offered only as "possibilities"(?):]
 - c) "*How often have we read and heard of dying persons who affirmed that they enjoyed heavenly visions! And, try as some might, they can't just be set aside as the impulses of fevered brains, or as the fond fancies of distorted imaginations!*" -Lard's Quarterly, Vol.3.
 - 1) "*That loving mother who kept her weary, anxious vigils around the couch of her dying child, in tenderness watched death's throes ravage that precious little body. Every cramp and each convulsion of that little sufferer was a barbed arrow through her own heart! But now, the storm of intense suffering subsides and the pulseless calm of death approaches. A bright smile spreads over that placid palid face, the babe opens her eyes and with a bound rushes to the embrace of the beckoning angels. No attending angels you say, the radiance of whose shining wings was not reflected in the face of that dying infant?*" Lard's Quarterly, Vol.3.
 - 2) "*Bishop McKendree, one of the purest and best men that ever lived, affirmed that in the hour of death his room was full of angels. And why not? They had come for him. And if it were deemed necessary by Fatherly love and mercy that a view of their presence should cheer his heart in the death-agony, THEN I BELIEVE HE SAW THEM!*" Lard's Quarterly, Vol.3.
 - 3) "*Multiplied other instances are just too numerous and too emphatic to deny unequivocally, and still so vapor-shrouded to explain in detail!*" -Lard's Quarterly, Vol.3.
4. **HEBREWS 1:14; 12:22; MATTHEW 18:10:** (NKJV) "Are they [ANGELS] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? But you have come to Mount Zion and to the

city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, **to an innumerable company of angels,**" "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven **their angels always see the face of My Father** who is in heaven."

- a) It is positively and without qualification asserted here that the angels are ministering spirits and that they are sent forth, and it indicates they are concerned about us.
- b) Also, the Hebrew writer affirms that all Christians have come to this innumerable company of angels, who are, unquestionably, much nearer to us than we might imagine! For the present, however, it pleases infinite wisdom to exclude us from an awareness fellowship with them.
- c) What about "guardian" angels? Do they help in alleviating and protecting us from evil, pain, suffering and death? **Matt.18:10; Heb.1:14; Luke 16:19ff.** There's no doubt, in my mind, that **any angelic** care is an extension of GOD'S CARE (**1 Pet.5:7**) and that they, of course, would not do anything to our benefit without direction from the Father. **[I don't believe the Catholic doctrine that we each have our own particular angel!]**
- d) **I JUST REALLY DON'T KNOW HOW** the angels may be serving me while I'm alive, and I surely don't believe that I have the right to "call twelve legions of angels" to my defense just any time I may desire, but **I DO truly believe** that at the end of a life that has pleased the Father, they'll be there to carry me also to Abraham's bosom!

III. JUST HOW SURE CAN WE BE ABOUT THOSE THINGS IN THE INVISIBLE WORLD?

- A. They're just as *SURE* as the word of God, for that's where they're mentioned! **Heb.6:19; 2 Pet.1:19.** I account for the fact of these celestial visions being granted only in the hour of death, because **then the work of faith is done!** We *STILL* walk by faith, not by sight!
 1. In accompaniment **WITH** and growing out of relationships **TO** the invisible, we have need to continue to urge some duties which will persevere our relationship with the Father.
 - a) **The Word of God.** Our understandings of life and immortality were brought to us in the gospel! The more we know of the Bible, the more learned we will be in the things of the invisible. That's where our information comes from and, to the proportion in which we neglect the Bible we will lose whatever interest has been piqued in the things which are not seen and eternal! The Bible is all we have that has to do expressly with the future and unseen. All outside this volume is the merest, baldest conjecture!
 - b) **Faith.** "*Now faith is the sure confidence with respect to things hoped for, a firm persuasion with respect to things not seen.*" There is nothing too high or too hard for faith, as it respects our relations to God, and based upon His promises to the human family. And it is through faith we're able to turn our gaze from the visible and perishable and can turn toward the invisible and eternal. By faith we have humbly bowed before Him and have committed our most sacred and eternal interests to His ever awareness! We believe He will fulfill all His promises!
 - c) **Prayer.** It is just impossible to exaggerate the importance of prayer. In what other more poignant way do we hold communion with the infinite and eternal Being Whom we worship? Prayer opens the door to unspeakable pleasures and beautiful visions of that relationship we have with the Eternal One!
- B. **HOW WONDERFUL IT IS** to be able to listen for that which has come from beyond the veil where God is relating to us by His word those pleasures He derives from our efforts!

