

How Does God Help Us? (Part 1)

He Accomplishes It By Enabling Us To Understand His Truth

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As Christians we find ourselves on an unusual pilgrimage during which we go nowhere geographically. And yet at the same time our lives are fraught with many trials as if we are on the move to a destination we have never been to before, and going by a way we have never traveled before.

We are not dealing with the blistering heat of a wilderness or a lack of food and water, but we nonetheless know that our lives would be far different from what they would have been had we never been called.

Like Abraham, who did not move ahead a great deal either, we are looking for a city whose builder and maker is God. It is not only taking a long time to get there, but we are facing the travails of this way of life with cultures that are in turmoil, and world conditions such as make it very stressful for us so that we are really becoming aware of why Jesus said "He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved." Because our hopes are so high, and our patience so low, we find that things become pretty wearying.

One of the major spiritual lessons of our calling into God's family is the enormous cost of freeing us from our bondage to Satan, sin, and the world so that we can enter into this pilgrimage. Christ paid that cost voluntarily and willingly, but, by way of contrast, one of the major lessons of the Days of Unleavened Bread is that Christ did not do it all for us.

Hebrews 13:5-6 Let your conduct be without covetousness; and be content with such things as you have: for he has said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

This indeed is quite reassuring because these verses tell us that a Christian can look to God as a source of unfailing strength. The verses also tell the reason we can be content is because God promised to never leave us.

Was He not able to provide for somewhere between two or three million Israelites trudging and grumbling through a barren wilderness? He most certainly did. Perhaps you have heard of some of these estimates before, but I am going to give you some sort of an idea of what a massive job God undertook in feeding and seeing to whatever was

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needed for between 2 or 3 million Israelites. Most of you sitting before me are at least fairly familiar with Mecklenburg County which contains the city of Charlotte. Mecklenburg County does not have two million people in it, and so we are talking about a population of Israelites leaving Egypt that is larger than the population of Mecklenburg County.

Incidentally, the source of the information I am going to give you is from *Cutting Edge Ministry*. It was put on the web sight and came out just days before the Days of Unleavened Bread. The date on this is 04/08/2006.

They had to be fed, and feeding 2 to 3 million people required a great deal of food. According to the Quartermaster General of the Army—a man accustomed to supplying the needs for army personnel on the march, in a war, or whatever—reported that Moses would have had use for 1500 tons of food each day. That works out to somewhere near one pound of food per person per day. This source says that to bring that much food each day, two freight trains each at least a mile long, would be required.

You must remember that they were out in the desert. They would have had to have firewood if they wanted to cook something. The Quartermaster General figured it would take 4,000 tons of firewood each day, and of course the freight trains needed to haul all that firewood from wherever. Just think. They were 40 years in the wilderness.

They would have had to have water. If they only had enough to drink and wash a few dishes, it would take 11 million gallons each day, and of course the freight trains are lining up waiting to get in across the Red Sea to get to these people.

Another thing: They had to get across the Red Sea. You know from the story in the book of Exodus that they all went across the Red Sea in one night. Now if they went on a narrow path, double file, the line would be 800 miles long and would require 35 days and nights to get through. This man figured there had to be space in the Red Sea at least 3 miles wide so that they could walk 5,000 abreast in order for the Israelites to get across the Red Sea in one night.

There is another problem, too, because each night they camped out. They put up their tents and camped out. Do you know how much room would be required, according to this army guy who was accustomed to putting tents up all over the place? For two and one half million people, 750 square miles of earth's surface would have to be provided for all these people to camp. I do not know how big Mecklenburg County is. I did not have enough time to look into it, but it is quite possible it is somewhere near that size.

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God took care of them out there. One Mighty Being provided for them for 40 years. God undoubtedly did it in a way that was far more efficient than the army could, but it was a massive job. Yet, He just pulled it off like it was nothing. Is He going to be able to provide for *you*? Oh! We worry so much. In a way we do not doubt that He can do it, we just worry that, "Is He really going to take care of little ol' me?" Yes He is. You would not be here if He were not with you.

