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## **LIGHT IN THE PITCH-BLACK DARKNESS**

Following is an excerpt from The Hole In Our Gospel, by Richard Stearns, President of World Vision, U.S.: I don't think I've ever been to a place as spiritually dark as Gulu, in northern Uganda. Gulu is the center of more than 20 years of violent atrocities committed by the "Lord's Resistance Army" and its leader Joseph Kony, a monster who has declared himself to be the son of God. Their trademark is to kidnap children who are forced at gunpoint to commit murder, rape, and even acts of cannibalism. It is believed that Kony has kidnapped more than 38,000 children, who are often forced to hack their own brothers or sisters to death with a machete and to drink their blood. The girls, often just 12 or 13, are gang-raped and forced to become sex slaves and "wives" to the rebel commanders. In the past 20 years, some 1.5 million people have been driven from their land into refugee camps.

For more than a decade, World Vision has worked to rehabilitate the children who are rescued or who escape from the LRA rebels. These kids with unimaginable emotional wounds are feared as monsters and rejected by their own communities. Sometimes their own parents don't want them back. You can imagine the intense counseling, forgiveness, and job training these children need.

My wife, daughter and I, together with a few staff and about 40 children of various ages, waited in the compound for two of the boy soldiers, Michael and Joseph, who had been captured by the Ugandan army and were being brought to us. As they got out of the van, their eyes were hollow and vacant - eyes that had seen unspeakable things. Their souls seemed dead. Michael's left arm was withered, the result of a gunshot wound sustained in some past firefight. The LRA warned their child soldiers that they would be murdered by their own people if they ever tried to go home. They were also told that if they were taken to the World Vision camp they would be poisoned or tortured. They were terrified that day as they stepped out of the van.

The 40 other "children of war" - damaged souls all - surrounded them and began singing and clapping joyfully. These songs of praise to God were more beautiful than any choir of angels. Michael and Joseph were dumbstruck at this welcome, so different from what they expected. They began to see faces they knew, other kids who had escaped. A spark of light began to return to their hollow eyes. Hesitant smiles slowly turned up the corners of their mouths, as high fives and hugs were offered by this one and that. We moved into the chapel of corrugated tin and wooden benches, and a spontaneous worship service erupted as the songs of God's healing and forgiveness were sung over and over. *Welcome home, Michael and Joseph. You are home now.* The good news - the glorious, life-transforming gospel - washed over Michael and Joseph, and in that moment the unthinkable possibility of forgiveness broke over them like a new dawn. They could be forgiven, restored, made whole again. This was almost impossible to believe, the good news so overwhelmingly good.

Jesus, too, had been abducted. He, too, had been beaten and maimed. He, like them, had faced unspeakable evil - and defeated it. Jesus had made forgiveness possible, for Michael and Joseph, and for you and me.

## **WHEN IN A FIX, PHILIPPIANS 4:6!**

Are you good at memorizing poetry? I'm not either, but this is my favorite poem, and I'll bet if you tried real hard you could memorize it. It helps me remember one of my favorite scriptures, Phil. 4:6-7 - ***Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*** (NKJV) ***Be anxious for nothing,*** Or the NIV says, ***Do not be anxious about anything.*** Just trust your Heavenly Father, and rest in His mighty hands. I suggest you mark the place in your favorite Bible right now so you can find it quickly when you need it. While you are at it, mark Verses 4 through 8. Phil. 4:4-8.

I have my Bibles marked up something terrible: underlined passages with black or red ball-point, big arrows pointing to certain verses, asterisks, question marks (because I'm so dense I don't understand a lot of things in the Bible), lines around whole paragraphs, notes in the margins and on top of pages or among the footnotes, etc. Some people keep a journal, but I've tried it and it doesn't work for me. I keep my journal in the Bible, with all kinds of notes and reminders. But I digress.

This passage from God's word tells us that if we will obey God and do what He says, that we will not have anxiety but that we will live in a place of inner peace and rest. Do you believe that is really possible?

I have been listening to a set of CD's by Graham Cooke, and he says that for more than 20 years he has lived without any anxiety but with total peace and rest in his heart. This is the way he does it: He pictures himself living in a house with a central living room or den, and that is the place where he meets with Jesus, who lives there in that big room, and it is always a place of rest and peace. Surrounding this room are a number of doors leading into big closets. That's where Graham keeps his problems, concerns, trials, and prayer needs. When a big problem intrudes into his life, and there are a lot of them, he consigns it to one of the closets. When he chooses to deal with that problem, he goes into that closet and prays about it. He may pray for several minutes or for an hour or more until he feels he has dealt with it as he should before God. Then he leaves the problem in the closet, goes out of the closet and locks the door. He will not allow that problem to enter into his den, his heart, his place of rest and peace. In his den he is abiding with Christ, and Christ does not have any fear or anxiety whatsoever. He thinks this is how Jesus lived a life of serenity and peace in the midst of trials and turmoil, and he believes that Jesus gave him this revelation of how we could all live in the same way He did.

Graham says that peace and rest are the place of spiritual warfare and the place of victory over the enemy. We can't fight the devil when we are full of anxiety and fear. Fear is a sign of lack of trust in God! It is a sign that we feel that we have to win this battle. It is not pleasing to God for us to run around with stress and anxiety. Are we going to trust Him or not?

Hebrews 4:1 says, *Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.* Boy, this is important to God and to you and me. This should be a central matter in our Christian faith.

