



Glenn Brown

441 ½ Lark Drive

Grand Junction, Colorado 81504

Telephone 970-434-1377

Email casabrn441@gmail.com

Website www.glennbrownministries.com

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IS IT WELL WITH YOUR SOUL?

(You can find this story on Google: "Hugh Bonneville, It is Well with My Soul," backed by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.)

In November, 1873, an ocean liner set sail from New York bound for Europe with 313 passengers on board. In a few days it would arrive in Europe just in time for Christmas in Paris. Anna Spafford and her four girls were among the passengers. They had come from Chicago: Annie, aged 11; Margaret Lee - 9; Bonnie - 5; and Tenita - 2. Their father, Horatio, had intended to sail with them but was detained by business. He assured his family he would follow on another ship in a few days for a wonderful Christmas in Paris.

On November 22nd, at 2:00 in the morning, the passengers were jolted awake - they had collided with another ship, an iron-hulled Scottish clipper. Lifeboats quickly filled, many passengers leapt into the icy waters. Anna tried desperately to keep her children together, but the two eldest became separated in the confusion. Just 12 minutes after the impact a wave washed over the deck and Anna was drawn under together with her two youngest daughters. She held onto five-year old Bessie until her strength gave out. Her last memory was of two-year-old Teneta, in her lace nightgown, torn from her grasp; getting smaller and smaller until she too disappeared.

Later, the crew found Anna unconscious, floating on a wooden plank. When the ship docked in Wales, Anna sent a telegram to her husband. It read, "Saved alone. What shall I do?"

Horatio immediately sailed from New York. He wrote to a friend, "One thing has become clear, I must not lose faith." Four days into his voyage, the captain summoned Mr. Spafford to the foredeck. By his estimate, they were nearing the very place where Anna's ship had gone down, taking all their precious girls.

But Horatio refused to look down. "I did not think of our dear ones there," he later recounted. Instead, he gazed out across the rolling waves into the moonlit sky. There and then he began to formulate a simple expression of his faith, a verse that became a hymn.

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

Only a few days earlier, when Anna awoke from the terrible accident, she thought, "What is life worth now? How can I live without my children?" But then it was as if she heard a voice in her heart: "You are spared for a purpose, you have a work to do."

Once they had returned to Chicago, Horatio sought the support and prayer of a congregation to help him face the dire financial straits the world was in. Anna gave birth to a boy and then a girl, but at age 3 that son succumbed to scarlet fever. Then a year later another daughter was born. Only two of their seven children lived to maturity. But the Spaffords never yielded hope.

In 1881, the family moved to Jerusalem and established there an American colony not far from Bethlehem. Their purpose was to serve people of all backgrounds, relieving their poverty and disease. Seven years later, Horatio died. Grieving once again, Anna Spafford had every reason to give up, but she would not. She found the strength to move forward and to turn outward - to continue the work.

In time, their daughter Berta expanded the family's humanitarian work with the intent of rescuing those who had experienced the shipwrecks of life as they had. During World War 1, she had led the way in organizing soup kitchens for refugees. She also oversaw hospitals for wounded soldiers on all sides of the conflict. One Christmas eve, Berta met a Bedouin man, his ailing wife and their newborn son that had traveled to Jerusalem by donkey. Like another couple from long ago, there was no place for them to stay. By the next morning, the mother had died and Berta was asked to take care of the child.

She named the little boy Noel, and within a week she had taken in two more orphaned babies. And so began the Spafford family's most enduring work, The Hospital for Children. She said, "We make no distinction on nationality or creed, the only requirement being that people need our help." Some of the family's charity work continues to today in The Children's Center that bears the family name.

For nearly 150 years, millions have been encouraged and blessed by Horatio's hymn, but most have not been aware of the circumstances in which it was written. The words echo with the words of Christmas about a child born in Bethlehem. With God's help, the human spirit can rise above sorrow. Hope can heal the wounded soul.

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.*

*And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back like a scroll.
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend
Even so, it is well with my soul.*

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THE DANGER OF DECEPTION!
“WORDS FROM GOD” THAT ARE NOT

The Bible shows from beginning to end that God speaks, communicates directly with people. No one who believes in the Bible could deny that. But does God still speak to people today? Surprisingly, there are some Christians, even some churches, that believe that God spoke to us through the Bible but He no longer speaks to us in any other way. That is clearly unbiblical. Jesus said, *My sheep know my voice.* (John 10) We believe that God speaks to His people through the Holy Bible, but also through a “still, small voice;” through impressions, dreams, visions, prophetic words, etc. Paul declares that God has given to the church certain gifts that allow us to receive words directly from Him: prophecies, words of wisdom, words of knowledge, discerning of spirits, etc. (I Corinthians 12) We certainly don’t believe that God “adds to the Bible” or gives instructions that contradict the clear teachings in the Bible. And God warns us to “test” words that we believe are from God so that we won’t be deceived.

Many years ago when I was a pastor, on a certain occasion I believed that God was leading me to make a change in the practices of our church. I believed that because of a number of different things that had occurred, including a “prophetic word” that I was sure came from God. Without attempting to confirm this supposed guidance and in an inappropriate way, I tried to force this new path on the church. The result was a lot of hurt feelings, division and problems.

