

"WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS..."
by Rom A. Pegram (4/2/17)

History has always been one of my favorite subjects to study ... whether it is biblical history or world history; the two *often* intersect anyway... And, one of the fascinations of my study of history has always been the Roman Empire...

The founding of the Roman Empire was one of the most incredible political achievements ever accomplished—the empire stretching as far north as present-day Great Britain and as far south as Egypt; it went west all the way to Spain, and east to the Caspian Sea. So, we're talking about *all* of Europe, a portion of Russia, and countries like modern-day Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and so forth. Have you ever wondered what all it took to pull off the logistics of this historical phenomenon? Think about it! How in the world did the emperor *communicate* well enough to pull an empire like this together? Communications from headquarters in Rome had to travel as far as 2,000 miles—all that *without* telephones, e-mail, radios, trains, or airplanes. How on earth did they manage the farthest regions of this empire? Yes, it was done successfully for hundreds of years ... but *how*?

I'm glad you asked. *It was accomplished through well-trained administrators who spent enough time in Rome to capture the mindset of the emperor.* That's how. There were governors (like Pontius Pilate, for instance) who were never sent out to provinces until their conduct and perspectives were thoroughly consistent with those in Rome. The administrators who represented the emperor spent years in disciplined study, learning to interpret the policies and procedures that governed the empire. This way, when decisions were made in the most remote areas of the empire, those in charge were able to consistently reflect the mind of their leader. They were the emperor's *ambassadors*, so to speak...

In 2 Corinthians 5:20, we learn that those who follow Christ are called *his ambassadors*. To be *an ambassador for Christ*, or to represent him well, it's necessary to understand his thoughts, know his mind, and be aware of his perspectives. *We* must be able to articulate *his* policies and procedures. In fact, the Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 2 that our attitude, our *mindset*, should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. This, folks, is an expectation that is placed on all believers ... including us! So, that's our goal, isn't it? Or is it?

Let me speak the obvious at this point: *Knowing the mind of Christ cannot be accomplished without getting into Scripture!* God's Word *must* be familiar to us; it must be *personalized*; you have to make it your own! Yet in practice, I'm afraid, many believers take a very casual attitude toward the word of God. Only you can answer that for yourself, but the fact is *if* we want to know what Jesus would think on something (and that should be our goal as his followers), we need to get into his word! Have we truly seen the 'Unseen Christ?' And, are we spending time in his word?

The truth is, *all* of us probably need to be reminded of the place God's word should have in our lives. Do you know what I think would help with that? (By now, you can almost guess, can't you?) *Remembering that Christ is present in our lives ... in our worship, in our homes, in our places of business.* When we recognize that Jesus is always with us, we're also going to begin to recognize that *he's* the one to turn to for guidance and direction in our lives. Where do we get that? Right here (point to Bible)! That's what the believers in Thessalonica did when they finally began to realize Christ's presence in *their* lives ... and just listen, now, to what happened to them (1 Thessalonians 2:13, NLT)...

"Therefore, we never stop thanking God that when you received his message from us, you didn't think of our words as mere human ideas. You accepted what we said as the very word of God—which, of course, it is. And this word continues to work in you who believe."

How did these folks from Thessalonica respond to God's Word? They saw Christ in it, didn't they? They saw it NOT as a word from men, but as the actual Word of God! That's what will happen to us when we see the 'Unseen Christ' and look to his word for guidance & direction! We'll soon realize that it's like no other book we've encountered ... and we'll begin to surrender our lives to the truth within; *we'll begin to go out of our way to allow God's Word to take hold of and impact our lives!* It's happened to believers all down through the ages...

Back in the 1740s, before we were officially a nation, there was a man by the name of George Whitefield—a preacher from England & a contemporary of John and Charles Wesley—who was a mover and a shaker for God. He had a powerful ministry on both sides of the Atlantic, but was especially effective in the American colonies. God used Whitefield's dynamic preaching to fan the flames of revival in New England that came to be known as The Great Awakening...