Our situation is not exactly the same, is it? We are not marching anywhere. Oh, yes we are, but it is different nonetheless, and we need to be reassured that God is with us. Have you noticed that what I just read is in the book of Hebrews? That was written to *Christian* people: "*I shall never leave you nor forsake you.*" It was not written to the Israelitish people. It was written to people in the church, and that is a promise from Him to His sons and daughters who are in the church.

So a question remains to be answered. How does God help *us*? This can be learned from the Days of Unleavened Bread. For the most part, our needs are not going to be the same as it was for the Israelites. Supplying our physical needs is not as pressing as it was to them. They needed those things daily, and God supplied them.

This verse —"I shall never leave you nor forsake you"—is kind of interesting. Adam Clarke says this verse is practically untranslatable because there are five negatives in that one seven or eight word phrase. He did the best job, and this is basically what he came up with: "I will not, I will not, I will not cease to sustain you. I will not, I will not let you down."

This world's churchianity manages to teach people that the way following baptism is a cake walk, that once one is *born again* (where they might use the term "regenerated"), they have it made. They seem to infer that bad habits and bad attitudes will miraculously disappear and temptations easily gotten around. But I think that anyone of you here within the sound of my voice has found that this supposition not to be true in the least.

Ask yourself something. When God released Israel from their bondage in Egypt and then parted the Red Sea for them to walk through, did their problems disappear? I think not. I should say *absolutely* not, because they still had to walk across the wilderness during which they faced a wide variety of problems.

What we have found is that we can ask things of God, and when they are not given in the way or in the time that we set in our minds, our faith waivers and weakens, and finally, in some cases, it actually breaks down completely. We then run the risk of becoming possessors of attitudes, of doubts, of bitterness, of cynicism, and sarcasm.

We are going to let the Bible and the Israelites show God's primary means of helping us. We need to really consider this deeply because of the things that have impacted upon our ears and upon our lives over the past five or seven years. We must be especially careful because the political community, the entertainment community, and the media, along with even some of the church communities, are ganging up on Christianity and on the Bible to break people's faith in Christ.

Some of the more common ones are the book, and now the movie that is coming out on *The Da Vinci Code*. There are other imitators of that which are out there. There is even one that came out written by a man living in Charlotte. This man attended Ambassador College, and he effectively calls God a liar, Christ a liar, and all the apostles who wrote about Christ's life liars. This man is held in high regard in the intellectual community around here, and he is in charge of producing a new translation of the Bible called the *Transparent Version*.

We are going to go to Matthew 2 to show some of the parallels between Israel, their release from bondage, their wilderness journey, and ours, because all of those things are there according to Paul. Twice he said this—once in Romans 15:4 and the other time in I Corinthians 10, that all these things are written for our admonition. They are there for us to learn from and apply to our understanding and have our faith built as a result of it.

Matthew 2:15 And was there until the death of Herod [Joseph, Mary, and Jesus]: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

I do not know whether you are aware of it, but all you have to do is be reminded that Abraham went to Egypt and got into trouble. Isaac went to Egypt just like his father did, committed the same sin, and then had to be rescued from that trouble as well. Here we are, reading this right now. Jesus also went into Egypt as an infant, stayed there for approximately two years, and then his parents brought Him to Nazareth. They went into Egypt, and just like Abraham, and just like Isaac, and just like the Israelites, spent some time there, and then had to be brought out.

Brethren, we can begin to see the parallel already with us—the Israel of God, the church of God—that it too has been in Egypt—in *spiritual* Egypt, not physical geographic Egypt—and God has called us out of it.

Let us go back to the book of Exodus, chapter 6, and establish something that has to be

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at the base of our thinking. God has called us out of Egypt just like the predecessors of this end-time generation. God is saying this to Moses.