What are you going to do next time you are in a fix? **When in a fix, Philippians 4:6.** Prepare the big room in your heart as a place of peace and rest, and stop allowing the enemy to walk around in there with his dirty feet! Amen?

## **THE ONE WHO RESTRAINS EVIL**

The little letter of 2 Thessalonians addresses some subjects that are very obscure and difficult to comprehend such as The Return of the Lord; the Day of the Lord; the Man of Sin (called the Antichrist in the letters of John); the Mystery of Lawlessness; and the Restrainer. A few observations about the Restrainer:

2 Th. 2:6-7 reads - ***And now you know what is restraining, that he (the man of sin) may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.*** Following are some observations from the NKJV Study Bible: "**What is restraining**" is neuter, suggesting an impersonal force; while "**He who now restrains**" is masculine, suggesting a personal figure. The restrainer is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible. Apparently Paul taught the Thessalonians on this subject and assumed they understood what he was referring to. Since scripture does not make the subject clear to us, we can only speculate about it.

Proposed interpretations for the restraining power are: (1) the Holy Spirit, who keeps things under control until the ripe eschatological moment (2) God Himself, since it is evil that is being held back (3) the Jewish state at the time (4) the institution of human government.

David Platt, in a six hour streaming telecast that about 35 of us recently endured, I mean enjoyed, made the following offhand statement on this subject: "Although there is a tremendous amount of evil in the world, for all we know God is restraining 99.9 percent of the potential evil that would be happening without His restraining action." This really got me to thinking about God restraining evil, and following are some thoughts:

- The terrorists on 9/11 killed almost 3,000 innocent Americans in the Twin Towers, but I have read that fortunately ("fortunately") this event happened early in the morning before the great majority of people got to work, and that if the airplanes had been flown into the buildings a few hours later probably more than 10,000 people would have been killed.
- Remember the SUV in Times Square that failed to explode on New Years Eve?

- Remember Richard Reid whose shoe bomb failed to detonate in the airliner? (He is the maniac responsible for our having to remove our shoes every time we go through security. I have to forgive him again every time.)
- Can you remember a time when someone intended to do you harm (a mugger, rapist, credit card thief, angry drunk, etc.) and you were protected?
- Can you remember a time or times when you fantasized about doing evil: something dishonest; a violent act of revenge; a sexual adventure that if carried out would have been a disaster?

You can probably add to this list, but as I think about it, I can recall so many times when "something" or "Someone" must have restrained evil in my life or family. Thank you, Heavenly Father, for shielding and protecting us from evil. We are taught to pray in the Lord's Prayer: *"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."* The NIV reads, *"Deliver us from the evil one,"* which is the accurate translation from the Greek. Perhaps we should take this prayer much more seriously.

## CAN YOU TRUST YOUR CONSCIENCE?

Robert Morris suggests that the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" in the Garden of Eden is what we now call our conscience. That is to say, our conscience tells us what is right and wrong, but God never intended for us to live by our conscience but by His voice. When people are considering doing a certain thing, for instance, marrying an unbeliever, they usually say that they feel it is OK, it is all right with God, even though God specifically states in the Bible not to do it. (By the way, if it not right to marry an unbeliever, it is not right to date an unbeliever, because dating leads to romance, etc.)

Jesus said that *When He (the Holy Spirit) comes, He will convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment*; i.e., the Holy Spirit will tell us what is right and wrong, and His guidance will never disagree with the Word of God.

What if God told you to do something that violated your conscience? God asked Abraham to violate his conscience. (This is very tricky, because a lot of mentally sick and demonized people have murdered their children because "God" told them to do so.) Also God commanded Peter to do something that violated his conscience when in a vision a sheet was let down from heaven with unclean animals.....leading to Peter's opening the door of faith to the Gentiles. Again I would caution that Satan is a master at deceiving sincere Christians by imitating the voice of the Lord.

Our highest passion should be to get to know God's voice, to listen to His voice, and to obey His voice. A lot of church people want their pastor or some leader to get a word from God for them. In Exodus 20 the Hebrews said to Moses, *You speak with God for us*. When you receive a phone call, you can instantly recognize your spouse's voice or a friend's voice. We can grow to recognize the Lord's voice if we spend time with Him.

## SOMNAMBULISM

I saw a newspaper report yesterday that as many as 30% of our population were somnambulists. I thought, No way! Then today I saw another report on the same subject that said the figure was 3%, not 30%. That sounds more like it. (Just between you and me, have you ever had a problem with somnambulism?)

## HOPE VERSUS CYNICISM

Dallas Willard says, "Prior to Jesus the people of that age viewed hope as a weakness, a vulnerability of the naïve and simple-minded. For the followers of Jesus, however, hope distinguished those who knew God from those who did not." ***At that time, you were without Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.***

Cynicism and despair masquerade as hard thinking, realistic analysis and modesty, and dismiss hope as illusory, naïve and even arrogant. But truth be told, it is despair that has the facts wrong. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, and He will stand triumphant at the end. If we are in Christ, we will be standing with Him, so we need fear no person, thing, or devil in this world. ***I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others do who have no hope.*** (1 Thess. 4:13)

Beware cynicism! It is a sign of a hard, hopeless heart. It makes people sick of life and sick emotionally and physically. "When in a fix, Philippians 4:6". *Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Blessings to you all,

Glenn

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