Later, as I tried to figure out what went wrong and to reconcile this situation with the Lord, I can remember saying to Him: “Lord, I confess that I made a really bad mistake. Obviously, it has caused a lot of suffering for the good people in this church, but I was sincere in thinking I was being obedient to you, so that makes it OK, doesn’t it?” Do you know what God said in answer to my prayer? Nothing. He was silent.

It took me a while to figure that out. (I’m not exactly brilliant and am a slow learner.) The fact of the matter is that I was deceived. I was very sincere in what I thought I had “heard” God tell me to do, but I was wrong. And what is God’s attitude toward us when we are deceived and make really bad decisions? Is God sympathetic and understanding so long as we are sincere? Gosh, you don’t have to look farther than the 3rd chapter of Genesis to find a story about a couple of people who got seriously deceived. God didn’t act very understanding

about their deception. In fact, He put a curse on them that has been reverberating to this day. I’m not saying that God isn’t forgiving, He certainly is. But there are consequences to being deceived, and God does not shield us from those consequences.

Being sincere is irrelevant when you are sincerely wrong. The Muslim fundamentalists that flew airliners into the World Trade Center on 9-11, killing themselves along with almost 3,000 innocent people, were as sincere as one can get, but I don’t think God looked kindly on them just because they were sincere.

God does give prophetic words, dreams and visions. That was true all through the Bible and is still true today. But many people are misled by false prophecies (as we saw happen recently in the political arena), and I think we must be much more careful to test “prophecies” and “words from God,” and to hold those prophets to account who give false prophecies.

It certainly appears that the world has entered a season of trouble and suffering, and that seems to be true especially for believers. As trials and troubles increase, I believe there will be a corresponding increase in all sorts of prophecies - words of warning or direction which may or may not actually be from God. It will be imperative in these coming days that the church be able to separate the true from the false.

BEWARE FALSE PROPHETS

Because most American Christians haven’t heard any teaching or preaching on the subject, they are usually unaware of the many teachings and warnings in the New Testament about false teachings and false teachers, false prophets, apostles, pastors, etc. Jesus teaches about it in each of the four Gospels, and there are specific teachings and warnings, sometimes whole chapters, in the writings of Paul, Peter, John and Jude. In addition, most of the New Testament epistles were written in whole or 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. Wouldn’t you say that God knows this is a crucially important subject for believers?

Consider what Jesus said about false prophets in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7 (selected verses):

Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits....Every tree that does not bear good fruits is cut down and thrown into the fire.... Many will say to me in that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, cast out demons and perform miracles in your name?” Then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.”

This warning from Jesus has always been troubling and even intimidating to many. Some of the questions it

raises, along with brief answers follow. (The answers are too brief, and I trust you will dig into scripture, study Bibles and commentaries for more satisfactory answers.)

- (1) Is Jesus teaching that people are saved by their good works rather than by faith in His finished work on the cross? Absolutely not. But He is clearly saying that if a person is truly saved that good works must and will follow. *Every tree that doesn't bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.* That verse makes me tremble for the great number of church folks who apparently believe that since they went forward at an invitation 20 years ago and participate in church events when it is convenient that all is well between them and God,,,,,,but in the way they live there is no discernible difference between them and their unbelieving neighbors.
- (2) These false prophets are ministering "In the name" of Christ, so are they believers or not? We can't be sure. Perhaps they are backslidden believers or perhaps they are mimicking what they have seen other prophets do, as the sons of Sceva copied Paul in Acts 19:14.
- (3) If God regards them as false, why is He giving them authority to prophesy, perform miracles (of healing, presumably), and cast out demons? Good question. Maybe because He honors faith by whomever, and surely for the benefit of the folks who are receiving the ministry.
- (4) But if a "prophet" is doing "mighty works in the name of Christ," doesn't their success seem to validate them as being from God to the public and to the church? It does seem to validate them, and this is the very reason Jesus is teaching us to beware, that things are not always as they seem.
- (5) The most important point about this teaching is that man looks on the outward appearance of things, but God looks on the heart.

There is a certain well known preacher who has been in public ministry for decades. He is a fixture on Christian television, has written books, written and sung Christian hymns. He knows the Bible and is an excellent speaker. But I noticed years ago that a common thread runs through his ministry. No matter what subject he is teaching about, his sermons end something like this: "You have to have faith in Christ, my friends. And faith is more than just believing something in your mind. It requires an action. And as I was praying for you last night, God showed me that He is going to give the gift of faith to certain people who hear this broadcast. God is going to speak to a certain few to step out in faith and send me a thousand dollars. And do you know what will happen if you do that? God is going to multiply it back to you many times. And God is going to save that son or

daughter that is lost in the far country and that you have been weeping and praying for. I know it's a sacrifice, but will you trust God and step out in faith so He can bless you?"