Exodus 6:5-7 And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant. Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments. And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, which brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

What I am getting at here I will make very plain: It is **God** who saves us. It was Jesus, who was the God of the Old Testament, who chose Moses, and directed him into Egypt from his being expelled out of Egypt. It was God who released the Israelites, not Moses. Moses was merely an instrument in God's hands. Our story, for the purpose of this sermon, has to begin with the Israelites' bondage, because the parallel is there.

Exodus 1:13-14 And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigor: And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service wherein they made them serve, was with rigor.

We can begin to see the parallel that is developing, that we too have been in bondage, and our lives were hard with the rigors of living in this world. We did not know why. We may not have even recognized at that time what was happening around us, that we were literally in bondage.

Exodus 2:23-25 And it came to pass in process of time that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.

Apply that to yourself. God looked on us in our bondage, and He had respect for us that we did not have for Him.

Exodus 3:7-9 And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.

It is essential to understand what a slave is. Here is a brief definition: "A slave is a person who is always at the bidding of another—his master. He is a person who has very limited and, in some cases, no choices at all in terms of the direction, use, and outcome of his life."

Hebrews 2:14-15 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he [Christ] also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

It is right here that we begin to come face to face with a bondage in almost every case totally unlike Israel's bondage to Egypt. It is nonetheless a bondage, and a worse bondage than the Israelites' because this bondage, if allowed to continue, will keep us from entering the Kingdom of God. It is far worse than the Israelites' who just never would have made it across the Red Sea. Our position is far more insecure even though we have no bars around it, even though we might not consider ourselves to be slaves of a master.

Now, what are we in bondage to? There are quite a number of things. First of all, we are in bondage to time, and to death; especially death, because of sin. "The wages of sin is death," and death holds us in its grip, and death does impact upon our thinking quite often.

Death itself may not be the real terror. It is far more likely to be the mystery surrounding what happens *after* death. If one does not believe the truth, that mystery can be a disturbing fear. Fear was mentioned there in regard to that. Christ has released us from that, but we are still subject to death. Hebrews 9:27 still applies to us: "It is given unto all

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men once to die," but Christ has removed the mystery, the terrors, and the fact that death cannot hold us. It will not be permanent.

Regarding time, we know that we only have so much, and I can tell you from my own personal experiences, that as I age, it becomes more and more a part of my thinking, and forces decisions. "I have got to get this done!" Now that I have had a heart attack, that even intensified it somewhat. For a while there I thought I was made out of iron and steel, but I am not. I am flesh and blood. My heart has its problems now, and I carry that with me. I want to get things done, and so it is pressing in on me.

It is not that I am afraid. When I had the heart attack I told Evelyn not one thought of fear went through my mind. I can say that honestly. I was not afraid, because I knew that I would be taken care of. I knew Evelyn would be taken care of, but I know I am mortal, and it has altered my thinking somewhat as well. So it is there, and it does shape the way we think and make decisions. We are in bondage to habits—to a tremendous variety of habits covering virtually every area of life, and not all of them are good habits.

If I had to sum up in one thing, in one term, what we fear as is shown by these two verses, it is a bondage *to* fear. That fear may not be desperate, but it is nagging. It is there. Are we going to be taken care of? Is God going to supply our need? That is why that encouragement is given in this same book.

All of us have also established our own righteousness by doing what seems right at the time. Why did we do this? It is because we are in Babylon, surrounded by a confusing mass of choices, and morally and spiritually most of them are wrong. "Satan has deceived the whole world."

God then calls us. We are at the doorstep, you might say, of a journey. How can we know which way to go while we are still in spiritual Egypt? The answer to that is, we cannot, and so until God really opens up the way, we remain in bondage without fully realizing what we are in slavery to. We may be aware that something is wrong, but what is it? We really do not begin to know until God opens our minds that we are in bondage to Satan, to this world, and to human nature. All of these masses impose their will on us, and we have little or no power to resist, because in most cases we do not know any better, and thus we have no real choice in matters of conduct. We are enslaved.