1. How really wonderful it is that we can reach back to Him in the expression of our faith called "love", manifesting it in ways He has said are pleasurable to Him!
2. Certainly not the least important asset we have is that we can voice our concerns and our desires, and offer our thanks and present our supplications and intercessions, as we talk with the Father of Lights!
3. It is divinely true that *"they who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint."*

IV. THE WAGER: GOD vs. SATAN vs. JOB

- A. The first and last chapters of Job make it clear that he was unknowingly performing in a cosmic showdown before spectators in the unseen world!
 1. Despite the fact that all but a few pages of Job deal with the problems of pain and suffering, I concur with Philip Yancey and others that, as a whole, the book is about *FAITH* in its most naked form!
 2. The big "wager" is how Job will respond to the afflictions Satan brings upon him. Will he trust God, or deny him? Of course, Job doesn't know he's the "pawn" in this contest as to whether someone can LOVE GOD, without being "bought" to do so. And he just keeps wondering and asking, "Why me? What did I do wrong? What is God trying to tell me?" And the astounding answer is, **JOB DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG!** Even God had said he was *"blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil!"*
 3. Belief in the invisible world forms a crucial dividing line of faith today. Many go about their daily routines without the slightest consideration of the existence of an unseen world. Even though slight "peeks" are suggested in places like **Luke 10:18** [*"I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven"*], and **Luke 15:7** [*"...joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than..."*], or **Rev.12** [where a baby's birth disturbs the entire universe].
 4. Very often, frustration and despair begin with Job-like circumstances. Death of a loved one, a tragic accident, loss of employment by a family man may bring all of Job's questions home to us! *"Why me? What does God have against me? Why does He seem so distant when I need Him?"*
 - a) When tragedy strikes we will live in shadow, unaware of what is transpiring in the unseen world! Once again, God could be letting His reputation ride on the response of unpredictable human beings. **THE MORE IMPORTANT BATTLE**, as seen in Job, **takes place inside us!** So while I refuse to suggest that everything that happens to me is a result of a contest between God and Satan, I must be impressed that **GOD IS GLORIFIED IN ME** when I'm faithful to Him! *One person's faith can make a difference!*
 - b) Every temptation before us and every tragedy that confronts us is a reenactment of God's original question in creation -- *"Will the humans choose FOR Me or AGAINST Me?"* -- and we can be an important part of the answer to that question! **OUR FAITH CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**
 - c) **Just one step further:** *the kind of faith that pleases God is the kind that JOB, and those people of God mentioned in Hebrews 11, had!* It's more than just a child-like trust. *It's something MORE ... it's a FIDELITY ... a hang-on-at-any-cost kind of faith!* We, as Christians, understand the difference -- we must PRACTICE the difference!

- 1) For the most part, we have little understanding what our faith really means to God! Suffice it to say that there's no better way to express our love to God than by exercising an undaunting fidelity to Him!
 - 2) God's people serve as the principal foot soldiers in the warfare between the unseen forces of good and evil, and this kind of faith is our most powerful weapon!
 - 3) James and Peter and Paul tell us how to exemplify such faith: *"Consider it pure joy ... whenever you face trials of many kinds". "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials". "We also rejoice in our sufferings"*.
- B. God spectacularly answered Job's biggest question: "Is Anybody out there?" What God said doesn't seem nearly so important to Job as the mere fact of His presence! Once Job perceived the unseen world all his urgent questions faded away!
1. We too live among clues and rumors, some of which argue against a powerful, loving God. Strong faith must continue to be exercised on our part with consistency, and with no degree of uncertainty!
 2. TRUE and acceptable FAITH isn't so much for trying to *manipulate God* into doing our will as it is to **position and prod us to do His will!**

CONCLUSION:

I recognize that something that's vaguely understood can be dismissed, and often is, with the flippant remark that "we walk by faith, not by sight", but I hope we've come to be impressed that "walking by faith" is a POSITIVE action, and not just a "default" answer to our ignorance about something. I hope the faith of all of us has been strengthened!

AGAIN, I do not suggest that everything that happens to us, whether JOY or ADVERSITY, is because there's a great contest going on over US in the unseen world! That IS what was happening with Job. It MAY sometimes, or all times, be happening with us --- I don't know! But I do know that the very thought of such has given me a great deal of strength to persevere, in times when I've really needed it! ***God be praised, now and forever!***