Doesn't that touch your heart? I Googled that man's name and learned that he lives in a mansion worth maybe \$10 million, and lives an exorbitant lifestyle. I believe the guy is a false prophet. You might consider that judgmental on my part, but why did Jesus give us all these teachings and warnings in the Bible unless it is to equip us to evaluate teaching and leaders in the church? I am not judging his soul, I am judging his actions, his lifestyle and his character, which I believe we all are expected and obligated to do.

More teaching about false teaching and false leaders next month.

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FEBRUARY 20, 1927

Was the date an elderly guy was born. Holy cow, 94! It's hard to comprehend. The year Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic. Calvin Coolidge was president. Model T Fords cost \$260 and gas was 21 cents a gallon. (But adjusted for inflation that equals \$3.17, so gas is actually cheaper now.)

2020 was difficult for me, too. Had another heart blockage, but they were unable to put in a stent because of calcification. (You've heard of a heart of stone?) And some other physical problems. I told my doctor I've lost confidence in him. I've been seeing him for almost 30 years and my body is falling apart. He wouldn't give me a refund.

But I am blessed beyond measure. I'm still able to walk with a cane at the grocery store. But little old men and women on crutches scare me when they go zipping past me. I can still drive my car, but I try to be much more careful. And I go to the gym three days a week for a light, very light workout. Someone said, "When you stop moving, you start dying." A great blessing is that my children and grand-children and great-grand-children all love me and stay in close contact. The greatest blessing is that the Lord loves me and stays in close contact.

And as I was praying for you last night, the Lord told me that if you will send me \$1,000.....oops! Almost slipped into my bad preacher persona.

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WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ABOUT THE BIBLE?

It has been said, "What you believe about the Bible is the most important fact about your life." I think that may well be true.

What you believe about the Bible affects everything:

- The way you treat your spouse
- The way you treat your children

- Your attitude toward your job, your boss, your employees, your neighbors and strangers
- Your morality
- The way you spend your money
- Your attitude toward yourself, your purpose
- And of course your understanding and relationship with God

Use your imagination for a moment:

You are driving with your family through a big city late at night. You are on your way to a relative's funeral, and you have been delayed because of terrible weather and icy roads. Suddenly and inexplicably, your car dies. You try your cell phone, but there is no service. The streets are deserted, but then you see five husky young men walking down the middle of the street toward your car.

If you had your choice, which would you prefer?

1. The guys have just left a bar
2. They have just left a gang party
3. They have just left a very contentious political meeting
4. They have just left a Bible study

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

The year 2021 is a milestone for many grieving parents. We don't want to let go of 2020 if our child was alive that year. It's hard to move on to a new year when we don't want to let go of the last. That's one of many reasons we need to meet, even if we are required to sit several feet apart.

We help each other to not give up, because we understand that what seemed impossible in the beginning of the grief journey can slowly become possible. We need people and a safe place to openly speak about our challenges and pain. We need a place of honest, gut level sharing, a place of encouragement. Each time we meet, we become stronger as we gain more tools for survival.

Your words may help someone else who is struggling, though you may not even know your words made a difference. Sometimes just one sentence will be remembered, and give a fellow traveler the courage they need for the next day.

(Thanks to my friend, Alice Monroe)

FOUR STAGES FROM BABY TO ADULT

(Borrowed from Robert Morris' message on TBN)

STAGE 1 - GIVE ME!

We all start here physically and spiritually. For a baby it is natural and necessary and is in no way guilty or sinful. Neither parents nor God are upset when babies demand, "Give me!"

Marriage nearly always starts here: emotional, physical, sexual, social, financial. "Give me what I need

to be happy and complete." But it is impossible for one human being to completely meet the needs of another. It

simply can't be done. And if people don't start maturing, after ten years or so one or both decide to give up and move on. Marriage was created by God to kill your selfishness, to help you die to self. And if marriage doesn't do it, children surely will, if we allow the process to work out.

STAGE 2 - USE ME!

This is a good thing to say to God, but new believers usually say this to God when they are still very immature, and so their motivation can be mixed. "Use me, O God, so I can be significant and can be seen by others to be significant."

Did you realize that the word "ambition" is not in the original Bible. In fact, there is no such word in Greek. There is a compound Greek word that translates, "selfish ambition," and it is listed as one of the works of the flesh, or our fallen nature. (From Glenn: This was a revelation to me, and I have done some serious thinking about this relative to the values and worldview we have in America.)

Paul writes in Philippians 2:3 - *Do nothing out of selfish ambition, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, Who, being in very nature God....made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant....and being in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.*

STAGE 3 - SEARCH ME!

David cries out in Psalm 139, *Search me, O God, and show me what is wrong with me!* (Paraphrase)

You can't fix your husband, your wife. You can't even fix yourself. Only God can fix us. I'm responsible for my actions, not someone else. We have to do our part, and it's hard, painful work, but ultimately it is God who heals, restores, saves, matures. *God will bring to completion that which he has begun in you.* (Phil. 1:6)

I would like to thank each of you for your support of this ministry. If any of you want to receive tax credit for your financial contributions, you may send them to:

CANYON VIEW VINEYARD CHURCH
736 24 ½ Road Grand Junction, Co. 81505