Now Satan has no power over death, as his encounter with Job very clearly shows. God put the brakes on him, but do not forget this: Satan does govern this earth in a *dominion* of death. It is not the same thing. It is he who introduced death into the world, and it is

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he that keeps it going through deceit. He ensnares, and then he rules through lying coercions, temptations, and threats.

God sent Moses and Aaron to be the instruments through which He would work to free the Israelites, but as we saw at the beginning here, it was God who set Israel free. Now the One who freed us is the very One who used Moses to announce to Israel and to the Pharaoh that God would free Israel.

So what did Jesus do to break this cycle of slavery for those that God calls? Well He, our Creator, voluntarily accepted becoming human in order that He might die and pay the penalty for sin so that we could be released from the bondage to death. In His sinless life, death, and resurrection, Satan's power is broken so that death cannot hold the person whose life demonstrates his faith in Christ. It is right here, that once the original bondage is revealed and broken, that some of the burden of our salvation falls on us, and we need the constant help of Jesus Christ, our High Priest. Did Israel need the help of Jesus Christ who was in the Cloud? You bet! And just as they needed His help, we need His help during a far more serious pilgrimage than those people took.

This parallel too is seen in Israel's release from Egypt. When they were still in their Egyptian slavery they did virtually *nothing* to deliver themselves. Can you think of anything they did to deliver themselves? It seems as though most of the time they were picking at Moses. I think one of the few things they did was put the blood on the doorposts and the lintel. Other than that there is not much they did. That blood represented Christ's blood. Brethren, for us to get free from this bondage that is virtually the only thing we do. We, too, come under the blood which delivers us from death we are in bondage to.

Once they got through the Red Sea some of the burden of their salvation fell on them as demonstrated by the fact that they had to walk to the Promised Land. It took them forty years to get there, and they had all kinds of difficult circumstances to face *until* they got there. Do you know what those difficult circumstances were doing to them? Those difficult circumstances were preparing them to live in the Promised Land.

There again is the parallel. From this you can understand that our salvation is not going to happen quickly. It might be a forty-year journey for an awful lot of people. I just told you that Evelyn and I had a forty-year journey just from the time of my ordination, and there was another seven years on top of that from the time that we were baptized. So now we are 47 years and counting.

When we came into the church, Allison had not even been born yet. But while Allison

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was growing up—she was two years old, three years old, four years old, five years old—she was never even going to get into high school, because 1972 was going to come, and we thought Christ would return then. It shows how good our guesses are, and this journey is taking a great deal longer. Why?—because we need the time to come out of our bondage. When Israel went into the wilderness they carried their bondage right with them. They never overcame it. We cannot afford that luxury even though we are still carrying the bondage with us. It is in our heart. We might say it is in our mind. It does not dominate us anymore, but it is still there exerting its influence because the bondage is in the heart, in the mind. It is all those things I mentioned just a little while earlier.

We are going to go to the book of John, chapter 8. John 8 concerns itself with just two or three different subjects. Most of us are very familiar with a couple of the verses there. The one with which we are familiar is the chapter of the woman taken in adultery. Do you understand that she was enslaved to that life of sin which was showing up in her adulterous affairs she was having? I am sure that she had more than just the one she was caught in, and so there she was, standing before the judges—standing before all those people who brought her before Christ to be condemned.

Of course you know what happened. They all left when Jesus wrote in the sand and they looked at what He wrote. They were convicted by what they knew He wrote down there, whatever it was. When Jesus looked up nobody was there but the woman, and what did He say to her? He said, "I do not condemn you. Go and sin no more." You see, He set her free from the bondage to death. That is the prelude to the rest of the chapter, because the rest of the chapter is about bondage and liberty. This is the chapter that says "the truth shall set you free."

