

# *Forerunner*

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 19, Number 4

July-August 2010



*Timing Is  
Everything!*

# july/august 2010

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## 3

**PERSONAL** from *John W. Ritenbaugh*  
Born Again or Begotten? (Part Two)

## 8

**PROPHECY WATCH**  
Thy Kingdom Come! (Part One)  
BY JOHN PLUNKETT

## 11

**READY ANSWER**  
Timing is Everything  
BY DAN ELMORE

## 15

**WORLDWATCH**  
Socialism's Inherent Contradiction  
BY RICHARD T. RITENBAUGH

## 16

**BIBLE STUDY**  
The Miracles of Jesus Christ:  
*Healing Two Blind Men (Part One)*  
BY MARTIN G. COLLINS

## cover

An oriole adds vibrant color to a flowering tree. Like many birds, orioles migrate long distances each spring and fall, following food sources and temperate climates. Missing the time to migrate—even by a day or two—could spell disaster for whole flocks. Timing is important to men and God as well—and at times, just as critical.

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# Born Again or Begotten?

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## Part Two

As Part One explained, the teaching on the born-again doctrine—found primarily in John 3 but expanded by Paul, Peter, and John in later writings—has been prone to misunderstanding since Jesus Christ spoke to Nicodemus about it nearly two thousand years ago. In fact, Nicodemus immediately misconstrued what Christ meant, understanding His analogy on a purely physical level, as another literal birth. He was not alone in this. A study of Jesus’ discourses throughout the book of John shows that people frequently interpreted His entirely spiritual instruction in a physical manner, and thus failed to grasp the truth He taught.

That Christ’s teaching on being born again is pivotal is revealed in the fact that it is the first major discourse that John records. In addition, it is introduced with the words, “Most assuredly, I say to you” (NKJV) or “Verily, verily, I say unto thee” (KJV), a construction that announces that what follows is significant and weighty, urging us to pay close attention.

Even so, it is not necessary for us to understand all the particulars of the born-again doctrine to be saved, although a deeper understanding of it helps us to grasp how God perceives us once we experience the born-again event. This teaching reveals that God sees us as His children, already part of

His Family Kingdom, and able to function as adults before Him in this world. Further, it shows that, to Him, we are a new creation embarking on a spiritual journey, in which we will grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ and transform into His image.

In turn, this doctrine should also teach us how to perceive ourselves once we are converted. We are not what we once were—spiritually dead to God and His way of life—but now we are alive in Christ, heirs of salvation, and free from spiritual bondage, able to pursue the holy, righteous character of our Savior. Jesus’ teaching reveals that we are special to God, and at the same time, that we are responsible for what we have been given and under judgment, unlike the rest of the world.

## The Instrument of the New Birth

Jesus says in John 3:5, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Because this is said as an explanation of Jesus’ initial statement, being “born of water and the Spirit” is the same as being “born again” or “born from above.” In that sense, as used here by Jesus, both “water” and “spirit” are *spiritual* entities.

It is easy to jump to the conclusion that Jesus’ mention of water refers to baptism.

# personal *Born Again or Begotten?*

However, as a figure, the part water plays is more complex than is commonly assigned in this context. Consider this: From righteous Abel on, all have been and are being saved by the same process encompassed by the grace of God. All must be called by God, all must repent and receive forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ, and all must be given God's Spirit. Note, however, that there is no mention in Scripture of any of the saints who lived before John the Baptist being baptized. This includes those who were under the Old Covenant. If all are to receive salvation by the same means, why does the Bible fail to show any of them being baptized?

It is more likely that the "water" and "spirit" Jesus refers to are those mentioned in Ezekiel 36:25-27:

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

In this prophecy, Ezekiel indicates a cleansing from spiritual filth and a change of heart, from which spring obedience to God's commands. As the prophecy clearly says, both the water and the Spirit are from God above and precipitate the cleansing and birth that Jesus teaches in John 3. God says He will "sprinkle clean water," but as we know, that does not indicate the waters of baptism, since true Christian baptism is an immersion. Notice what John the Baptist says in John 1:33: "I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'" This suggests that a baptism of the Holy Spirit is also needed, which Acts 19:1-6 confirms.

As we have seen as a pattern throughout these articles, we need to consider that Jesus also uses water in a figurative sense in John 3:5. To what, then, does He refer? John 4:13-14 gives us a clue. Jesus says to the woman at the well: "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." This water that Jesus speaks of can in no way be literal water.

John 7:37-39 expands on this:

On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the

Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

These verses clarify that the Bible uses water as a figure of the Holy Spirit both in terms of its cleansing properties and as a source of power. Could Jesus be using water in this way in John 3:5?

The Bible frequently mentions the Word of God in conjunction with birth and life. Psalm 119:50 reads, "This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life." Paul adds in I Corinthians 4:15, "For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." The gospel is composed of words. We are instructed in James 1:18, "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth."

Peter makes a remarkable declaration in I Peter 1:22-23:

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which lives and abides forever.

The imagery of God's Word also includes the idea of cleansing power. It is likened to water because water cleanses, as Psalm 119:9 shows: "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word." Jesus adds in John 15:3, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you." Paul says in Ephesians 5:26, ". . . that He might sanctify and cleanse [the church] with the washing of water by the word."

With all of these references feeding into Jesus' teaching in John 3:5, we can be confident that the water He refers to includes all three of these figures—that it quenches a person's spiritual thirst, facilitates his spiritual birth, and cleanses him from his spiritual filth. We can conclude that Jesus' reference to "water" in John 3:5 should be understood as closely attached to "Spirit."

