



Glenn Brown

441 ½ Lark Drive
Grand Junction, Colorado 81504

telephone 970-434-1377

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MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Boy, did we ever get a wonderful Christmas present! God loved us so much that He sent His own beloved Son to be born among us on that first Christmas morning. Our great, great, great grand.....father, Adam, made a huge disaster of his opportunity (just as you and I have done over and over again), and God could have said, "Oops, that wasn't a very good idea!" as He wiped the slate clean. No, God had a better idea. He sent His Son to be the Second Adam and get it right. And then, oh my, God allowed His Son to pay the penalty for our sins on the cross, so that through that amazing sacrifice we could achieve God's original purpose and live in relationship with Him as His children.

Joseph Prince said on one occasion he was walking with his little girl for a considerable distance. The child grew weary and wanted to be carried by her daddy. He picked her up, she laid her head on his shoulder and immediately went to sleep. After awhile, since she had grown and added more pounds than he realized, his right arm went to sleep. Because of restricted circulation, his arm and hand got completely numb, and in a few minutes his arm started prickling as if pins were being stuck into it. He could have immediately stopped the pain by shifting his little girl to the other arm, but she was so tired and looked so peaceful in his arms that he didn't want to risk waking her up. He loved her so much that it pleased him to suffer for her in this little way.

It pleased God to offer up His Son for you and me. The Old Testament says again and again that when burnt offerings were offered on the altar, the aroma that went up to heaven was well pleasing to God. It pleased God to suffer for you and me. Jesus was our burnt offering. And although Jesus in his humanity expressed horror and revulsion in the garden at the prospect of bearing the sins of mankind on the cross ("*Let this cup pass from Me, yet not My will but your will be done*"), at the end He was pleased to go to the cross, "*Despising the shame, for the joy that was set before Him.*"

His joy was to please the Father and to win our redemption for eternity. It pleased our Lord Jesus to suffer for us in that way. The Good News is that God loves us that much. "*For God so loved the world...*" It is so amazing that many people say they can't believe it. But that is not true. It is not that they can't but that they won't believe it. By the grace of God you and I believe it, and so, for us, it is indeed a Merry Christmas.

THE PLACE OF PROMOTION

Do you know what the place of promotion is? Graham Cooke says it is the wilderness. What? The wilderness? Why, the wilderness is a terrible place. There are serpents, scorpions, and scorching sun. There is no water, shade, or safety. It is a place of temptation and testing, and God seems to be absent. But it is also a place of promotion.

By the deliverance of Moses, a type of Christ, the Israelites went from slavery to freedom. It was only a short journey, eleven days, from Egypt to Canaan, their promised land. But they had to pass through a burning desert called the wilderness. Nothing grows in the desert, so very soon the multitude of people ran out of food. They forgot how God delivered them from their captivity: the series of plagues on the Egyptians, the parting of the Red Sea, the pillar of cloud by day to shield them from the burning sun, etc. They were still slaves in their hearts, so they forgot and started complaining that God had brought them into the desert to die. God gave them manna from heaven, which He had planned to do all along, but they had failed the test.

God gave them another test (they ran out of water), and another, and another. Ten tests in all, and they failed every one of them. God wanted them to pass the test, so he gave them ten chances, and all they had to do was pass the test one time. But they would never trust God. They kept complaining and wanting to go back to slavery in Egypt. God still loved them and provided for them for forty years, but God realized that they would never trust Him, so they were disqualified from entering the promised land. All of the people of that generation died in the wilderness. The wilderness was not a punishment, it was a test, a great opportunity for promotion. Failing to enter the promised land, their destiny, was the punishment.

After Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit came down upon Him in the form of a dove, and He heard the Father speaking from heaven: "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" Immediately, the Bible says, Jesus was led into the wilderness. Was God displeased with His Son? Of course not. God had just affirmed His pleasure in His Son. God led Jesus into the wilderness in order for Him to pass the test so that He could be promoted into His destiny. Jesus passed the test. The devil tempted Him three times, and Jesus resisted those temptations with the Word of God. Then Jesus was

promoted, He returned "in the power of the Spirit to Galilee." (Lk.4:14) God doesn't trust us with much of His power until we pass the test because we would go into pride.