John 8:30 As he spoke these words many believed on him.

John 8:33 They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man; how say you then, You shall be made free?

Here we have a chapter dealing with truth, bondage, and freedom. In order to get the ironic force of this discussion He is having with the Jews, first of all make note of the fact that He is speaking to people who believed on Him. That has an important twist as we go along here.

When Jesus brought up the fact that they were in bondage, they denied it. And here they were—the whole nation was in bondage to Rome! No. They were not in any

bondage [they said]. What were they thinking, brethren?

Now let us suppose that Jesus preached the same thing to a group of Americans anywhere in the United States. Do not Americans believe that they are the freest people on the face of the earth? These Jews, despite all of their fervency for their so-called liberty, were blind to the fact that they were in the kind of bondage that Jesus was pointing to. Any American today would probably say exactly the same thing that the Jews said, because we are brought up with this idea that we live in "the land of the free and the home of the brave."

Incidentally, any of you who are paying attention to what is going on in the news, know that the laws are in place now that take our liberties away—liberties that we have enjoyed since George Washington was president. They are within a snap of the finger to make everybody in the United States a captive of the government. So be aware. We are not as free as we would like to think we are.

The Jews were blind to their circumstance, and they were blind because they were in darkness. It was a spiritual darkness. The light was not in them, and so they were not aware of their bondage, and they could not see what Jesus was saying. Jesus would say something that to you and me now is open and clear, but the Jews'—the people who believed on Him—minds went off in another direction altogether, and they completely misinterpreted what He was saying. "We have never been in bondage to any man." Oh yes, they have been for hundreds of years.

John 8:34-36 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever commits sin is the servant [the slave] of sin. And the servant abides not in the house forever: but the Son abides forever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.

What Jesus said here was an enigma to them. What Jesus said here we must relate to God's family. A slave can be intimately involved with his master and his master's family, but the slave, despite his intimate involvement with the family, is not really a part of the family. The family may be very kind and friendly to him. They may give him gifts, but the fact remains, he is still a slave.

We need to understand that this is pretty heavy stuff. One of the subtle points here is that only those in the family of God are free. They are the only people on earth who are truly free, having the freedom Jesus is speaking of. What Jesus says becomes very important to us because most slaves cannot free anyone, including themselves. You

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can see the logic in this. Here these people were slaves, and they could not free themselves even from the Romans. They certainly were not free to escape the blindness that was in their hearts and minds.

A slave can be sold, ejected from service, or he can be given freedom from service by his master at any time. The point that Jesus is making is that only somebody who is entirely free can confer liberty to his slaves. Do you understand how important this is to you and me? We are bought with a price, and we became *Christ's* slaves. He purchased us. He is the only being, other than the Father, who can set us free. How important is that to you? It is exceedingly important.

John 8:37-40 I know that you are Abraham's seed; but you seek to kill me because my word has no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and you do that which you have seen with your father. They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus said unto them, If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill me, a man that has told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.

Abraham was a free man. They thought they were free, but they were comparing themselves to a man who really *was* free. They were slaves. So now He has to straighten out for our benefit, and even for them too, the truth concerning their true relationship to Abraham. What He says does not sit well at all with them because He tells them He knows they are physically descended from Abraham, but that they are not *spiritually* descended from him because they did not conduct their lives like Abraham did. It is right here that their bondage to sin really begins to become apparent.

The Bible uses terms like children, sons and daughters in two ways. One is in a natural physical descendant context. The other is as one who shows the characteristics of another even though there is no physical relationship between them. For example, the Bible uses the term "sons of Belial" or "children of Belial." Belial was Satan. These are people who, though not literally physically descended from Belial, nonetheless show the immoral characteristics of Belial. That is why He said what He said there in verse 39.

