

## 042: A Pilgrimage to Unlikely Places (based on Preface in *The Savior of All Men*)

### Well, it's time to change the subject for a while

- My first 16 podcast episodes are about the seriousness of the Judgment Seat of Christ and the importance of preparing to give a good account
- A very sobering subject indeed and one that is not widely taught in evangelical Christianity
- Episodes 17 through 30 focus on Christ's offer of kingdom inheritance to the Jews, which helps us to correctly interpret the Gospels, thereby setting the stage for rightly dividing the entire NT
- Episodes 31-41 focus on the Sermon on the Mount and the qualifications for kingdom inheritance, so we know how to conduct our lives in a manner that pleases the Lord – with a view to hearing “Well done!” when we stand before Him in judgment, rather than receiving negative reward

### Starting with this episode and several more to follow, we turn our attention for a time to the controversial subject of God's plan to reconcile all mankind over the course of the ages, through His Son, Jesus Christ

- Is there hope for those who never believe on Jesus Christ for eternal life? Or are they doomed forever in the lake of fire?
- Why does the Bible say that “every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord?”
- Where do our friends and loved ones go when they die – do they really go straight to Heaven or Hell, as is commonly taught, or does something else happen?
- Is Hell, which the Bible calls the lake of fire, forever? Or only for a period of time? And what is its purpose?

- Unfortunately, most Christians have been taught in their churches and Bible colleges, doctrines that came out of the Reformation, not out of the Scriptures
- These errors have been blindly accepted and perpetuated throughout the centuries
- But we are going to see what the Bible has to say about these critical matters
- Ten years ago I would never have imagined *believing* what I will be teaching in these episodes, much less, speaking and writing about it.
- But that's the nature of a pilgrimage — it takes you to some unlikely places.

### But I'm getting ahead of myself

- Before delving directly into this new subject matter, which is called Universal Reconciliation ...
- I first need to back up and share with you a lengthy personal testimony as to how I arrived at this point
- Because I did not begin here; my thinking has progressed to this point over many years, and it's important for you to understand the progression
- My spiritual pilgrimage (thus far) can be summed up by the three words found at the end of the great love chapter (1 Cor. 13): Faith, Hope, and Love.
- Not that I have mastered these great virtues, by any means, but I have come to a deeper understanding of them, by the grace of God, that has helped me immensely, for which I am truly grateful.

### The apostle Paul said faith, hope, and love are the three virtues that abide or remain.

- It's as if the essence of spiritual life is summed up in merely three simple words.

- Ironically, though the words are simple, the truths they represent are complex and profound, and therefore grasped by few believers.
- Perhaps that is because only a small minority are willing to put forth the effort to diligently seek the Lord in His Word and thereby mine out the gems that are buried beneath the surface.
- God wants seekers who will submit to His truth, even when it goes against the grain of what they have learned.
- Remarkably, Paul's use of this triplet in 1 Cor. 13:13 is not a lone reference.
- The three words are used together in several places in the New Testament.

I will share two of these and give you references to a few more

- Col. 1:3-5 We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your **faith** in Christ Jesus and of your **love** for all the saints; because of the **hope** which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel,
- 1 Thess. 1:2-3 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of **faith**, labor of **love**, and patience of **hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father,
- (See also Rom. 5:1-5; Gal. 5:5-6; 1 Thess. 5:8; Heb. 10:22-24) – all of these passages mention faith, hope, and love together
- Repetition in the Scriptures means that God does not want us to miss truth that is far-reaching and consequential.
- I refer to the first stage of my spiritual pilgrimage as ...

## 1. FAITH-LIVING AND HOLINESS

- More than twenty years ago the Lord began teaching me intensively about faith.
- Not saving faith — for I had believed on Jesus for eternal life much earlier in life — but rather, sanctifying faith.
- Sadly, I had been living the Christian life in my own power and strength, without realizing it.
- I would try hard to be a good Christian by keeping a list of things that I thought would make me spiritual.
- But it wasn't working.
- I was doing everything I knew to be right, but something was still missing.
- There was no vibrancy or lasting victory, and I was regularly defeated.
- I had been a pastor for only a few years and my ministry was seemingly going nowhere.

I remember at that point in my life crying out to the Lord, "Oh God, please help me! Show me what I am missing in my life!"