If you have accepted Christ as your Savior and Lord, then God has delivered you from enslavement to Pharaoh (the devil), led you through the Red Sea (the waters of baptism, symbolizing death and resurrection), and set you on a path to the promised land (your destiny, the purpose for which you were created, the place of rest and peace). But first you must be led through the wilderness (this will happen again and again on your journey). If you pass the tests prepared for you, then you will be promoted. The wilderness is not a punishment, it is an opportunity. You and I should rejoice every time we find ourselves in such a place. James 1:2 says, "*Count it all joy, my brethren, when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience*" in order to make you mature so that God can safely promote you. If God promotes you before you mature in the faith, you and your ministry will be destroyed. How many Christians do you know who were promoted beyond the level of their character and soon fell on their faces?

The wilderness tests you go through are designed specifically for you, but some of the tests are common: (1) in the face of failure and pain, will you trust God and not murmur and complain? (2) overcoming pride and selfish ambition (2) lusts of the flesh (a big percentage of Christian men are stuck on pornography and perversion and will not move on to their destiny unless they pass the test of purity) (3) the love of money, security in money instead of security in God (4) all kinds of addictions and idols (substance abuse, etc.) (5) the test of controlling your tongue (6) the test of loving the unlovable (many times this involves members of your family).

Remember, these tests are designed to lead to your promotion. The tests are designed for you to pass, not fail, and God will help you if you will cry out to Him. That, in fact, is the purpose of the test: so that you will grow less dependent on yourself and more dependent on God. If you have failed a test, don't despair, God is merciful and will continue to give you that test again and again until you pass, or until you show that you will never trust Him and He has to disqualify you from entering into your destiny.

How do you know if you are passing your tests?

- You are entering into **rest** and **peace**. Each time you get fearful, anxious, and frustrated, you must quickly return to the place of rest and peace.
- You are less independent and more dependent, totally dependent, on God.
- You are growing to enjoy the wilderness because you know promotion is coming.
- You are abiding in Christ and walking in love. You absolutely refuse to allow resentment and bitterness toward anyone to separate you from your Heavenly Father.
- You are really getting to love yourself in a healthy way. No more anger and bitterness and harsh words to yourself about yourself. (How dare you speak evil of someone that God loves so greatly!) You come to know and are absolutely certain that God loves you with an

everlasting love.

- You lose your fear of people, the future, and death. "*To live is Christ, and to die is gain.*"

Are we going to pass all of these tests perfectly? "*Brothers, I don't count myself as having attained, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*" (Phil. 3:13)

"WHY ARE YOU DEPRESSED, O MY SOUL?"

You probably know that this is a misquotation. The word depressed is not in the Bible, but the word downcast, or the reference to loss of courage is there in many places.

The Psalmist talks to himself and says, "*Why are you cast down, o my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?*" (Ps. 42 & Ps. 43) Then he gives himself good advice: "*Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.*"

The word downcast is a word from shepherding and describes a specific condition. When a sheep had a full growth of wool that needed to be sheared (wool in this analogy represents sin), sometimes the sheep would wander into a place, perhaps hidden by bushes or woods, and lie down. Then, because of uneven terrain, the sheep might roll over onto its back and be unable to get up. When a sheep lies on its back for even a few hours, the gastric juices become toxic and the sheep will die. The sheep can do nothing to help itself in that situation. If the shepherd does not find the sheep, turn it over, and help it to stand on its feet, it will die.

Since you know the Good Shepherd, I don't think this little story needs any elaboration. You might meditate on it for awhile.

COUNTERFEIT

- Definition:** 1. An imitation made to deceive, a forgery.
2. An imposter, a cheat, a sham, a pretender.

COUNTERFEIT LOVERS

In the last two months three different ladies shared a similar story with me, a story that I have heard many times in past years. It goes something like this: "I waited for many years to meet the right man. I didn't want to have happen to me what happened to my mother. So I prayed for wisdom and waited. Then I met a man. He seemed to be the right one. He told me he was a Christian, that he prayed, that he loved the Lord. He went to church with me and seemed so sincere. I sensed way down deep that something was wrong, but he was so convincing that I finally said yes to his proposal and we were married. Almost immediately everything changed. He stopped going to church. He became selfish and cruel. When I confronted him about the change I was seeing, he laughed at me. He ridiculed my faith and my God and said he had never believed that foolishness, but that he had decided to marry me and knew he would have to play a little game to get what he wanted.

My husband and I had children. He fell into alcoholism and

infidelity and was as cruel to the children as he was to me. When I sought help from my church, I was told again and again that God hates divorce and that I must submit to my husband no matter what. There came a time when I literally feared for my life (or the life of my children), and I had to run away. My life has been very difficult since I divorced my husband."