When the Messenger from God appeared at Abraham's door, he welcomed Him. He was hospitable toward Him. He entertained Him. He fed Him. The Jews, though physically descended from Abraham, were not following through with Abraham's characteristics by welcoming Him, who was God's Messenger to them, but they were following Belial's characteristics. Now what does that teach you? Jesus said, "Based on

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what you are doing in relation to Me, I can tell, that though you are physically descended from Abraham, your spiritual father is Satan the Devil."

John 8:44-47 You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own, for he is a liar and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, you believe me not. Which of you convicts me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do you not believe me? He that is of God hears God's words: you therefore hear them not because you are not of God.

Christ is giving you and me a way that we can judge how free we are. It is by what we do. Do we show the characteristics of Abraham, our physical father in the faith? Do we show the characteristics of Jesus Christ? The Jews' bondage was making them do what they were doing, just as surely as Satan's nature makes him do what he does. Their bondage was blocking their understanding, so their thoughts were on the destruction of the good. The good of course was Jesus Christ.

John 8:32 You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Jesus frees us through His calling by enabling us to have the spiritual and moral freedom in a welter [a mass] of spiritual and moral confusion.

It was God, by His singular acts, who enabled Israel to walk from Egypt not only unscathed, but without having to fight a war. In like manner, we cannot justify ourselves before God to have the freedom to approach to Him. The very medium that enables us to begin the trek to absolute liberty is also the medium that nourishes us, strengthens us, and sustains our liberty once the journey truly begins. It is truth. But there is a catch. Yes, truth makes us free, and truth enables us to remain free if we believe it, and if we use it. There is the condition.

Unlike Israel, God does not physically move us anywhere, but we must begin to come out from our personal spiritual bondage before we enter into the covenant with Him through baptism and the laying on of hands. In other words, we must begin by showing fruit fitting for repentance, as John the Baptist clearly instructed.

What Israel went through was only a physical type. We are going through the spiritual reality, and Jesus makes it very clear here that truth is a major player in real freedom.

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Thus one can be truly free regardless who they are and where they live, because no one is truly free until they are spiritually free.

Believe it or not, a person can be free in prison as the apostle Paul was. And God put an exclamation point on it. One time when Paul was put in prison, God sent forth an earthquake, knocked the building down, and Paul walked away. Peter was in prison. God sent an angel, opened up the door, and Peter walked away. They were free men, and God provided what was needed at the time.

But the lesson, brethren, is that regardless of where we are, our freedom, or our enslavement, is here. It is truth that enables us to break the bondage. Do not get me wrong. It is not going to be done entirely by us. It is going to be done in conjunction with Christ, but our journey, our pilgrimage, is a spiritual journey.

You might recall again that Jesus said in John 8:44 that Satan, who has influenced us all through the world, was a liar from the beginning, and that there is no truth in him. Therefore, we must understand that Satan's deceit, combined with our own self-deceptions, plays a very large role in our bondages.

Let me give you an important truth or two. In John 8 Jesus gave the Jews two hard-to-accept challenges: (1) To surrender in obedience to Him, and (2) To accept the highest of standards for one's conduct.

One's life takes its values from its purposes and goals. Now, what is your goal in life? Think seriously about this. What is your goal in life? Is it the Kingdom of God? Goals play a major role in shaping one's values in life, because if a person really desires to succeed in meeting that goal, whatever it is, it will force that person to do what it takes to attain that goal. He will pay the price. In terms of Christianity, its great goal will shape the standards that, if they are used, will produce liberty, because they are true values.

I want us to notice how clearly Jesus stated how He is going to help those who listen to and believe His message. Never forget, in one sense, Jesus was just a preacher. Just a preacher? He was the best one that ever walked on the face of the earth. It is in His preaching that He stated how He is going to help those who listen and believe His message. He used words in order to do this. Those words were contained within the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Words are symbols of concepts and ideals upon which we base our thinking and decision making.