- I was sincere and continued to pray this for some time, as no answer came immediately.
- Eventually, a small ray of light shined.
- God spoke to me through James 4:6, *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*
- What did *that* mean in my present situation?
- I didn't consider myself arrogant or boastful.
- I thought that I had maintained a humble spirit toward God and others.
- The verse gnawed at me over time, so I asked God for more light.

- Around that time, I attended a leadership conference for pastors, which was focused on the study of theological doctrines.

Most of the sessions were instructional in format, with professors presenting position papers for consideration and discussion.

- But the one the Lord led me to was more testimonial in nature, taught by an elderly pastor who had walked through the valley of the shadow of death physically, nearly dying, but allowed by God to live so he could share a specific message.
- It was the very message I needed.
- He told the story of how his life and ministry had been characterized by a desire to please the Lord, but that he had gone about it in his own power and might.
- He had built a very large church and had become a national leader in his particular movement and everything about his life and ministry screamed of success.

Inwardly, however, he was miserable, for he knew something was missing.

- He was not living in blatant sin, but could not get victory over some sins and knew that he was not pleasing God.
- His spiritual life was parched, as in a desert place.
- Then the cancer came.
- He hit rock bottom, not only in health, but in his spirit.
- It was then that the rays of God's sunshine began to shine.
- In brokenness, he repented of pride, asking God to forgive him for decades of going about life and ministry in his own strength and not depending on God for the enablement to fulfill His will.

Aha! I understood.

- God was telling me that He had been resisting me, because I had been going about my Christian life and ministry in *my* strength rather than His.
- My pride was in the form of self-sufficiency, without realizing it.
- Yes, I would pray and ask for God's help, but then I would depend on myself to carry it out.
- In times of failure, I would grit my teeth and try all-the-harder to succeed going forward.
- God was merely my credo, not my source of strength.
- The only difference spiritually between my life and that of the elderly pastor is that my ministry was just starting whereas his was near the end.
- I had a whole life ahead in which to amend my ways and live differently, by God's grace.

I wept throughout the old pastor's session, not because his testimony was presented in an overly emotional fashion (it was not), but simply because God was seeing through me.

- I felt like Isaiah — “Woe is me, for I am undone!” —
- and like Job — “Now my eye sees You; therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” —
- and like Peter — “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”
- God had taught me the important lesson of brokenness as one of the keys to holy living.
- In the months that followed, the Lord used some classic books to point me to His Word following His breaking work in my life —
- *Victory in Christ*, by Charles Trumbull, *The Calvary Road* by Roy Hession, and *The Normal Christian Life* by Watchman Nee.

- These books were immensely helpful in putting the pieces of my life together in a manner that would please the Lord.
- A host of others would come along later in my pilgrimage.

Then the Lord graciously impressed on my heart the significance of Rom. 6-8.

- In these glorious chapters Paul emphasizes the importance of identifying, by faith, with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection:
- Rom. 6:4-6 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.

Though this marvelous transaction occurred when I was saved, I did not realize it, much less, take it by faith.

- Because I died to sin *in Jesus* and rose to newness of life *in Him* when He regenerated me, I can live consistently holy (i.e., righteous) and victorious.
- That brings vibrance to the Christian life.
- Thank God, I've traded masters.
- I am no longer enslaved to sin. Jesus is now my Master.
- Consequently, the old man has been crucified, put to death.
- The new man (the indwelling Jesus, through His Holy Spirit) is ready and able to empower me to put away sin in my life.

- But I must depend upon Him, by faith, as my provision for victory, allowing Him to live through me.

I must reckon these truths to be so and not allow sin to reign, for sin is no longer my sovereign.

- Rom. 6:11-13 Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.
- Rom. 8:4 That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

God's will is that I live righteously.

- I can now do that, thanks to the Righteous One who lives within, as my provision.
- Rom. 6-8 can be summed up in one verse:
- Gal. 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.
- These Scriptural concepts are frequently called "identification" or "provision" truths.
- Sometimes they are referred to as the "deeper Christian life" or the "victorious Christian life," or more simply, "the Christ-life."
- The truths learned during those early years of my ministry have never faded in my life and have provided the critical foundation for understanding hope-living and love-living.

- I have written more extensively on this important aspect of the Christ-life in my book, *Christ Magnified: Glorifying Jesus by Your Life*.
- Unfortunately, many Christians never learn the importance of appropriating the Christ-life for victory.
- Yet it is at the heart of faith-living, which is the most basic level of Christian sanctification and maturity.
- Peter urges believers to “add to your faith.”
- It is the indispensable starting point.
- If believers do not learn to live by faith, then how can they progress to hope and love?
- That leads me to the second stage of my spiritual pilgrimage ...