E.W. Bullinger, in *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, p. 664, says that in this context we are dealing with a figure of speech called *hendiadys*, which literally indicates "one by means of two." In a hendiadys, two words—in this case, "water" and "spirit"—are employed to get the point across, but only one idea is intended. One of the words, "Spirit," expresses the point, but the other word, "water," intensifies "Spirit" to the superlative degree.

It is God's Holy Spirit that is the instrument of both the cleansing and the birth of the divine nature in us. "Water"

intensifies and magnifies “Spirit” by means of the many figurative ways God’s Holy Spirit is shown working: as a means of God’s light- and life-giving Word, of spiritual power, and of cleansing.

Jesus says in John 6:63, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” This statement clarifies matters: The water, the Word, and the Holy Spirit must be considered together—as one element—that precipitate the new birth, all being given from above. Considering them as one makes Jesus’ declaration stronger.

## The Spirit Gives Life

It is God’s Holy Spirit by which we are made alive and birthed from our spiritual deadness in sin. God the Father opens a person’s mind by His Spirit, giving the newly called individual insight into and understanding of His Word and an awareness and appreciation of God and His purpose, the importance of Jesus Christ, and a sense of guilt regarding sin to a degree he never had before. God’s Holy Spirit cleanses us from the effects of our dreadful past.

Paul writes of the unconverted in Ephesians 4:18, “Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” That ignorance and blindness begins to be lifted by means of the new birth through God’s miraculous infusion of His Holy Spirit, not by the waters of baptism.

This new creation follows the same pattern as shown in Genesis 1:2-3: “The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’, and there was light.” In the new creation, the spiritual creation, the sinner is perceived by God as dead and in spiritual darkness, then God sends forth His Spirit to draw the sinner to Christ and into spiritual life and light (John 1:4; 6:44; 8:12), making the sinner His child. It is God, by means of His Holy Spirit, who produces the new birth.

Consider water in terms of baptism. Even in baptismal contexts, water is used figuratively. Water is shown, not as a cleansing agent, but as a type of death, burial, and resurrection. In baptism, water becomes a grave from which we must be spiritually resurrected, not a symbol of life and regeneration. Paul makes this clear in Romans 6:1-8:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue to sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were

buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.

In these verses, we see pictured the figurative burial of the old “dead” man living in trespasses and sin (Ephesians 2:1-2) in preparation for the birth of the new man in Christ. Jesus permitted John the Baptist to baptize Him as an example for our benefit, though He had committed no sin:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I have need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?” But Jesus answered and said to him, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him. Then Jesus, when He had been baptized, came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. (Matthew 3:13-16)

John 1:32-34 adds to this account, helping to pinpoint the time of our receipt of God’s gift of His Holy Spirit:

And John bore witness saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”

Our receipt of God’s Holy Spirit occurs when we are spiritually resurrected from our watery grave and by God’s grace cleansed through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. God’s Spirit gives birth to the new man as a child of God. It is not the waters of baptism that cleanse us but Christ’s blood and the receipt of God’s Holy Spirit.

## What Is the New Birth?

Jesus proclaimed to Nicodemus that one *must* be born again to enter the Kingdom of God. Since Adam and Eve, mankind has been cut off from God. The design of the

# personal *Born Again or Begotten?*

Tabernacle, the Temple, and the worship system under the Old Covenant pictures God as distant and virtually unapproachable. Man in his natural condition, having a carnal mind and dead in his sin, is certainly shown as *away from* God. Though it is necessary for an individual to be born again to enter God's Kingdom, it takes a gracious and miraculous act—completely on God's part—to close the gap between Him and those He calls (John 6:44).

No one can arbitrarily volunteer for entry and be accepted; a person cannot cause himself to be born again. Flesh does not produce redemption. Unless one is born of the Holy Spirit, whatever one does in the flesh will not make him spiritual in the biblical sense. The Bible shows that the natural mind of man is at war against God and that it is not subject to God's law and cannot be (Romans 8:7), expressing the harsh reality of the carnal heart of mankind.

When Paul writes that the unconverted are dead in trespasses and sin, he means exactly that. Regardless of how sincere or religious they might be, such people are lifeless in terms of true spiritual life that is given by God. They are part of the old, natural creation and are spiritually lifeless unless and until—and completely at His discretion—God graciously gives life by His Spirit. Paul writes, "For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.' So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy" (Romans 9:15-16).

What, then, is the new birth? It is not the removal of anything from the sinner, nor the changing of anything within or without the sinner's body. It is, instead, the communication of a precious gift to the sinner. It is forgiveness and the imparting of the new nature. When we were born from our mothers, we received from our parents their nature, what Paul calls the "carnal" or "fleshly" nature. When one is born again, he receives from God *His* nature, as II Peter 1:4 relates, "... by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature."

As early as Genesis 1, the Bible shows that a fundamental law of nature is that every living thing brings forth its own kind. What is produced by a vegetable is vegetable; what is born of animal is animal. What is born of sinful man and woman is a sinful child, which Paul designates in Romans 8:8 as being "in the flesh." It cannot be anything else. We may educate and cultivate it all we please, but human nature remains "in the flesh." It may be refined flesh, beautiful flesh, or religious flesh, but it is still "in the flesh."

On the other hand, what is born or brought forth by the impartation of God's Spirit is spirit. To use Paul's

term, such a person is "in the Spirit" (Romans 8:9). The child always partakes of the nature of its parents. What is born of man is carnal and sinful; what is born of God is spiritual.