Sometimes the story is that the husband seized all of the family's assets and almost literally kicked the wife out of their home. Sometimes the husband also steals the children to his side, or he might buy them with money. The wife in these stories is left with nothing. I have heard these stories many times. Sometimes the roles are reversed and it is the wife who is the counterfeit in the story.

These stories break my heart, and I exhort the church to be very careful about judging and condemning the victims in these situations. Please read Chapter 24, "**Wife Abuse**," in my website and think about this matter. It is so common in our society and in the church of our day that we need to carefully consider what perspective we should have as Christians. We need to pray for our children and teach them how to determine the character of the person they are thinking of marrying. Second only to their decision to follow Jesus, it is the most important decision of their lives, and they need our help.

COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANS

The villain in the above story is a counterfeit Christian. Unfortunately, counterfeit Christians are not uncommon in the church. There may be some in your fellowship. Some counterfeits are even leaders in the church: counterfeit deacons, elders, pastors, missionaries, prophets, bishops. "Why, Glenn," you may be thinking, "that is a terrible thing to say!" But I am not the first to say it. Jesus, Peter, Paul, and Jude all warned us to beware these counterfeits in the church. I have a long teaching on this subject, but I am going to present a brief overview and leave it to you to study this subject in Scripture if you are interested.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned about **false prophets**. (Matthew 7:15-20) Following this warning is Jesus' warning to us all that whoever hears Jesus' teachings and "does not do them" will fall in the coming judgment. (Matthew 7:21-27) Jesus also warns about false prophets in Matthew 24:10 and following.

Paul warns the church about **false apostles** (missionaries, leaders) in 2 Corinthians, chapters 10 and 11. Paul indicates that some of these false apostles pretended to be servants of Christ, that they had been imprisoned and beaten for their faith, etc, but he says that they exalted themselves, that they were preaching "another Jesus and a different gospel," and that they were greedy for money and fame. (Consider some television preachers.)

Peter warns about **false teachers (and pastors)** in 2 Peter, chapter 2. He says they "introduce destructive heresies," even denying that Christ's atoning death on the cross is what purchased salvation for us. He says they are sensual and lustful (for instance, telling people there is nothing contrary in Scripture regarding fornication, adultery, and homosexuality); they are greedy for money; they despise authority (especially the authority of the Bible, as well as other authority); they are

arrogant, etc. Only two of the points Peter describes have to do with the content of their teaching, while another nine or ten describe flaws of character.

Paul warns about **false pastors and elders** in Acts 20:17 and following. He calls these men "savage wolves," implying they will attack the flock with heresy, greed, sensuality, and arrogance.

Note: in addition to these specific warnings, most of the New Testament epistles were written in part to correct false teachings and false practices, including:

1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, 1 & 2 Peter, 1 & 2 John, and Jude. (I suggest that as you read through the Bible, you read the introduction to each book in your study Bible for a brief explanation of the purpose of the book, the author, etc).

How do we recognize false Christians and especially false leaders? Jesus doesn't say that we will know them "by the gift of discernment." (We can be mistaken or deceived.) He says in Matthew 7 that "You will know them by their fruits." That means, first, that you will recognize that their teaching is not biblical, not Scriptural. We must know the Bible in order to recognize true from false doctrine. Second, it means that we must know our leaders well enough to see how they are living, how they treat their families, how they treat people in the church and outsiders, how they talk, etc. It is impossible to inspect someone's fruits without knowing them or at least knowing people who know them intimately. This is also important for our daughters and sons when they are considering marriage. They must spend sufficient time with the person to really get to know who they are. It is not easy to identify a counterfeit, but it is very important or the Bible would not devote so much attention to it.

I bring this teaching not to make us suspicious of leaders and other Christians, but to exhort all of us to be very careful about whom we trust as leaders of the church or even as friends. No one is perfect, and we need to have grace toward one another, but the Bible makes a clear distinction between true and false Christians. Remember that false church leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees, were the ones that in their hearts hated God and crucified the Lord.