## **2. HOPE-LIVING AND KINDOM PREPAREDNESS**

- Ironically, I was exposed to the realm of hope-living at virtually the same time that I was exposed to faith-living, albeit unwittingly, but the principles of hope-living did not arrest my attention and bear fruit until many years later.
- At the same conference, mentioned earlier, I also met a book seller and publisher, named Lewis Schoettle of Schoettle Publishing Co.
- He was selling used Christian books at the conference, in addition to peddling the new books he had published.
- I was a bit wary of the new books, because I didn’t understand the subject matter, nor did I recognize the authors.
- Several were late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Brits that Schoettle had republished — for example, Govett, Panton, Pember, G.H. Lang, Mauro — as well as some more modern American writers — Gary Whipple, Joseph Dillow, and Joey Faust, for example.

Schoettle was a good salesman, and he would always get in a “hook,” by giving away a free book — *The Judgment Seat of Christ* by D.M. Panton.

- Many received that little pink book at Schoettle’s table during the conferences.
- I read a few pages and was fascinated.
- Actually, *convicted* might be a better word, for I was learning about the account I must give to Jesus one day.
- The next day I stopped by Schoettle’s tables and bought some of the new books he had published, including Robert Govett’s *Reward According to Works* and Gary Whipple’s *Shock and Surprise Beyond the Rapture!*
- Before I could delve into reading these books, I attended a pastor’s conference and, during the open discussion, asked the veterans, “What do you guys think of these authors and this subject?”
- I described what I had purchased from Schoettle.
- The room went completely silent.
- Nobody seemed to know anything about the subject.
- Then one old-timer in the back of the room bellowed out, “Just read your Bible, brother, and stay away from those books!”
- A little shaken and now quite gun-shy, I wondered if these authors might be heretical, and put the books away on my office bookshelf, forgetting about them for many years ... until India.

More than ten years ago I had the privilege to travel to various parts of India to preach and teach to believers about the Christ-life truths I had learned.

- I was in many rural parts of the country where the comforts of home were not available, things we take for granted in the United States.

- In fact, I became whiny in my spirit, and — though I didn't verbalize it — I started griping and complaining about my uncomfortable conditions.
- It wasn't long before the Lord put on my heart the coming Judgment Seat of Christ and the account I must give to Him one day.
- My heart and mind were almost instantly smitten by the Lord.
- The Lord showed me that I was a spoiled American, not nearly as focused on the things of eternity as I had thought.
- While on the trip, I studied every passage in the Bible that I could find on the Judgment Seat and the coming day of reckoning with Jesus.
- I had not realized that God said so much in His Word about preparing to meet Him.

Overwhelmed with my new findings, one of the first messages I preached when back at home was entitled, "Our Consumable Works," based on 1 Cor. 3:11-15.

- Ironically, I preached it at Tri-City Baptist Church as a candidate for the pastorate — the very church that later called me to be their pastor and where I have served now for nearly 12 years.
- What a marvelous time it has been, learning together about the glorious realm of hope-living and kingdom preparedness!
- I am extremely grateful for the warm reception of the dear folks at Tri-City to both Christ-life and kingdom inheritance teaching through the years.
- We are all learning to live by faith and hope.
- What is hope-living?

The traditional evangelical paradigm teaches that the Judgment Seat of Christ is essentially an awards ceremony, where trophies and crowns will be handed out to all children of God.

- Of course, some will receive more than others, but all believers will receive rewards by nature of their position "in Christ."
- The expectation is that all believers will rule with Jesus in the coming kingdom, and all will be glorified.
- Beware! This view implicitly condones licentious living.
- If all believers will be rewarded and will rule with Jesus, regardless of how they live, then behavior doesn't really matter.
- Believers can live however they want.
- That is the dreadful logical conclusion of the traditional paradigm.
- However, that position is not biblical.

The Scriptures teach the prospect of negative reward as well as positive, based on whether the individual lives righteously in this life or not.

- Col. 3:23-25 Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.
- 2 Cor. 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.
- Hope-living is the expectation that, if I live righteously and faithfully, persevering in suffering and hardship for Jesus' sake, I will hear "Well done!" at the Bema Seat of Christ, receive His clothing of glorification (shining in

some degree), and be rewarded with the privilege of ruling with Jesus as His bride and co-ruler in New Jerusalem, the heavenly ruling headquarters of the Messianic kingdom.