Being born again is the creation of a new man in Christ Jesus. It is the birth of a new spiritual man within the physical. The new birth is the imparting of the mind, the nature, of Jesus Christ. Paul explains in I Corinthians 2:9-16:

But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

Every born-again person is automatically and instantaneously a child of God, a member of the Family of God, and being part of that Family, he becomes a citizen of the Kingdom of God. In every case in which God commands or exhorts His children, He does so as to an adult who is fully capable of carrying out what He says. A command may be said to one young in the faith, even one called a "babe" due to his spiritual immaturity, but he is not a spiritual fetus. He is physically an adult with a great deal of experience from which he can draw for decision making, along with his growing knowledge of God.

There is no gestation period, just as there was no gestation period when God created Adam and Eve as the culmination of the physical creation. In Genesis 2:7, God breathed into Adam the breath (*ruach*, a type of the Holy Spirit) of life, and he immediately became a living soul, not a fetus in a womb. Paul calls us "a new creation" (II Corinthians 5:17). However, the spiritual creation is not fully complete, in the same way as the development of a newly born human child is incomplete. Much growth

remains to be done.

## The New Man Must Choose

The new spiritual child now possesses two natures because the old carnal nature remains. These two natures are at war with each other, striving for dominance of the born-again person's conduct and life: "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Galatians 5:17).

The born-again person must choose to overcome the old nature that is making war against the new nature born within him. Revelation 2 states this charge in a variety of ways four times in just one chapter: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7; see verses 11, 17, 26). Revelation 3:5, 12, and 21 proceed to say this three more times.

Peter writes in II Peter 3:17-18: "You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." In Ephesians 4:13, Paul tells us what we are to grow into: "... till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Overcoming and growing are major undertakings. Do we honestly think that this can be accomplished by one still in the womb?

## Why Is the New Birth Necessary?

Jesus instructs us in John 3:6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Some have mistakenly used this verse as proof that an individual is not born again until he is composed of spirit. However, Jesus is not considering a person's bodily composition at all. A Bible student can be misled by abruptly abandoning Jesus' use of spiritual imagery and returning to a literal interpretation. Like the rest of the context, verse 6 must be understood spiritually and figuratively.

The verse states why the new birth is necessary. Flesh can continue to give birth only to what it has always produced: flesh. Yet, Jesus states clearly in John 6:63, "The flesh profits nothing." In John 8:15, He accuses the Jews of judging Him according to the flesh rather than using God's Word—which is Spirit—as their evidence. In both of these cases, Jesus is also speaking figuratively.

In Greek, "flesh" is *sarx* (*Strong's* #4561). Jesus and Paul commonly use the term as a metaphor for sinful

man's nature, sometimes also described as "carnal." Used in this way, *sarx* is morally negative, even though by creation a person's flesh is not intrinsically negative. Figuratively, it symbolizes the unregenerate moral and spiritual state of man that almost continuously generates sinful acts. "Flesh," then, represents the inward, carnal inclination rather than muscle, skin, and bones—disposition rather than composition.

Paul writes in Romans 7:18, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells," meaning nothing good spiritually. Later, in verse 25, he admits that his "flesh [serves] the law of sin." In Galatians 5:15-17, he positions the Holy Spirit as the opposite of the flesh, declaring that these two are at war:

But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Biblically, the term "born" or "birth" is used, not only to indicate coming from the womb as in mammalian birth, but also to describe the source or beginning of a thing, an event, or series of events. For example, we speak of the birth of a nation, an institution, or a concept. The "womb" of those births was an event or series of events that triggered the inception of a new direction, manner of life, activity, or thought.

This is how Jesus is using "born" or "birth" in John 3. He is not speaking of the birth of a human child but the birth of a new nature. The events triggering this birth are the calling of God, repentance from sin, justification through faith in Christ's death, and the receipt of God's Holy Spirit. All of these are effects of the acts of the spiritual God.

Conversely, human nature gives birth to more human nature and thus more of human nature's sinful works. It cannot do otherwise. As Job 14:4 says, "Who can bring a clean thing out of any unclean? No one!" Paul makes the same point theologically:

For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:6-8)

The flesh expresses itself, produces, and gives birth to the works of the flesh and thus to immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, and other evils, as Galatians 5:19-21 details. Though the flesh is capable of doing some good

(continued on page 14)

## Thy Kingdom Come!

### Part One

Not long ago, as summer vacation time began to wind down, I was walking on our local beach one morning, when I noticed that some children had been playing there. With their basic “construction materials” of wet sand and pebbles, they had built a dam—for the obvious purpose of trying to block the water of a little rivulet from making its way down to the ocean.

Because of the uneven terrain of our local beach, hollows have been eroded into the sand. When the tide is out, the rivulet normally flows, first into one hollow, creating a small lake, then into a second hollow, making another small lake, before emptying into the ocean itself.

It was evident that the children’s efforts had been in vain. Although they had made a valiant attempt to build the sturdiest dam that they were able, the water of the rivulet had won the day. Some of its water had incessantly washed against the dam, gradually eroding away the sand “mortar” that held the pebbles together, and some of the water had simply rerouted and flowed around the dam.

Then the tide came in! The mighty waves of the ocean first swallowed up the second “lake.” As it progressed, it consumed the first “lake” and then the dam. Finally, it completely swallowed up the beach part of the rivulet itself.

In subsequent visits, I noticed that the pebbles of the dam were gradually being pulled apart by the rivulet and the ocean tides—to the point where, a few weeks later, not even a trace remains of the children’s dam ever having existed.