Back in those days, there wasn't much denominational bias concerning Whitefield & he was welcome to preach, as a traveling evangelist, in just about *any* pulpit ... and people from all different backgrounds would come to hear what he had to say. Here's a couple of other characteristics about Whitefield you need to know: He had an incredibly powerful voice, which allowed him to do much of his preaching in the open air ... and his presence was so compelling that crowds would always gather to hear him. Just listen to this account from the 1740s, written by a Connecticut farmer describing the 25-year-old Whitefield's visit to a nearby town...

"Now it pleased God to send Mr. Whitefield into this land . . . like one of the old apostles. . .

I felt the Spirit of God drawing me by conviction. I longed to see and hear him and wished he would come this way. . . . Then one morning all on a sudden about 8 or 9 o'clock,

there came a messenger and said Mr. Whitefield . . . is to preach at Middletown this morning at 10 o'clock. I was in my field at work. I dropt my tool that I had in my hand and ran home and ran through the house and had my wife get ready quick to go and hear Mr. Whitefield preach at Middletown and ran to my pasture for my horse with all my might fearing I should be too late to hear him. I brought my horse home and soon mounted and took my wife up and went forward as fast as I thought the horse could bear . . . as if we were fleeing for our lives, all this while fearing we should be too late to hear the sermon. [It's kind of how I imagine all of you getting ready to come and hear me preach each week. Ha!] So this Connecticut farming couple were hurrying as fast as possible fearing they would be too late to hear the sermon for we had twelve miles to ride double in little more than an hour . . . and when we came within half a mile of the road that comes down from Hartford, Wethersfield, and Stepney to Middletown on high land I saw before me a cloud or fog rising, I first thought off from the Great River but as I came nearer the road I heard a noise something like a low rumbling thunder and I presently found it was the rumbling of horses feet coming down the road, and this cloud was a cloud of dust made by the running of horses feet, it arose some rods into the air over the tops of the hills and trees and when I came within about twenty rods of the road I could see men and horses slipping along in the cloud like shadows and when I came nearer it was like a steady stream of horses, and their riders, scarcely a horse more than his length behind another, all of a lather and foam with sweat, their breath rolling out of their nostrils, in a cloud of dust every jump, every horse seemed to go with all his might to carry his rider to hear the news from Heaven to the saving of their souls. . . . We went down in the stream. I heard no man speak a word all the way, three miles, but every one pressing forward in great haste and when we got down into the old meeting-house there was a great multitude, it was said to be 3 or 4000 of people assembled together. We got off from our horses and shook off the dust and the minister was then coming to the meeting-house. I turned and

looked toward the Great River and saw the ferry boats running swift forward and backward bringing over loads of people, the oars rowed nimble and quick; everything, men, horses and boats seemed to be struggling for life; the land and the banks over the river looked black with people and horses. All along the twelve miles I see no man at work in his field but all seemed to be gone. When I see Mr. Whitefield come up upon the scaffold he looked almost angelical, a young slim slender youth before some thousands of people and with a bold undaunted countenance. And my hearing how God was with him everywhere . . . solemnized my mind and put me in a trembling fear before he began to preach for he looked as if he was clothed with authority from the great God and a sweet solemn Solemnity sat upon his brow, and my hearing him preach gave me a heart wound by God's blessing. [My old foundation was broken up and I saw that my righteousness would not save me.]"¹

Now, from this account, you can tell that people went out of their way to hear God's Word preached by Whitefield. (Perhaps this was similar to the way the Thessalonians responded to Paul's ministry.) Well, In light of this, let me say that...

WHEN PEOPLE BECOME AWARE OF THE UNSEEN CHRIST, THEY GO OUT OF THEIR WAY TO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD. Folks, *whenever God's Spirit is moving, people are attracted to the truth and reality of God's Word.* God's word may result in a "heart wound," but isn't it better to be broken & right before God than to be spiritually blind and live an illusion?