Let us go to Luke 4:18 because here Jesus states the very reason why He was sent and what He is going to preach. We have in Mark 1:14-15 that He came to preach the

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Gospel, but here in Luke 4:18 we have it broken down in a little bit more specific order.

Luke 4:18-19 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

Now let us go through them a little bit more slowly and with a little bit more explanation.

Objective number 1: To preach the gospel to the poor.

The Bible uses the word "poor" in a couple of different ways. It does not always refer to people who are economically poor; most of the time it refers to those who are weak, powerless, and deprived. A person can be an upstanding person in the community and yet spiritually he is powerless and deprived. How much power do you think that you have of really changing things in the United States of America? None. The preaching of the gospel to the poor has to be there because it gives vision to men who will listen and believe. It sets the goals.

Objective number 2: He heals the brokenhearted.

This is actually referring to a specific people. The "brokenhearted" in the biblical concept are those who are truly repentant. Those people He will heal. A secondary reason why He does this is to take care of the past—to take the ton of guilt that hangs upon us and replace it with encouragement and comfort. God is a God of comfort, because once He preaches the gospel to the poor, and then begins to heal the brokenhearted, their minds begin to change with the truth they are being given, and they are encouraged and comforted, because now there is hope.

Objective number 3: He preaches deliverance to the captives.

Do you know who the captives are? They are those who are in bondage. They are the captives of Satan and the cultures of this world, and even to themselves. Why does He do this?—In order to inspire enthusiasm and to give hope for a bright and wonderful future. You would think that anybody in jail would just feel so good to be out of there. That is what He is talking about. He begins to put rejoicing into a person's life. The person now knows why he was born. It is an awesome thing. He is beginning to be healed of the spiritual blindness that he had, and so God gives him deliverance.

Objective number 4: The recovering of sight to the blind.

That one ought to be pretty obvious. Those who are in bondage He gives spiritual and moral truth, and therefore He begins to straighten out their thinking, making it clear, and sets the direction for their lives.

Objective number 5: He sets them at liberty—the forgiveness of sin and whatever it takes to keep them free; so again, another reference to bondage.

Objective number 6: He preaches the acceptable year of the Lord.

Do you know why He does this?—to instill a sense of urgency. Did you ever notice in the Bible how many times in Paul's writings he said things like, "Hey! The end is coming. Time is running out on us!" God wants us to be filled with enthusiasm for what He is doing in our lives, and to make it clear to us not to waste time. It does not mean we have to run around like a chicken with its head cut off. He has given us direction to expend our energies, and that is toward the Kingdom of God.

With every one of these functions God is working on the mind by means of His word, His truth, empowering us through an educational process to make the best possible use of our lives. In this sense salvation *is* an education in essential truths. This is where the release from bondage comes from—having our minds swept clean.

We all know what it says in John 17:17. Jesus appealed to His Father in that prayer: "Sanctify them through your truth: Your word is truth." Nobody is truly free until he is free to choose truth in the face of all the confusing deceit and hypocrisy that Satan has built enslaving the people of his dominion.

II Corinthians 3:12-16 Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end [the goal] of that which is abolished [talking about the Old Covenant]: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remains the same veil [the same blindness] untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it [or they] shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.

Paul is repeating a truth that everyone in this room knows. The veil has been taken

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away from your mind. So Paul here is referring specifically to the Jews of his day, and how blind they were. Are we any different? No. Until Christ did what He did, the blindness remained until *He* took the veil away. How did He do it? Well, we can say that He did it by working a miracle on our mind. That of course would not be wrong, but what did He make happen so that we can see this? He gave us truth—some of the things we see there in Luke 4—and enabled us to believe it. Until then, the veil was there.

So we, too, are blind to important elements of this truth until our calling, and therefore we cannot really begin to become fully free until the blindness is removed and we begin obeying it. Even then, though we do not literally walk through a geographic wilderness, we do walk through life in a moral and spiritual wilderness of this world.