As I sat and watched this day after day, I began meditating on what was happening here, forming a picture in my mind of:

- The water of the rivulet symbolizing time and God’s children marching inexorably on towards the end of this age.
- The first “lake” symbolizing the time of the prophesied Place of Safety.
- The second “lake” symbolizing the thousand years of the Millennium.
- The huge ocean symbolizing the wonderful eternity of God’s Kingdom.
- Finally, although the youthful dam-builders are, of course, relatively innocent, their sand-and-pebble barrier symbolized, in my mind, the vain attempts of Satan, his demons, and his human supporters trying to prevent the inexorable progress—of time and of God’s people—in their journey toward God’s Kingdom.

We can find encouragement in being reminded from God's Holy Word that, no matter what Satan *or* his demons *or* his human allies do to try to stop them, the resurrections, the return of Jesus Christ, and God's Kingdom *will* come!

The Kingdom of God has both a present and a future aspect. Believe it or not, it also has a *past* aspect! We need to consider these three aspects.

### **GOD'S KINGDOM IS WITHIN US NOW!**

First, right from the beginning, Satan and his cohorts have partially failed in their attempts to thwart the coming of God's Kingdom. How? Why? Because God's Kingdom has already partially come with the arrival of the human Jesus Christ:

Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

This raises the frequently asked question: Did Jesus really mean "within you"? Or did He mean "among you"? Whichever one of these options Jesus meant—or even both of them—does not negate the facts that:

- The Kingdom of God certainly *did* reside in the Person of the human Jesus Christ.
- God's Kingdom certainly *does* reside today in His brothers and sisters—the members of His church—by the indwelling of His Holy Spirit.
- The *fullness* of God's Kingdom must come, completely, at "the fullness of times," which will be at some time in the future: ". . . that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him" (Ephesians 1:10).

We know that the Kingdom of God was inherent *within* the human Jesus; and therefore, if we are now in Him by His Spirit dwelling in us, then the Kingdom is inherent within us too.

Notice, too, Ephesians 1:11 because it dovetails nicely with some concepts we will consider shortly, those of our inheritance and predestination: "In

Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will."

Actually, the "within you or among you" argument is something of a moot point. Why? Because God's Kingdom certainly did not originate with the conception or birth of the human Jesus. Rather, it was actually originated and prepared *millennia* prior to Jesus' human lifetime. As the Logos, He and God the Father began preparing their Kingdom way back in prehistory, at the time God's Word calls "the foundation of the world."

Jesus says in Matthew 25:34: "Then the King [Jesus Christ] will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" Note the mention of the word "inherit" in this context. However, before considering the inheritance, we should read another verse showing that God's Kingdom was planned "from the foundation of the world": "For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: 'So I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest,"' although the works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Hebrews 4:3).

God the Father and Jesus had completed the major part of their preparation work for their Kingdom eons ago!

### **GOD'S KINGDOM IS COMING!**

So we have seen that the Kingdom of God has both a past-tense, historic aspect—we could actually call it a "*prehistoric* aspect"—and a present-tense aspect! It was in the human Jesus Christ through the indwelling in Him of an unlimited portion of the Holy Spirit (John 3:34), and it is in Jesus' brothers and sisters through a smaller portion—an earnest or down payment—of that same Spirit (II Corinthians 1:22; 5:5).

The present-tense aspect for God's human children is inextricably associated with both the past-tense and future-tense aspects in that, through the indwelling of that same Holy Spirit that was in the human Jesus, we are heirs of the riches of God the Father. Recall Ephesians 1:10-11 (KJV):

That in the dispensation of the fullness of times [referring to a future time] he [God the Father] might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him [Christ]: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance. . . .

# prophecy watch *Thy Kingdom Come!*

Mark it well: “we *have* obtained” it. That is past tense and therefore means that we have this inheritance now, and that our ownership of the inheritance is present tense! The inheritance and its associated blessings are as good as ours *now*. Of course, we must still endure and overcome!

... being predestined [again, the pre-history part of the promise] according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard [past tense] the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed [past tense] with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until the [future] redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:11-14)

At the time of the complete fulfillment of this redemption, “the earnest of our inheritance” will blossom into its entire fullness. What will we be heirs of? What will we inherit?

- The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are [present tense] children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (Romans 8:16-17)
- And if you are Christ’s, then you are [present tense] Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:29)
- That having been justified [past tense] by His grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:7)
- Are [angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14)

The English words “will inherit,” as translated here in Hebrews 1:14 from the Greek verb *méllontas*, make it sound as if it is in the future tense. Grammatically, however, it is actually “active present” tense in the Greek, and therefore it might be better rendered as “those who *are inheriting* salvation.” Nevertheless, even with human inheritances,

the entirety of the inheritance does not come immediately upon an individual becoming an heir, as the actual receipt of its benefits comes later (Hebrews 9:16).

Being heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, the total inheritance has not yet been totally given to us. So far, we have received just an earnest—a down payment—of the fullness of His Holy Spirit and the fullness of the associated blessings that we will receive in the future. Further, we have God’s unbreakable promise that we will receive our full inheritance when the time comes: “Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath” (Hebrews 6:17).

Again, what exactly is the inheritance? What is promised to us? The apostle James makes it clear: “Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (James 2:5). As well as being an indescribable inheritance, God’s Kingdom is also a firm promise to us from God. He does not break His promises!

