

Encountering Jesus Related to Our Past, Present and Future

I. RELATING TO JESUS IN THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

- A. Jesus desires to unlock our heart that we might live in fulness. We encounter Him in issues related to our past as we properly understand past failures, mistreatments, and blessings. We encounter Him in the present in relationship and operating in His power. We encounter Him related to our future as we believe right things about our future and make commitments to it.
- B. The issues that determine who we are and how we live are found in how we relate to Jesus in our past, present, and future. Paul referred to each aspect of encountering Jesus (Phil. 3:3-14).

¹⁰That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection...¹³One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead...¹⁴I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:10-14)

II. ENCOUNTERING JESUS RELATED TO OUR PAST: FORGETTING AND REMEMBERING

- A. We encounter Jesus in issues related to our past as we understand past disappointments and blessings in the light of God's revelation. Our past can affect us negatively and positively. The Bible calls us to both "forget" and "remember." We are to remember God's promises and works.
- ⁷Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations... (Deut. 32:7)*
- B. Many focus on how our past negative experiences have shaped us to be who we are today. They say that we are trapped and controlled by our past. Yes, we are partially the product of what has happened to us. Taken to an extreme, this relieves us of the responsibility of our sinful responses.
- C. We are both victims who have been mistreated by others and agents who have contributed to our bondage by our sinful responses. If we ask, the Holy Spirit will reveal to us the places in which we are chained to the past by wrong responses such as bitterness, shame, and ingratitude to God.
- D. Paul exhorted us to forget our personal responses both good and bad (Phil. 3:13). Because of Jesus' finished work on the cross, God forgets our sin (Heb. 8:12). Thus, we must also forget our failures after we repent of them. Paul also forgot his past dedication to God (Phil. 3:3-16). To remember our dedication tempts us to feel that we deserve better treatment from God. We relate to God on the basis of our gratitude instead of on the basis of our service to Him (Lk. 17:7-10).
- E. Summary: We forget our past failure (shame), our dedication (pride), nostalgia (delusion of good old days), bitterness (mistreatment), and relational debts (the sense of being owed).
- F. Our past can produce gratitude in our hearts as we remember God's goodness in our past which includes receiving His forgiveness, prophetic promises and direction, plus supernatural provision and deliverance. We were lost in the state of darkness before we were saved (Eph. 2:1-12). Our weak works of love are remembered and eternally rewarded by God, giving our lives relevance.

III. ENCOUNTERING JESUS IN THE PRESENT: EXPERIENCING HIS HEART AND POWER

- A. God invites us to enjoy active intimacy with Him which includes understanding the deep things of His heart for us and working with Him in power (1 Cor. 2:10-12). As we encounter God's heart and power, our heart is fascinated by new discoveries of His beauty and experiences of His power. Active intimacy with Jesus protects our heart from spiritual boredom and dullness.
- ¹⁰The Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God...¹²We have received...the Spirit...that we might know the things that have been freely given to us... (1 Cor. 2:10-12)*
- ¹²He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also... (Jn. 14:12)*
- B. Our identity must be established in an intimate relationship with God or in who we are before God. We are loved by God and genuinely love God. Therefore, we confess ***"I am loved*** (by God) ***and I am one who loves*** (God and others), ***therefore I am successful.***"
- C. We all ask identity questions such as "Who am I? Where am I from? Why am I important? What is my worth? What is my destiny?" What makes our lives meaningful?
- D. How we feel about ourselves is determined by what we believe Jesus thinks and feels about us. Our primary value and success consists in who we are before God and secondarily in who we are before people. When we feel successful, we have the strength to walk in diligence.

IV. ENCOUNTERING JESUS IN THE FUTURE: OUR HOPE AND COMMITMENTS

- A. We encounter Jesus related to our future as we believe right things about our future and our godly commitments to it. Hope pertains to our life in the future (this age and the age to come). What we believe about our future and the commitments we make to it influences how we live.
- ⁹She [Israel] did not consider her destiny; therefore her collapse was awesome. (Lam. 1:9)*
- B. Those who lack vision for what they want to be, live undisciplined (without restraint) in their time and money. We are not only concerned with where we have been, but where we are going.
- ¹⁸Where there is no vision, the people perish [lack restraint]... (Prov. 29:18, KJV)*
- ¹⁸Where there is no revelation [vision], the people cast off restraint [discipline]. (Prov. 29:18)*
- C. The absence of a commitment to the future results in an identity crisis in the present. Our commitments define who we are. People become disciplined when they have a picture of their future in God. People without commitments to the future often fall into bitterness and passivity.
- D. Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) was a psychologist who rejected Freud's over-emphasis on the past as being the primary force that forms us. Viktor survived the Nazi concentration camps. After the war, he analyzed holocaust survivors, categorizing them into two categories—those emotionally stable and those who were not. He concluded that the predominant factor was not what they experienced during the concentration camps, but rather what they believed about their future.