We are going to go to II Corinthians 4. The opening to chapter 4 is in one sense so beautiful and humbling at the same time. After saying what he said in chapter 3 about the blindness being taken away and about what is going to happen at the end of the process, that we are going to be in the image of Jesus Christ, we are now free to take on that image.

II Corinthians 4:1-7 Therefore seeing we [Paul and his companions who were there in the ministry] have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; [We do not give up.] But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord: and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this **treasure** in earthen vessels, ["We have this treasure and we are still human!", is what he is saying] that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

Do we really appreciate this treasure? What is he talking about? What *is* this treasure? It is truth! It is truth about why we were created. It is truth where God's plan and purpose is to end. It is truth that we are now a part of that purpose and plan. It is truth that we have His spirit—the very spirit by which He created everything that is. We do not have it to the power that He has, but it is in us. We have been set free from going nowhere but

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to death.

Did you notice in there how frequently Paul used terms such as blinded, veiled, truth, light, darkness, and knowledge? Our liberation, and the walk that follows, is an education in God's truth given so that we might apply it in the practical circumstances of every day life, thus building the qualities needed for life in the Kingdom of God. We come full circle. God was preparing Israel in the wilderness for life in the Promised Land. God is preparing us for life in the Promised Land.

Let us continue this thought about Israel by turning to Hebrews 4:1.

Hebrews 4:1 Let us therefore fear [In this case he means to be very concerned], lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

The word-picture here is of a people who knew truth, and yet their bodies were strewn all the way from the Red Sea to the Promised Land because they failed. They fell short of their destination. Verse 2 is really something. It is the reason he wrote what he wrote in verse 1.

Hebrews 4:2 For unto us was the gospel preached, *as well as to them*: . . .

They had the gospel preached to them. Way back 1400 years before Jesus Christ came, they had the gospel preached to them because Moses *knew* it, even as Abraham *knew* it, and Isaac *knew* it, and Jacob *knew* it.

Hebrews 4:2 . . . but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

What an ominous conclusion that can be. He is urging us to get on with it, to make use of the truth we have been given. We are all in different stages of the accumulation of it, the understanding of it, and the use of it, but God does hold us responsible to apply and use what He has made available to us.

Our salvation depends on our use of truth, because the use of truth is going to continue to make us freer, and freer, and freer. It is not going to earn us salvation; not in the least, but it does play a part in our responsibility to God. Why? Actually Jesus gave the

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answer in John 8, because you can tell who a person believes in by what he does. If a person believes in God, and he is making use—maybe not perfect use—of the knowledge that is given to him, God knows very well, just like He said about Abraham—*"Now I know!"*

God had no doubt about Abraham. Abraham is going to be subject to Him in God's kingdom just like Jesus Christ. So God is looking to see by what we do with the truth that is given to us how free we are, and whether we will continue to submit to Him right out on into eternity. But even though God will be our Master, we will be free because we have learned how to conduct our lives in God's liberty by following His word. It is that simple. It is not a real complex concept at all.

If you want further proof that Moses knew what was going on, you can find it in Hebrews the 11th chapter. It says there that "Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ" way back in Egypt. He knew whom he was following. He knew that God was going to become a man and sacrifice His life, because mankind needs a Savior to pay the penalty to death so that mankind can be set free to have an education in truth. The person set free then has a relationship with God, and the education becomes very personal to God and to the person.

We could go on and on to show the parallels here, but if you learn just one thing from this sermon, it is that the major play in our life is God's truth and how we make use of it by believing it. If we believe it, we will use it—all of us to different degrees, but we will use it.

I think we have shown, at least to some degree, that Christ did not do it all for us. There are things that are required of us. Once we get out into the wilderness there are things that we must do. They are not things that save us, but they are things that determine how free we are going to be before we get to the Kingdom of God. So let us make sure we are making use of the truth He has given to us, and we will be free, and we will have the right kind of mind to carry about with us with a clear conscience, and loving God with all of our being.