God’s people were chosen before the foundation of the world to receive this priceless inheritance and promise. Paul writes in Ephesians 1:3-4:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He [the Father] chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

This is exactly what the term “predestination” refers to!

Of course, as these verses clearly state, in order to receive this inheritance we must overcome and endure to the end! The apostle says that we must be holy and without blame; that is, we must maintain our holiness and blamelessness until the end, staying well away from all unrighteousness and works of the flesh.

Does this mean that God’s promises are conditional on an individual basis and depend on what we *do* with them? Or is it a case of “once saved, always saved”? Has Christ done it all for us? Or does it matter what *we* do for the remainder of our Christian lives? Part Two will answer these questions.

—John Plunkett

# ready answer

“Be ready always to give an answer . . .” I Peter 3:15

## Timing Is Everything

“To everything there is  
a season, a time for  
every purpose under  
heaven.”  
—*Ecclesiastes 3:1*

Most of us are probably familiar with Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, but it may be a passage that we have not considered for a while:

For everything there is a fixed time, and a time for every business under the sun.

A time for birth and a time for death; a time for planting and a time for uprooting;

A time to put to death and a time to make well; a time for pulling down and a time for building up;

A time for weeping and a time for laughing; a time for sorrow and a time for dancing;

A time to take stones away and a time to get stones together; a time for kissing and a time to keep from kissing;

A time for search and a time for loss; a time to keep and a time to give away;

A time for undoing and a time for stitching; a time for keeping quiet and a time for talk;

A time for love and a time for hate; a time for war and a time for peace. (*The Bible in Basic English* [BBE])

Albert Einstein’s thoughts on the matter of time make it seem uncomplicated: “The only reason for time is so that everything doesn’t happen all at once.” Certainly, he was being facetious. But time is a basic part of our universe that, while we tend to work in relative harmony with it, is

# ready answer *Timing Is Everything*

far more complex than we realize. Scientists and philosophers spend their lives trying to grasp the hows and wherefores of time.

Timing is a related concept, one whose importance we need to explore because it is a daily factor in our lives. More than that, it will be part of our future—our spiritual future—because God Himself has perfect timing. In this short study, we will look at timing in nature, in society, and in the Bible.

## Timing in Nature

Maestro pianist and composer Arthur Rubinstein wrote: “The seasons are authentic; there is no mistake about them, they are what a symphony ought to be: four perfect movements in intimate harmony with one another.” Seasons are larger elements of time, each a quarter of a year, each with its own particular properties. God mentions them in the creation account in Genesis 1:14, saying that the operations of the heavenly bodies would control them. Beyond these specific calendar seasons are other large sections of a year like hunting season, football season, and holy day/holiday seasons.

We all have different likes and dislikes, but I prefer the warmer seasons of the year, especially because I would rather be hot than cold. Further, spring and summer always seem to offer so many promises of pleasant happenings.

One of the things I look forward to the most is the return of the fireflies in spring. The term “return” is misleading, as the fireflies never really leave. They do not migrate to warmer climes; they burrow into the ground and hibernate until a warm spring night entices them out. What a magical sight it is to see thousands of fireflies covering an open field!

They all seem to know when to emerge—and all at once. It is a matter of timing. If they come out too early, they may find themselves in the midst of an April cold snap, and many would perish. On the other hand, if they come out too late, they may miss the chance to find a mate. Timing is everything! They need to emerge from hibernation at just the right time.

Another event many of us eagerly anticipate each spring is the return of the orioles. What beautiful birds they are! Their distinctive yellow/orange and black coloring is unique. Here in the Ozarks, we are blessed if we see two or three of them in a season, as they are “neotropical migrants.” They winter in Central America and each year migrate to the northeastern United States and Canada—sometimes as much as 4,000 miles—to their breeding grounds. Their timing is triggered by an instinct that urges them to go.

They sometimes stop along the way for a day or two to await better flying conditions or to avoid a storm or a

strong headwind. This is when we in central Missouri are allowed to behold their beauty, when they choose to stop in the Ozarks for a day or two before continuing on their journey northward. I like to think that the orioles stop here to smell the roses on their way to spring training in Baltimore—at just the right time.

Many animals and birds, and even whales and fish, migrate each year. For most, the issue of migration is vital, and instinct prompts the timing of their often lengthy travel. This makes the timing of their migration critical. Timing is everything! They need to migrate at just the right time or fail to reproduce—or fail to follow their food source—and die.

## Timing in Society

Timing is everything for people, too, in big and small ways. For instance, timing can be critical to the success of a joke, often spelling the difference between a good joke and a bad one. In the same way, timing can make or break an actor’s performance.

Timing comes into play in such mundane activities as cooking. “Better late than never” just will not do when grilling one’s favorite cut of meat on the barbeque.

Timing is vital to our health. We want to become aware of a disease early before it gets out of hand. If we have to take medication, we need to do it when directed.

Timing is a serious matter in finance. What happens when we pay our bills late or miss paying one altogether? When we venture into investments, we want to buy low and sell high! When we take out a loan for a house or a car, we want a good interest rate with desirable terms.

Certainly, timing is essential when dealing with people. We need to be very careful when we ask for a raise or a favor of someone. Catching that other person at the wrong time—when his car has just broken down or he has just lost a big deal to a competitor—will probably doom our request. It is critical, too, when we need to confront a brother in the church because of a sin he has committed against us (see Matthew 18:15-17).