MINISTRY

I returned from a short trip to Mexico on December 8th and want to give a report: Pepe Quiroz, his son, Israel, (and the staff of Alfa & Omega, their ministry center at Tlalmanalco, near the volcano Popocatepetl, an hour's drive from the airport in Mexico City) have taken up a huge ministry responsibility during the past year. This is how it came about:

A multi-millionaire in the U.S. is a faithful Christian of the Baptist variety. A couple of years ago he decided to spend a bunch of money to purchase some sites to evangelize young people. He bought twenty sites in different parts of the world, including two sites in Mexico. The type ministry he and his advisors decided to use was birthed in the Philippines and has been very successful. One of the two camps that the Baptists purchased in Mexico is named Tierra-Alta, and is located about four hours south of Mexico City. It was purchased from an elderly Mexican industrialist and has fabulous facilities: 28

perfectly groomed acres, a huge main casa with multiple bedrooms and banos (I suffered for my faith by staying in one of these bedrooms), huge dormitories for men and women, a large, beautiful meeting hall, swimming pools, lakes, etc, etc.

The gentleman who bought the two facilities in Mexico wanted to pay the way for some Mexican pastors to fly to the Philippines and be trained in this evangelistic method. But a problem developed: The focus of this ministry is street kids. There are over two million street kids in Mexico. They have been abandoned, thrown out of their homes, or run away from an abusive situation. They are involved in drugs, gangs, violence, stealing, prostitution, and so on. They are like the lepers of society. They are feared and shunned by society and by the church for the most part. There were no Mexican pastors who volunteered to receive the training and work with these kids. None! They felt that their congregations would not accept these kids, and they didn't want to spend their time and energy on a bunch of tattooed, face-ringed, drug addicted, Hepatitis-infected losers.

(Before we get too self-righteous, we might ask ourselves if we would want to work with these kids. Are we working with people like that now?)

After trying to recruit pastors for about a year, and with these expensive facilities sitting unused, the Baptist hierarchy decided to ask Pepe Quiroz if he would be willing to lead this youth camp, and if he could abide by their stipulations. Pepe is a nationally known evangelist because of his many campaigns and his radio and television programs, but he is a Charismatic! That is somewhat of a problem for Baptists, but Pepe is a loving, inclusive type guy. Their stipulations were: (1) No talk about the baptism of the Holy Spirit (2) No teaching about or talking in tongues (3) Everyone who is saved must immediately be baptized. Pepe was delighted to be given this opportunity and accepted their proposal. They sent Pepe and his son Israel to the Philippines to learn the ropes.

It was a marriage made in heaven. Pepe loves the Baptists, they love him, and they are delighted with his camps. During the past summer, they held 43 camps for 12,000 street kids. About 5,500 accepted Christ as their Savior. Hallelujah! The Baptists pay for everything: the 10 or 11 busses used to carry the kids to and fro, all the food, cost of materials, etc. The hard work is to recruit pastors and churches to help with rounding up the street kids and enfold the saved kids into their churches when they return. Pepe and his staff train pastors and leaders in this hard work also. You can hardly imagine how much work this is.

I won't describe in detail how the two-day camps work. Included in the event are: treating the kids with love and respect, much humor, dividing the kids up into competitive teams, loud music (Oh, boy!), involving the kids in fun activities, testimonies by former street kids and drug addicts, entertainment by break-dancers, a killer obstacle course with a 10-foot deep pit with black mud in the bottom, climbing walls, a big lake with those revolving puzzles to run across, and heart-felt evangelist calls to accept the Lord, etc. Of the 380 kids who attended our two-day camp, over 125 accepted Jesus.

Pepe is also getting invitations to lead mini-camps in the public schools! We attended one on our last day in Mexico.

Schools, parents, and society don't have any answers for the youth of our day. They are lost and falling into destruction. Jesus is the answer! But we can't expect these kids to come to a traditional church service and sit in rows and listen to a sermon that does not fit their lives. We have to find out from God how to rescue them, then we have to be willing to spend ourselves in doing it. Pepe is also getting invitation from other countries (pastors from Peru, Brazil, and Argentina attended the public school camp and want him to come help their kids).

Pepe's goal is to recruit and train others in leading these camps. My goal is to help him raise some money to do this great work. If you would like to send some money for Pepe, send it to my Vineyard church marked for Jose Quiroz. My goal also is to get some folks from my church and other churches to go down and see one of these camps when they start again next March so that we can use some of these methods in reaching the lost kids of our cities. Are you interested in going down for a few days and seeing it for yourself? We really had a great time. Please pray about it.

God Bless,

Glenn

Web-site: www.glennbrownministries.com



"A photo taken at Camp Tierra-Alta, Mexico, on Dec 5th,

I would like to thank each of you for your support of this ministry.
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