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“WITHOUT EXCUSE”

The Bible reveals that God created man uniquely: (a) in the image of God (b) for relationship with Himself (c) with free will (d) therefore, life for man is a test. For instance, in Deuteronomy 8:2, Moses says to the people: *The Lord led you during these forty years in the wilderness to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.* And in 1 Corinthians 3:13: *(On the Day of judgment) each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.*

Since life is a test, it follows that at the end of every life there will be a final judgment. God is a good God (the word “good” itself derives from the word “God”). *God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. God is love. Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good.* God's judgment, therefore, will be fair.

From the beginning, God is revealed in the Bible not only as our Creator, but as the God who loves us and desires to rescue us from our sin and destruction. God is not impassive, remote and detached from mankind, like a fat Buddha with a Mona Lisa smile. God's love is burning, emotional and personal, like the love of a newly married groom for his bride. God even sent his Son who taught us to know Him as our heavenly Father. The Bible also states that from the beginning God has made himself known inwardly to every person (1) by the conscience, by an inward knowing (2) by the outward evidence of an orderly and amazing creation:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest (evident) in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead (divine nature), so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:18-20, NKJV)

The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard, yet their message has gone throughout the earth, and their word to all the world. (Psalm 19:1-4, NLT)

We might look at these scriptures and at our own life experience and conclude that, Yes, I can agree that people are probably dimly aware that a supreme being exists, and, Yes, people should be able to look at the cosmos and figure out that it was created by a Designer, but most people don't seem to get it, and most people aren't convinced that there was Designer, and they have a great variety of explanations of how the world came to be. And many of us believers can remember the struggle we had with the Genesis story of creation, and perhaps we are still not entirely convinced. So how is it true that all men have an inner and an outer knowing about the existence of God?

It is my belief about all of this (God's communication to man's mind and conscience about His existence and something of His nature and purpose) that it is not a rare or random experience but is a given, a constant, from the very beginning of every human life to its end.

Is it a rare thing to experience the rising of the sun? To awake to an awareness of the mystery and miracle of our existence? To sense the difference between right and wrong, good and evil? To sense that there is more to life than what we see on the surface?

I believe that there is an inner awareness of God in our conscience and as an intuition in our mind from the beginning and that God periodically re-tweets us in various ways to try to get our attention. Stop and think about the times that God “spoke” to you in some way prior to your becoming a Christian: through a sudden thought or impression, through a dream or a vision, through someone's casual words, through the witness of a stranger, through the love and encouragement of family or friends, through a quiet moment of awareness.

Ex.: My daughter said that when she was a child and a teen she can remember lying awake at night and wondering, “Why are we here?”

Ex.: One of my sons said that he seemed to always know there was a God, and he knew there was something important he should be doing about it.

Ex.: Attending church was the normal experience in my childhood, and I can also remember numerous times when people, even strangers, spoke to me about Jesus.

Ex.: During my years of rebellion, I can remember a couple of times when I was far from God and thinking about taking a certain sinful course when I “heard” a warning inside that was as loud and clear as a human voice. Really!

Ex. I remember another time when I was in my 20’s when I was driving on a highway in Fort Worth during a rain storm. Because of an accident the highway was reduced to one lane and traffic was backed up for maybe a half-mile. A man in an old car had stopped to allow the traffic in my lane to move into his lane. As I passed him, I saw a loving smile on his face, and in some mysterious fashion I perceived that God was in that man. I knew at that moment that God was speaking to me and calling me. I didn’t do anything about it at that time, but it was so real that it has stayed with me for 65 years. I feel sure that there were many other experiences that I have completely forgotten.

Ex.: What moments, words, dreams, experiences do you remember? I think the problem is that we have forgotten most of those experiences..... for the following reason.

The evil birds

Jesus’ primary way of teaching in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke was through parables, some forty of them. Only seven of the forty are mentioned in all three Gospels, and one of them is the most important. The “parable of the soils” or “the farmer scattering seeds” is found in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8, and in Mark 4:13 Jesus says to his disciples, *If you can’t understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables.* So this parable seems to be the most important and the key to them all.