Timing is important in matters of the heart too. A recent story in the news demonstrates this fact extremely well:

When Alex and Donna Voutsinas were photographed together at Disney World, they didn’t know each other. In fact, they didn’t even live in the same country. But fifteen years later, they met and married:

*That fateful realization came just one week before their wedding eight years ago. Alex and Donna had been going through old family snapshots. There, in the blurry background of a picture of 5-year-old Donna*

*was 3-year-old Alex being pushed down Main Street at the same moment in 1980 by his father.* (John Farrier, “Disney Photo Captured Married Couple on Film 15 Years Before They Met,” *Odd News*, June 13, 2010.)

A very wise man, Solomon, advises in Ecclesiastes 9:11:

I realized another thing, that in this world fast runners do not always win the races, and the brave do not always win the battles. The wise do not always earn a living, intelligent people do not always get rich, and capable people do not always rise to high positions. Bad luck happens to everyone. (*The Good News Bible* [GNB])

Or, as the New King James version reads in that last sentence, “But time and chance happen to them all.” Timing is everything!

Composer Hector Berlioz morbidly points out just how critical timing is to humans: “Time is a great teacher, but unfortunately it kills its pupils.”

### Timing in the Bible

Timing is a huge issue in the Bible. It comes up frequently in the sermons and sermonettes we hear. For example, Saul was unwilling to wait for Samuel’s arrival, and the results were dire (I Samuel 15). Certain Israelites in the wilderness were terrified of the consequences of not keeping the Passover at its appointed time (Numbers 9). Jonathan and his armor-bearer made a timely attack on a Philistine garrison (I Samuel 14). Of course, we all recall how Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar did not wait on God’s timing in bearing a son for Abraham (Genesis 16). With his mother’s help, Jacob stole the blessing rather than wait for God to work the matter out (Genesis 27).

In addition, we know that we must count to achieve the proper timing for Pentecost (Leviticus 23:15-16). Each Sabbath is an exercise in timing, as we keep it from sunset to sunset (compare Leviticus 23:3, 32). Many of God’s miracles involved God’s perfect timing, for instance, His parting of the waters of the Red Sea to allow the Israelites through but sending them crashing down on the pursuing Egyptians (Exodus 14). The story of Esther is all about perfect timing (Esther 4:14). Timing was critical to Jeremiah’s Seventy Years Prophecy (Jeremiah 25:12), as well as most other prophecies in the Bible.

Standing above these, though, is Jesus Christ’s example of timeliness. The Old Testament contains about three hundred prophecies fulfilled by His first coming.

These prophecies include the places, circumstances, and timing of His birth, ministry, and of course, His death. The odds of one person fulfilling just eight of these prophecies are 100 trillion to one.

All of this required perfect timing; these events had to happen at just the right time to fulfill the prophecies. Too late or too early would invalidate them. Timing is everything in prophecy. God is never late! He brings everything about at precisely the right time. As the *New English Bible* translates Ecclesiastes 3:11, “He has made everything to suit its time.”

Paul points this out in respect to Christ in Romans 5:6, which we can see in several translations:

- For when we were yet without strength, *in due time* Christ died for the ungodly. (KJV)
- For while we were yet weak, *in due season* Christ died for the ungodly. (American Standard Version)
- For when we were still without strength, *at the right time* Christ gave his life for evil-doers. (BBE)
- For when we were still helpless, Christ died for the wicked *at the time that God chose*. (GNB)
- For *at just the right time*, while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. (International Standard Version)

Why was it “just the right time”? There are several reasons:

First, timeliness was required by prophecy. It established Christ’s credentials.

Second, timeliness proves how reliable God is.

Third, after eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, man was condemned to experience a life cut off from God. All of us humans share that common sentence. Herbert W. Armstrong used to say that, at that point, man chose to decide for himself what was good and what was evil. As a result of that natural enmity and hostility to God (Romans 8:7), mankind tends to reject what is good and to be attracted to evil. Mankind has been in dire need of rescue ever since, and it was time for that rescue to be carried out.

Fourth, it was time to remove the curtain of separation from those whom God calls. God was restoring human access to Himself; but this required the sacrifice of our sinless Creator. Through His church, made up of those who have accepted that sacrifice, He is forming a Family to help Him convert all humanity.

Fifth, time was running short. If God’s plan covers 7,000 years, and if Adam was about 4,000 years before Christ, then roughly 2,000 years of the age of man

# ready answer *Timing Is Everything*

(continued from page 10)

remained (since the final thousand years, analogous to the Sabbath rest, will comprise the Millennial reign of Christ). When Jesus died, then, only the final third of the time allotted for man's rule remained. Thus, the end was near. Mark 1:14-15 conveys this sense: "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.'"

Sixth, it was the right time to bring hope to a hopeless world. Jesus Himself quoted this passage in Isaiah 61:1-2:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn. . . .

Lastly, it was time to establish an earnestness and urgency in His people. When someone gives his life so that

another—and in this case, many—can live, it motivates.

It is easy to see that timing means a great deal to us, as well as to the world. It is basic in nature, beneficial in society, and essential to Scripture.

Finally, I hate to contradict Albert Einstein, but in the end, everything *will* happen all at once! Notice these two passages:

- In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (I Corinthians 15:52)
- For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (I Thessalonians 4:16-18)

Timing is everything!

—Dan Elmore

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## personal *Born Again or Begotten?*

(continued from page 7)

things (Matthew 7:11), in relation to God and His way, the evil will always dominate. The natural, fleshly condition of man will always exhibit the same propensities. In contrast, the Holy Spirit gives birth to and is expressed by the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, etc. (Galatians 5:22-23). Therefore, a change must take place from a life dominated by the natural human heart to one motivated by God's Spirit—or a person will never be prepared for the Kingdom of God.