People are always drawn to an individual whose life radiates spiritual power—the Apostle Paul, George Whitefield, the Wesleys, D.L. Moody, Mother Teresa, Billy Graham—but if these human vessels of God's truth are attractive, how much more attractive is the person of Jesus himself!

Folks, try to imagine it. The crowds in Jesus' day were huge whenever someone heard that he'd be speaking. And, they didn't have the transportation we have today. Think of what it would be like today if word got out that Jesus himself was preaching somewhere! It would have to be an 'open air' situation, because there wouldn't be a structure big enough to house that many people!

It would be that exciting, wouldn't it? And, the truth is ... Jesus *wants* to speak to us through the word of God *every* day—all of us. Just as the Emperor would have called his 'ambassadors' into his personal presence to spend time with them, get to know

them, and have them get to know *his* mind ... so Christ invites us to himself to get to know him in the same way. Folks, the Word of God is calling out to each and every one of us to 'come on in' and get to know *personally* the One whom we serve. What's the key to hearing this call? *Attitude*, plain and simple. You absolutely *have* to be aware of and acknowledge the reality of Christ in your life ... and, along with Christ personally, gain a respect for his word as well... That's how we get to know him!

Like those people from Thessalonica who finally heard the word Paul was speaking as if it came directly from God ... like those people who knew the word George Whitefield was speaking was going to be a word from God to them, we have to *go out of our way* to hear God's Word, too! And then, guess what? We need to do something very important with it...

WHEN PEOPLE BECOME AWARE OF THE UNSEEN CHRIST, THEY ALLOW THE WORD OF GOD TO TRANSFORM THEM THROUGH OBEDIENCE. We have to not only *hear* the Word of God, but we have to then be *obedient* to it! Do you remember what James said in his letter? Don't be just 'hearers of the word,' but be 'doers of the word' (James 1:22)! Our attitude has to be one of *excitement* any time we have an opportunity to hear God's word—knowing full well that God has a word just for us! For God's Word to be effective in our lives, *we must go out of our way to acknowledge Christ's presence, let him speak to us, then be obedient to what we hear...*

One thing that should be a comfort to you is this: *I want to make you this promise.* When you come to church here and hear God's Word preached, what you hear being preached is **NOT Rom**. If it were, I don't think any of you would be coming back again ... and I know that. So, it's NOT Rom. Therefore, if you are obedient to what you hear on Sunday mornings around here, the obedience *is not* (and should never be) aimed in my direction or for my benefit, in any way; instead, *you're being obedient to God...*

We need to come before God's Word, whether spoken or read, with an attitude of submission and obedience, if it's to take hold and transform our lives for the Kingdom ... and, after all, that's the point! As D.L. Moody once said, "The Bible wasn't given for our information but for our transformation."

Folks, we have the greatest TRUTH MANUAL there is at our fingertips. I study it daily; I preach from it every week. It's called the Bible! The question really is: *what kind of an attitude do we approach it with?* Do you *run* to hear the Word of God every chance you get? Do you thirst for God's Word first thing in the morning when you get up, to start your day? Do you get up on Saturday or Sunday mornings and have an attitude of "I just can't wait" every time you *think* about coming to church and hearing God's word? And does your heart tell you, as you hear God's Word, "I know that Christ is in this and I'll do whatever he asks me to do today"?

Folks, *this* (Bible) is the greatest instruction manual in the world! It's the B-I-B-L-E! Its

truths are *eternal* (Remember: **B**asic **I**nstruction **B**efore **L**eaving **E**arth). And yet, how many of us take the time to read important instruction manuals? I know what the answer is for you fellas who are here. You won't even stop to *ask* for directions, much less read them... 😊

You know the old saying that goes: "When all else fails...!" The question today is this: WHY WAIT UNTIL *ALL ELSE FAILS*? Jesus is real today, folks. He's alive and well. He's with us. And he has a word just for us! Don't let *this* opportunity pass you by. Don't wait until 'all else fails'... *Get into God's Word today!*