Jesus says in Luke 8:5, *A farmer went out to plant his seed. As he scattered it across his field, some seed fell on a footpath, where it was stepped on, and the birds ate it.....* Later, when Jesus explained the meaning of this parable to his disciples, *He said: This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is God’s word. The seeds that fell on the footpath represent those who hear the message, only to have the devil come and take it away from their hearts and prevent them from believing and being saved.*

Jesus told us something tremendously significant in this parable: That we are living in a universe of invisible realities, that God loves us and is scattering seeds of truth and life, and that there is a devil that immediately steals those seeds so that we can’t reflect on them. This is why when we have a dream or vision that we think is significant we should immediately write it down. It will fade quickly, it will be stolen by the evil birds. Could this even be the reason we can’t remember what the preacher spoke about last Sunday a few days later?

God also judges nations

God is sovereign over all the earth, and He judges nations as well as individuals. Genesis 13:13 says, *The men of Sodom were sinning greatly against the Lord.* Although Sodom didn’t have much light, they had enough light to know that their gross immorality was evil, and they had Lot living a life of righteousness among them. And notice that God said that they were sinning “against the Lord.” God considers all sin to be sin against Him. The ominous thing about this is that Jesus said that where the Gospel has been preached and people do not hear it and repent that, *Even wicked Sodom will be better off on judgment day.* (Luke 10:12-16) What does this say about America where we have many churches in every town, and where we have Christian proclamation on radio and TV, and where we have wickedness that would make Sodom blush and where we have had some 60 million abortions!

Ex.: In March, 2011, Japan had a massive earthquake and tsunami that took some 16,000 lives and cost over 360 billion dollars. At that time, I heard a lady speaking on Christian television. She said when she saw the videos of the massive destruction she started weeping for the Japanese people. She said she cried out, “Oh, God, those poor people! Most of them have never heard the Gospel. They didn’t even know about You!” She said she was shocked when she immediately heard God speak to her in response: “They knew!”

Friends, the Bible declares that everyone knows there is a God. If they will take that knowledge, even though it is dim, and reach out to God, He will respond to them and lead them on to a saving faith. God promises in Jeremiah, *If you will seek me with all your heart, you will find me*. And Timothy says, *God wants everyone to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth*. I believe that when each and every person stands before God in judgment, if they have not responded to God during their lifetime, He will show them a video of the times, perhaps hundreds or thousands of times, when He spoke to them in some way and they willfully said, “No!” and turned away from Him. The Bible clearly teaches that if you don’t come to God in this life, you will be without excuse.

KING MANASSEH SHOULD GO TO HELL!

The Bible records the history of all the kings of Israel and Judah over a period of some 600 years, and it gives God’s evaluation of each king. A few of the kings were good: David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah, for example. Most were bad: Saul, Zimri, Omri, Ahab, and so on. But King Manasseh took the cake. His father was a good king, King Hezekiah, so Manasseh had no excuse for turning to the dark side. And he reigned in Judah for 55 years! That was longer than any other king. And he was a bad dude, oh, my goodness! His bad deeds are recorded in 2 Kings 21:1-11 and in 1 Chronicles 33:1-20. Listen to the things he did:

He rebuilt the pagan shrines that his father had torn down; he constructed altars for Baal and Asherah; he bowed down and worshipped the sun and moon; he sacrificed his own sons by burning them alive to demons; he practiced sorcery, witchcraft and divination; he consulted mediums and psychics; he set up a carved idol in the temple; he murdered many innocent people in Jerusalem; he led the people of Judah and Jerusalem to do more evil than the pagan nations around them.

When I first read through the Bible and read about how evil Manasseh was, I couldn’t understand why God allowed him to rule for 55 years. Why didn’t He kill him when he was a baby, and Hitler and Stalin to boot?

But do you know what really astonished me? At the end of his life of evil, Manasseh repented and God forgave him! Can you believe it? 2 Chronicles 33:10-20 tells about it:

The Assyrian army took Manasseh prisoner. They put a ring through his nose, bound him in bronze chains, and let him away to Babylon. But while in deep distress, Manasseh sought the Lord and sincerely humbled himself before the God of his ancestors. And when he prayed, the Lord listened to him and was moved. So the Lord brought Manasseh back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh finally realized that the Lord alone is God! After this Manasseh rebuilt the outer wall of the city, removed the foreign gods and the idol from the Temple, tore down all the pagan alters he had built, and encouraged the people of Judah to worship the Lord, the God of Israel.

This is an amazing story of God’s grace, and the distressing thing about it for me was my rotten attitude. Every year I read through the Bible and came across this story, and for a long, long time I didn’t like it. I would think, “God, look at all the evil that man did! Look at all the people he murdered, even his own sons! Why did you let him get away with it? You should have sent him to hell!” (You should be thankful that the God of mercy is in charge of things and not me.)