- E. What are you determined to be in God? Many do not have a vision for their future. If they do, it is usually limited to life circumstances such as romance, finances or impact (career/ministry). What do you believe about what you can be spiritually, not just in your career or ministry? Our vision includes what we will **BE** in our heart and **DO** in our occupation and ministry impact.
- F. To lack clear vision for our spiritual attainment hinders our present spiritual life. Set your heart to grow in the anointing of love, power, meekness, and revelation of God. Our primary dream is not to be on the size of our impact, but on the size of our heart and quality of impact.
1. Desire to love God with all our heart and to live in 100-fold obedience to Jesus.
³⁷You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart. (Mt. 22:37)
 2. Desire to operate in God's power so to bring His love to others and to impact society.
⁸Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. (Mt. 10:8)
¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations [impact society]... (Mt. 28:19)
 3. Desire to walk in meekness as the way to be great in God's sight (Mt. 18:4; 20:26).
¹¹He who is greatest among you shall be your servant. (Mt. 23:11)
 4. Desire to cultivate deep understanding of God heart, Word, and ways.
¹⁷Give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him... (Eph. 1:17)
- G. In my early years with the Lord I read many biographies of people who walked closely with God. I spoke often about their unusual devotion and obedience. One day, I determined that I wanted to know God like these people did. I cried out, "Why not me, Lord?" I determined to be a person who walked closely with God. It was not good enough to know people who knew God. I wanted to know God myself. This new determination created a dynamic shift in my heart.

V. A CLEAR VISION AND ACTION PLAN FOR OUR FUTURE

- A. Our commitments partially define who we are. Therefore, the lack of clear commitments to the future brings an identity crisis to us in the present. Our commitment to the future functions like a plumb line in our soul that gives us focus in our life.
- B. Many live focused only on the pressures and people who stand in the way of what they want. They live without thinking much about the future. They are concerned mostly with where they have been and what is happening now and not where they want to go.
- C. What are your future goals for your spiritual development? Many cannot form a picture in their mind of what they want to be spiritually in the future, thus they have no action plan for it. What are you determined to be in God? What are you committed to being?

- D. Paul prayed that the saints would be filled with the knowledge of God's will for them (Col. 1:9-10) because he knew the power of having a vision for the future and a commitment to it.
⁹To ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰that you may have a walk worthy of the Lord ... (Col. 1:9-10)
- E. Our action plan to attain spiritual goals includes time in the Word and prayer with fasting along with serving people, developing our skills, and operating in God's power now.
- F. In my youth, I was encouraged to pray-read 10 chapters of the New Testament each day, to fast one day a week, and to start a small group to disciple believers that were younger than me.
- G. If we sustain a marathon pace for ten years, this will change our hearts. Many gain little spiritual depth in a 10-year period because they lack vision and an action plan for their future.

VI. THE POWER OF HOPE

- A. Hope speaks of the future. When hope abounds in us, then we live differently. To have hope abound in us is to have abounding assurance or confidence about our future.
¹³That you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 15:13)
- B. Many dream of their future as if eternity is not a reality. Hope purifies and transforms us as it gives us a clear picture of our future for our heart and ministry in this age and in the age to come.
³Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself... (1 Jn. 3:3)
- C. In future plans, many replace reality with their fantasies of life in this age that consist mostly of honor and comfort without pressure. This common false thinking leads people to disappointment as their misguided dreams and expectations are unfulfilled. The end result is that many quit are diligent pursuit of God because of mishandling their disappointments.
¹²Hope deferred [that is unfulfilled] makes the heart sick... (Prov. 13:12)
- D. False ideals lead people to continual disappointments as their expectations are not fulfilled. We must understand that there will be many difficulties and pressures in our future not just the breakthroughs of God's power, promises, and blessings in our life.
⁸We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed-- ¹⁰always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus may be manifested in us. ¹⁷Our light affliction ...is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory... (2 Cor. 4:8-17)
- E. In Stephen Covey's book, the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, one habit he highlights is the need to have a clear picture of the end product before we begin to act. According to this, Jesus is a highly effective leader with a purpose driven life as He planned the New Jerusalem.