In the context of His instruction, Jesus gives not one indication that, when He refers to being "born of the Spirit," He intends us to think of a post-resurrection event. The context is strictly one of birth and its products. In addition, He is not even speaking of being composed of spirit. He is describing the present and near future of the born-again person while he is still flesh and blood as well as what he produces or gives birth to in his life—especially his new spiritual life. Thus, the so-called "hatpin test" does not apply here at all. It entirely misses the point Jesus is making!

*Barnes' Notes* ("John," p. 203) comments regard-

ing John 3:6: "*Is Spirit*. Is spiritual, *like* the spirit, that is, holy, pure." It is the birth of the spiritual heart and mind that enables a person to be spiritual in his attitudes, conduct, and perspective. Barnes goes on to say, "Here we learn, first, that all men are by nature sinful. Second, that none are renewed but by the Spirit of God. . . . Third, that the effect of the new birth is to make men holy."

Being "born of the Spirit" is not a "pregnancy" produced by God's gracious act of imparting His Spirit, but the birth—beginning—of a holy, spiritual mind, the mind of Christ. That the person is "seeing" the Kingdom of God, has "entered" into it, and is producing the fruits of the Spirit are evidence that he is already born of the Spirit.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

In Christian love,



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## Socialism's Inherent Contradiction

Ever since March 23, 2010, when President Barack Obama penned his signature on “The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act”—known by its opponents as “Obamacare”—the political landscape in the United States has been in turmoil. The Tea Party, a grassroots conservative movement determined to see Constitutional government restored to America, has fielded candidates across the nation in hopes of sweeping spendthrift, elitist members of Congress out of office in order to overturn the mountain of socialist legislation that has conferred crushing debt on Americans for generations to come. As of this writing, polls project that it will succeed in returning control of the U.S. House to Republicans, and a majority in the Senate is not out of reach.

Socialist policy—like that seen in universal healthcare, welfare, the many bailouts of banks and corporations, and the stunningly ineffective stimulus packages—appears to be so good and helpful that no one should want to oppose it. It provides money and other assistance to the old, poor, infirm, and disadvantaged, giving them a helping hand in their time of need. If that were all that it did—and sadly, this is all that a majority of the public *think* that it does—it would be admirable. Scripture is full of injunctions to aid the helpless (see, for instance, Deuteronomy 15:11; Proverbs 31:9; Galatians 2:10; etc.).

However, behind the mask of good intentions, socialism is a blood-sucking, whip-wielding monster, a fiend that wants nothing more than to pillage, enslave, and exercise increasing power over whole nations. Behind its claims to advocate for the “little guy” and its lofty rhetoric about “social justice,” socialism is all about social, economic, and governmental control. Rather than give the individual liberty to make choices based on what is best for himself, his family, and his nation, socialists demand that an elite group of knowledgeable “experts”—usually members of the government, often faceless bureaucrats—should make those decisions for the people.

Noted libertarian economist Walter E. Williams, the John M. Olin Distinguished Professor of Economics at George Mason University and the author of many books, writes in a recent opinion piece:

The primary goal of communism and socialism is government ownership or control over the means of production. In the U.S., only a few people call for outright government ownership of the means of production. They might have learned that government ownership would mess things up. Instead, they’ve increasingly called for quasi-ownership through various forms of government regulation, oversight, taxation and subsidies. After all, if someone has the power to tell you how you may use your property, it’s tantamount to his owing it.<sup>1</sup>

In America, then, a “pure” form of socialism is not in play, but the progressive policies of the political Left are achieving the same ends by covert means. Some have called it “stealth socialism.” It has been sold to the American people as a more compassionate and even “Christian” alternative to the rugged

individualism of traditional American capitalism. In this way, it is easy to see that it promises to replace “selfish” and “unequal” self-reliance with reliance on the state under the guise of sharing and equality.

Due to this incremental advance, which has shifted into high gear under the Obama administration, Americans have a fading opportunity to recognize where full-blown socialism has led in other places where it has been tried (and been found wanting). While U.S. socialism is nowhere near this point, the following examples of twentieth-century socialism show that the accumulation of power and control by the state inevitably leads to its use and abuse, as Lord Acton’s well-known dictum—“Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”—warns.

Despite progressives’ denials of a link, Nazism was a form of socialism—just note that its real name was the National *Socialist* German Workers’ Party. It promoted a dictatorship that started and prosecuted a devastating World War and a holocaust that took the lives of nearly 21 million people. The former Soviet Union was officially named the Union of Soviet *Socialist* Republics—shortened to the acronym U.S.S.R. During its 70-year reign of terror, it was responsible for killing just under 62 million of its own citizens! Communist China, however, committed the worst atrocities, causing the deaths of an estimated 76 million people between 1949 and 1987.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the inherent contradiction in socialism is exposed. While promising a better life to the less fortunate through the redistribution of wealth and the opening of opportunities, it takes a death-grip on the lives of its citizens. Control tightens and liberty disappears. The promised wealth and opportunity never materialize except to those few selected to join the ruling oligarchy. Want and misery spread, producing hopelessness, shortening life spans, and stirring revolt, which is put down with devastating force. What begins with soothing words and wonderful promises ends on the point of a bayonet.