Finally, finally, God started reminding me of my many sins and backslidings, and I thought: “Should God have let me get away with it?” And I shuddered. A favorite verse of many is Philippians 1:6 – *I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished...* I’m pretty sure that God has allowed King Glenn to live 92-1/2 years because it has taken Him that long to work out some really evil stuff in me including my judgmental attitude toward others. Maybe all of us should thank God for his kindness and mercy.

MIRACLE WORK – 2

Last month I shared about Jordan Seng’s book, Miracle Work, and his insight about how we get God’s power to do supernatural ministry. When we think of supernatural ministry we usually think of healing, miracles, and casting out demons, but he points out that all Christian ministry is supernatural: preaching, teaching, encouraging, helping, praying, etc. Jordan explained how a combination of things increases our power to do the things Jesus has called us to do, and his equation is:

Authority + Gifting + Faith + Consecration = Power

Jesus performed supernatural works, “signs and wonders,” and He authorized and sent out His followers to do the same things He did. When He sent his disciples out to preach and teach, he always gave them power to heal the sick, cast out demons and raise the dead. I believe God still calls us not just to do *supernatural ministry* but to become *supernatural people*.

Normal weirdness

Supernatural ministry – healing, deliverance from demonic power, or prophecy – certainly looks weird to people, including to you and me, but I think the biggest problem for us believers is that we try to make God seem normal. Think about it. We believe in an invisible being with no beginning who spoke the universe into existence; who lives outside space with fantastic angelic creatures; who is everywhere and knows everything and can do anything; who sent his God-man Son into our world and brought him back to life after he was killed; and then floated him up into the sky; and who resurrects us so we can live forever. And then we don’t like for anything to happen in our church that seems weird!

We are all very sensitive to how we appear to others. We crave a respectable God experience. We emphasize Bible study instead of doing the stuff in the Bible stories.

One nice thing about supernatural ministries is that they can help us stop pretending we’re normal. You can’t feel normal when you’re trying to cast a demon out of someone, or trying to talk your way into the ICU to lay hands on a car crash victim, or trying to raise someone from the dead. Such experiences remind us that we’re weird and that we believe in an invisible, holy, loving, powerful, present God.

If you believe you can even do Jesus’ miracles, then you will have less trouble being supernaturally generous with the poor or with disrupting your life to reach the unreached.

Have you considered how weird it is, how bizarre, how abnormal, for someone to give up their normal, comfortable life and go into the ministry, or even to go to a foreign land as a missionary? We should be drawn to every war zone, disaster area, cancer ward, violent ghetto, impoverished people group. Wherever the world has no solution, believers should rush in. Why? Because God make all things possible. But being unafraid takes practice.

An example

A few years ago, a young mother in our church, a soft-spoken woman named Heidi, told me that she had received a vision from God instructing her to provide for the starving orphans of Swaziland, an AIDS-stricken African country she had just visited. But how could anyone, let alone a shy mother with no significant resources, provide for thousands of orphans in a desperately poor country? In the end, I shrugged and said, “Well, I guess you’ll need a miracle.”

My friendship with Heidi had started several years earlier when I prophesied some things to her about God raising her up to be a leader. Over the years, we served together on our church’s healing team and saw God cure cancer patients, depressed people, and one precious little boy who couldn’t walk. Heidi is a quiet, conservative lady but, during our forty-day fast for healing power over cancer (NOTE!), she shaved off her hair and went bald-headed in solidarity with the chemotherapy patients for whom she prayed. She said, “Something funny happened to me when I shaved my head, and whatever it was I think it led to this whole Swaziland thing.” The pursuit of supernatural power had made her wonderfully weird.

So when I told Heidi that her calling would require miracles, she just laughed and nodded. Currently, her organization has developments in three Swaziland locations, and her teams in Africa have seen supernatural healings of several severe diseases.

Many believers have accomplished wonderful work for God without practicing ministries such as healing, deliverance or prophecy, but stepping out in these supernatural ministries seems to encourage the faith and courage needed to do wonderful ministries beyond the “normal.”