Those who do not live in this manner will not be rewarded in this way.

- They will be in the “outer darkness,” that is, the relative darkness outside New Jerusalem, which is the earthly realm of the kingdom, where they will consciously regret how they lived in this present life.
- In a nutshell, hope-living is preparing for the kingdom, preparing to hear a good verdict at the Judgment Seat.
- The means of preparation is following Jesus as a faithful disciple, progressing in uprightness and maturity in the Christian life with the confidence of being rewarded and given an inheritance in the kingdom for good works.
- It is recognizing that while the salvation of one’s spirit (regeneration) is by faith alone — believing Jesus for eternal life — the salvation of one’s soul (sanctification) unto reward is according to Spirit-enabled works.

When believers grasp this paradigm, they begin to interpret the New Testament correctly.

- For instance, they realize that the warnings in the book of Hebrews are not directed at unbelievers, so that they will get saved and not have to go to Hell.
- Rather, the warnings are directed at believers, so that they will live for Jesus and not become disinherited from reward and ruling.
- Those who take hold of hope-living also come to understand that *salvation* in the New Testament is not always speaking of the past aspect of initial salvation, or regeneration.

- It often speaks of the present saving of the soul, or sanctification, with a view to future salvation at the Judgment Seat (which is glorification and inheritance).
- Bible students need to rightly divide which aspect of salvation is being considered, according to context.
- Incidentally, one comes to realize in this paradigm that the overwhelming majority of the Bible — perhaps as much as 95% or more — is about matters of sanctification, not initial salvation.

In other words the Bible is not written as an evangelistic book, per se, but as a manual for believers – that is true of both OT and NT

- Hope-living requires that we live righteously and persevere unto reward.
- How can we live in that manner, so He is pleased?
- The Christ-life — faith-living truth — provides the answer as to *how*.
- Hope-living, kingdom preparation truth, provides the answer as to *why*.
- Incidentally, that is why Paul starts the trilogy with *faith* and then progresses to *hope*.
- Faith-living is the essential foundation for hope-living in the Christian life. God wants our eyes open to these truths.
- Eph. 1:18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,
- I have written more extensively on this important aspect of hope-living in my books, *The End of the Pilgrimage: Your Judgment Seat Verdict and How it Determines Your Place in His Kingdom*, and *Keys for Inheriting the Kingdom: Unlocking the Parables of Jesus*, and *The*

*Kingdom According to Jesus (Vol. 1): The Lamb of God and His Offer of Kingdom Inheritance and Vol. 2: The Sermon on the Mount and the Qualifications for Kingdom Inheritance*

- That brings me now to the third stage of my spiritual pilgrimage, which I refer to as ...

### **3. LOVE-LIVING AND UNIVERSAL RECONCILIATION**

- Many Christians start squirming when they hear the term “universal reconciliation.”
- It is important, therefore, to clarify up front that it is *not* the belief that anyone can come to God in his own way or on his own terms.
- Rather, it is the belief that all mankind will be saved and reconciled to God by the end of all the ages, on His terms, through His Son, Jesus Christ.
- I will dedicate the next several podcast episodes to fleshing out why I believe universal reconciliation is taught in the Bible and why traditional belief systems have rejected it.
- This episode will focus on how I came to this position.

I distinctly remember a day about five years ago when I cried out to the Lord, asking to understand the meaning of love in the faith-hope-love triplet.

- I had progressed in my understanding of *faith* and *hope*, to the point that I was eager to learn about the culminating truth of *love* that remained a mystery to me.
- I wondered if love was simply about my need to grow in Christ-like love toward others.
- While that would be an incredibly helpful and valuable lesson in itself, I suspected what God had buried in His Word was far more profound than that, since love is the “greatest of these.”

- I remember feeling as Moses must have felt, standing on Mt. Nebo, viewing the promised land in the distance, but not being able to see any of its details or even to enter the land.
- *Love* was eluding me in like manner.
- I knew it was out there, in the distance.
- I could see it and even feel it, but I could not grasp it.
- This went on for months, perhaps a year, then a ray of light shined.