For this world, on the other hand, the Kingdom of God will begin with Christ returning with power and a rod of iron to put down the perverse rule of ungodly men (Revelation 19:11-21), and as God’s way is taught and implemented, will bring to pass all the wonderful promises of true peace, freedom, and prosperity found in Scripture (see Isaiah 2:1-4; 9:6-7; 65:17-25). While some would see divine monarchy as the ultimate in dictatorship and control, the exact opposite is true. God’s government is based, not on power, but on love and service (Luke 22:25-27), and its citizens freely submit themselves to its rule and reap the blessings (James 4:10).

The prophet Jeremiah writes: “O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). Human forms of government are not the answer. Only those that incorporate godly principles have any hope of success in a world governed by satanic human nature, and even these eventually fall into corruption. Man’s only true hope is God’s Kingdom, which we pray comes quickly.

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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WORLDWATCH

<sup>1</sup> Williams, Walter E., “Leftists, Progressives and Socialists,” *Townhall.com*, October 20, 2010 ([http://townhall.com/columnists/WalterEWilliams/2010/10/20/leftists,\\_progressives\\_and\\_socialists](http://townhall.com/columnists/WalterEWilliams/2010/10/20/leftists,_progressives_and_socialists)).

<sup>2</sup> Rummel, Rudolph J., “20<sup>th</sup> Century Democide,” *Death by Government* (revised online), New Brunswick, N.J., Transaction Publishers, 1994 (<http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/20TH.HTM>).

## The Miracles of Jesus Christ

### *Healing Two Blind Men (Part One)*

In this healing miracle, Jesus Christ heals two blind men in Capernaum, probably in Peter's house (Matthew 9:27-31). Peter saw Jesus work several miracles in his house: the healing of his mother-in-law, the healing of the paralytic who was let down through the roof to come before Him, and this restoration of sight to the blind men.

Blindness seems to have been a more common problem in biblical times than today. Afflictions in those times were worse because people lived under poorer conditions and had limited access to medical care, if any was available at all. Nevertheless, these people had hope, for Isaiah 35:5 prophesies of the Messiah and His work: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped." This prophecy has a physical and a spiritual fulfillment. When Christ came to earth in the flesh, He healed many physically blind people. More importantly, though, He brought spiritual healing to many by opening their minds to see principles that lead to spiritual life.

Blindness is an appropriate description of sin's effect. For example, a prophecy in Zephaniah 1:17 says, "I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD." Sin causes people to grope spiritually at noon just as the blind grope in darkness (Deuteronomy 28:29). Sin puts us in darkness as blindness does, but spiritual darkness is a far worse darkness than its physical counterpart.

Spiritual blindness has only one remedy: Jesus Christ dwelling in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. In this healing of the two blind men, Jesus was physically before them, but for Christians, He is spiritually and personally available to us through the indwelling of His Spirit (John 14:20-23).



#### 1. Why is it vital for Christians to be awake to opportunities?

**COMMENT:** As Christ passes by, the two blind men have the ultimate opportunity, and they take advantage of it. He did not pass by every day. If the two men had not pursued Him for healing at once, they may never have had another opportunity to be healed. Spiritually, the same is true for everyone. God opens doors of opportunity for salvation and service, but very few take Him up on it: "For many are called but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). A person must pass through those doors quickly, or they will close and the opportunity will be forever squandered (Matthew 25:6-12; Revelation 3:20). A Christian may also miss rendering service to others because he fails to take advantage of opportunities. With opportunities come blessings, and if an opportunity is missed, so are the blessings.

#### 2. Why do the two blind men follow Christ? Matthew 9:27.

**COMMENT:** If we want blessings from Christ, we must follow Him. The blind men desired physical sight and so followed Him. Those who are indifferent in their faithfulness to Christ will have trouble receiving any blessing from Him, for He treats His followers differently from those who do not follow Him. Even a church member will complain at times of a lack of God's blessings in his life, but it may be that he has not followed Christ diligently and recognized the abundance of spiritual blessings he has received. God even goes so far as to warn His ministers that, if we fail to take to heart His warning about due diligence in serving Him with integrity, He will curse us (Malachi 2:1-2).

Christ calls, "Follow Me!" (Matthew 4:19; 8:22; Luke 18:22), but following is not easy because, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Mark 8:34).

#### 3. What positive characteristics do the two blind men exhibit?

**COMMENT:** With an attitude of humility (Proverbs 15:33), the blind men seek Jesus' mercy in healing, giving Him praise and honor. We have no merits for any blessing from God. As Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-9, these things are given by grace, not because of anything we are or have done.

The blind men not only honor Christ in their request, but also humble themselves. They do not ask Him to be just to them, for all have sinned and deserve death (Romans 3:23), but in their humility they ask for mercy. Had they asked for justice, they would have been asking for their "rights." Demanding rights is an arrogant approach, the opposite of humility. In emphasizing rights, a person ignores his responsibilities.

Another positive characteristic the blind men exemplify is that they continue to follow Christ until they receive an answer to their request—they persevere. In spite of the crowds, they keep following Him along the road, and when He stops and enters a house, they do not give up but go into the house after Him. When we do not receive an answer to a prayer the first few times we ask, we often quit praying and sometimes indirectly accuse God of failing to act on our behalf. However, delay in answering prayer is not necessarily denial. It may be to test our faith and strengthen it.

If we desire blessings from God, we have to persevere in pursuing them. God does not usually give special blessings to those who seek them half-heartedly. As parents, we use the same method with our own children. We sometimes delay our response until we know whether they are truly sincere in their request and desire, and until we determine how important it is to them and how hard they are willing to work for it.

In Part Two, we will analyze the two blind men's faith.

—Martin G. Collins