You need to know that even if you become comfortable with being weird for Jesus, there is always a chance that your activities will make other people uncomfortable with you. Supernatural stuff shocks people and disrupts families and churches and communities. When I was in my early twenties, a successful area pastor warned me, “That Holy Spirit stuff freaks people out! It confuses people. You’re better off without it.” Of course we need to be wise and sensitive about supernatural ministry, but some people get offended when they hear preaching or when we witness about how Jesus has

changed our lives. We don't question whether we should preach and witness to people, we just realize that we need to be wise and sensitive about when and how to do it.

Supernatural ministry has been both common and enormously fruitful in Church history. (It is simply not honest to claim that such ministry stopped at the end of the first century after Christ.) But this type ministry has never been what you could call steady. Over the centuries, it has been up and down, here then there, inconsistent. Why such variation? My theory is this: groups of believers frequently figure out how to do supernatural ministry, but they have a hard time figuring out how to live with the ministry. The revivals come with great exhilaration and fruitfulness; the downturns come when people tire of the level of weirdness, vulnerability and sacrifice that supernatural ministry demands.

The reality is that supernatural ministry doesn't solve everything, and it complicates our lives and our ministry a lot. God does not heal everyone we pray for, and this can cause frustration and raise all kinds of questions. I might cast demons out of someone, but, as Jesus taught, if he doesn't repent and work to get sin out of his life the demons can return. I might visit a deprived village and raise a child from the dead, but that wouldn't solve the village's deadly poverty. Miracles should change a soul, but they don't always. Think about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Scripture says that "Some believed," but some ran to tell the Pharisees that Jesus was causing a riot. (Note from Glenn: I could tell about several people that I have seen God heal who stubbornly refused to let that miracle change the sinful pattern of their lives.) Miracles are awesome, but people are fickle.

One result of this variation is that very few believers have had the benefit of a tradition in supernatural ministries, so each new generation has to do the work of rediscovering the ministries for themselves. It has always been this way. The use of supernatural ministry by first century believers is documented in scripture and elsewhere, but by the late second century the Church father, Irenaeus, in his famous tracts against heresies, had to reassure his readers that supernatural works were still practiced fruitfully in his jurisdiction (He wrote of some driving out demons, visions, prophecies, healing the sick, raising the dead.) Origen wrote from Alexandria of "traces of the Holy Spirit among Christians" who performed these acts, but it was only "traces." A century later, in the same city, Bishop Athanasius documented the miracles of his Egyptian contemporary, Anthony of the Desert, but noted that was exceptional and not normal. In the fifth century, Saint Augustine dismissed the possibility of supernatural ministries initially, but then he encountered them during a fifth century revival in North Africa. In the last section of *The City of God*, he offers a gushing account of healings and miracles.

We have detailed accounts of the use of supernatural ministries by Patrick, Columba, and other monk-evangelists of the western European outreach, but by the later middle centuries they seem to have faded out. Early Reformation leaders dismissed all miracle stories as a ploy by Catholics, but then Protestant pioneers rediscovered this ministry. John Knox, George Wishart, John Welsh, Robert Bruce, collected eyewitness accounts of prophecies, healings, deliverances. John Wesley, who began the Methodist Church, spiced his journals with accounts of deliverances and healings. Francis Asbury, the first American Methodist bishop, was so passionate about supernatural ministry that he used to command his preachers, "Feel for the power, feel for the power!" Two of his Methodist pastors and a Presbyterian partner touched off the Cane Ridge Revival on the American frontier in the early 1800s – a movement that popularized the phrase, "Slain in the Spirit." You will note across the centuries this pattern of atrophy and rediscovery.

An insightful pastor once told me over dinner after I did a seminar at his church, "Honestly, this all scares the hell out of me. I saw the people get healed, and I can't argue biblically with what you said, but I know what this would mean for us, and I'm not sure we're ready." I respect this guy's honesty, but it begs the question: What is it worth to see the sick healed, the oppressed delivered, and miracles manifest? I think the big question is not whether supernatural ministries are possible today but how difficult and costly it is to do them and to maintain this ministry.

God is never satisfied with a mere show of power when he can also demonstrate his lowliness and love. So, the one-two rhythm of the kingdom is power and meekness, strength plus vulnerability, authority with humility, glory and grit. Supernatural power requires other-than-natural living. Miracles are messy things. This is a question for the heart.

SOMEONE OUT THERE NEEDS

THIS WORD FROM GOD:

My grace is sufficient for you.

(2 Corinthians 12:9)

God Bless

Glenn

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

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