A verse of Scripture arrested by attention:

- 1 Tim. 4:10 For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.
- This verse asserts plainly that God is the Savior of *all*!
- How could that be? That is not what I was taught throughout my years of biblical training.
- Somehow, I had missed that verse for the first two decades of my ministry career.
- I became deeply curious to learn more and went to God’s Word with a zeal to study the matter further.
- That study has continued to this day and has included reading and re-reading large sections of the New Testament as well as books written by authors on both sides of the question.
- As you will learn later in these podcasts, in process of time I discovered numerous Scripture passages that teach the doctrine of universal reconciliation.

I can now see that what God has hidden in *love* is truly the “greatest of these,” the pinnacle of all Christian truth, for at least two reasons.

- First, it reveals the great loving heart of God to save all mankind.



- That truth in itself is astounding, far beyond anything I could have ever imagined, and contrary to all I had been taught.
- Second, love is the abiding virtue that Satan has worked the hardest to vilify and obscure through centuries of muddying the theological waters, so that if one embraces this doctrine today, he is certain to be ridiculed and attacked, even by friends, as I will explain more in a moment.
- Now that I understand God's heart of love for His entire creation, many perplexing and disturbing questions have been resolved in my mind, and my heart of love for fellow man has grown.

I can no longer write off wicked, belligerent people as destined for Hell and, therefore, not worth my time, now that I know God doesn't give up on anyone.

- (Tragically, the old paradigm led to that logical conclusion over and over again in my thinking).
- Loving God with all my heart and loving others as myself (Matt. 22:37-40) — or better yet, loving others as Jesus loves me (John 13:34; 15:12) — is my goal more than ever.
- My desires are becoming God's desires — to see *all* reconciled with God through Jesus Christ.
- Faith, hope and love, when understood and embraced in the life of a believer, form a threefold cord that is not quickly broken (Eccl. 4:12).

And now a warning.

- I incurred a degree of opposition and attack for embracing and teaching faith-living.
- Some folks do not agree with my understanding of the Christ-life, and affiliate it with Keswick sanctification

theology, as taught at the classic Keswick conferences in England between 1875-1914.

- While Keswick had a few “odd ducks,” so to speak (don't all churches and families?), the speakers overall were on-target and biblical, and I have learned much from their messages and writings.
- That being said, however, I get my theology from the Bible, not from the Keswick movement.

I have found that those who hold to Calvinist soteriology often have difficulty with Christ-life teaching (and the Keswick model of sanctification) because it separates initial salvation (i.e., regeneration) from ongoing salvation (i.e., sanctification).

- In other words, one can be a believer without following Jesus in discipleship.
- Calvinism's T-U-L-I-P doctrine of salvation doesn't see that as possible and, consequently, synthesizes salvation and sanctification, making them inseparable.
- That is unbiblical.
- Hope-living has brought a much greater degree of attack upon my ministry, and not merely from Calvinists.
- In fact, many of those who have attacked are my old friends, non-Calvinists, who overlap with me in doctrinal beliefs more than ninety percent.
- It is merely this matter of kingdom preparedness which has caused a parting of ways.
- But they view it as so monumental that they can no longer fellowship with me.

I have been removed from boards and ministries and canceled as a conference speaker because of my adherence to and proclamation of kingdom inheritance truth.

- So beware! If you start living by hope, you will surely draw fire, even from friends and family, and that is always painful.
- *Some* who disagree with you (though not all) will think you are heretical.
- And isn't that ironic? Hope-living requires perseverance amidst suffering for Jesus' sake.
- The bottom line: be aware that if you believe and proclaim the necessity of kingdom preparedness, you will be attacked.
- Oh, and if you adopt love-living, as presented in the upcoming podcasts, you may as well start preparing your theological casket.
- Those who oppose universal reconciliation (including old friends) will vilify you and seek to bury you as an unorthodox liberal who has sold his soul to the devil.
- Nevertheless, find encouragement in the words of Peter:

#### 1 Pet. 1:3-9

- 3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
- 6-9 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you

rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

#### Jesus is watching, and you will surely be rewarded for remaining faithful to Him, for persevering to the very end.

- I can only imagine, based on what I now know from the Scriptures, that you will receive abundant entrance into the kingdom (2 Pet. 1:11), while those who persecute will have to give an account to Jesus for their mistreatment of you.
- As we move forward in future podcasts, I will unravel what I believe is a Scriptural understanding of the ultimate reconciliation of all mankind to God, for Jesus is the Savior of all.
- So buckle your seatbelt. We are in for a wild ride.
- I challenge you to “think on these things.”