

"... healing for all the nations" Revelation 22:2



"... the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified" Isaiah 61:3

# The Tree of Life

Volume 3, Issue 1

"... for the testimony of Jesus"  
Revelation 1:9

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## The Vineyard and the Orchard - A Parable

Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Micah 7:1; Matthew 7:16-20; 21:19; 33-41; Luke 13:1-9; John 15:1-16

We have one last root killer to examine. It is perhaps the most re-enforced by the world, and also the most subtle of the five root killers. It is like a mold or fungus that starts unseen by the naked eye, yet as it starts to grow it spreads rapidly, devouring everything in its path.



It is unforgiveness. Our society has the motto of "my rights first, who cares who it hurts." Unforgiveness is all about me, my feelings, my hurts, my anger, my hatred. Those thoughts and behaviors lead to bitterness, envy, rage, depression, spiritual, mental and physical sickness. Can we as Christians live like this? I believe that the answer is an emphatic no!

Our passage of Scripture comes from Matthew 18. It is the parable of the unforgiving servant. It is a familiar passage, perhaps too familiar. Perhaps it has lost some of its radiance. Let it come to you fresh and new.

How many times must I forgive my brother? This is the question that Peter asked the Lord. Peter knew that he must forgive, Christ had already been teaching this in the Lord's Prayer. Peter is here asking a another deeper question. He is asking is it ok to keep a record of wrongs and then finally say enough is enough. How did Christ respond to this line of reasoning? He responds with a number, but a number of such proportions as to show the absurdity of keeping the record. That is the point of the parable. Unforgiveness is worse for the person keeping record than for the offending party.

This is how the Kingdom of Heaven is going to be, Jesus tells Peter. The King is coming to take account and to reckon with His servants. When He starts to reckon, one of the first offenders owes 10,000 talents. What an incredible sum! First, this should tell us that all sin is primarily against God. (Psalm 51:3,4) Second, it should show us the enormity of sin in God's sight. There is no such thing as a little sin. It is SIN, not sin. This concept becomes very important later in the parable.

The man begs the King to have pity on his huge debt. The King has compassion on the man. The King gives what man needs, not what the King needs or could demand. The King is very gracious, very understanding. He just simply forgives all of the debt that is owed. No bargaining, no

IOU, no nothing. Forgiven. The Bible is very expressive in the language that it uses. Compassion and loosed. The compassion loosed the man from his debt to the King!

All is not well though. This man after having been given his liberty, immediately begins to demand payment for a small trivial amount. It is a hundred pence you might say. What is a hundred pence in comparison to 10,000 talents? This is exactly what Christians do to each other and to everyone else. We have been given eternal life, forgiven of every sin and blasphemy that can be named, yet we demand others to pay for what debt they may owe us. We are also like the servant in that we do not listen to apologies. We do not look for change, we have no patience to see the effect of love on someone. We only want satisfaction, payment of the debt! With no forgiveness offered, it keeps the offender in the prison of shame, regret, and despair.

What happens when the King finds out? He asks the servant a question. Why did you not do to your fellow servant what I did for you? You felt my compassion loose you, yet you will not loose someone else? What then does the King do? He has the unforgiving servant thrown into jail. It is as though his debt was never paid. He ends up in prison longer than the second servant, because his debt was bigger.

To leave absolutely no doubt as to the interpretation of the parable, the Lord tells us exactly what He means. This how the Father will deal with all in His kingdom, if there is no forgiveness. Remorse? Shame? Regret? While in prison, the unforgiving servant had them all and more.

So how do we keep from being like that unforgiving servant? Here are a few suggestions.

1. Express those negative feelings of unforgiveness and bitterness instead of submerging them. David, Jeremiah and others all told God of their hurts and pains even though God knew them already. Think of it as telling yourself the truth, or acknowledging the truth.
2. Be responsible for your own feelings, emotions and action. Others are not to blame for our sin, or our reactions to their sins. We are. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:31-32) This would seem to include all Christians, even those abused, neglected, mistreated.
3. Confess your sin if possible, on three levels. First and foremost, to the Lord. Second, to a trusted friend, who will pray with you now and continue to pray for you. Third if possible to those who you are angry and bitter towards. Sometimes this is not advisable, make it matter of prayer and let the Lord direct you.
4. Ask yourself if you really want to forgive and let go of the bitterness. Is your bitterness an excuse for other sins such as self pity, anger or other destructive thoughts and behaviors?
5. By faith choose to forgive those that have hurt you. There is a story of Corrie ten Boom. When she was in a German concentration camp there was a guard who was especially mean to Corrie and her sister. Years later, this man got saved, and was at a service that Corrie was preaching. What did Corrie do? She walked right up to the man and said that by faith she was going to forgive the man for all things that he had done to her. As she spoke the words, a warm love for God and the man filled her heart. We walk by faith, not by our feelings.
6. By faith extend the forgiveness to the offender. This flows right from number 5. It is one thing to say you want to forgive in your prayer closet, it is another to tell the others involved.

7. Choose to accept God's judgment and forgiveness for what has been done to you. Their guilt is now before God, not you. Walk in the blessing of being cleansed and fellowship with God.

8. Know that this is a battle, the enemy may not give ground easily. Submit yourself to God and watch the deceiver flee before you. Trust God, not feelings, circumstances, or anything else. (Adapted from Handbook for Spiritual Warfare, Dr. Ed Murphy)

## The Beatitudes

Blessed are merciful, for they shall be shown mercy

Mercy. This is one of the great words of the Bible. Mercy is also the one thing that sets apart the Christian teachings of God from the rest of the world religions. Mercy is in the Old Testament, but the New is overflowing with the word mercy and the related concepts of compassion and understanding.

The thing that is most startling about mercy is that it is an action word. One cannot just talk about having mercy. The first couple of Beatitudes were all about the inward condition of a man. The later ones are all about the results of the new condition. Mercy comes directly from seeking after righteousness.

In Micah six, we find the Lord having a discussion with the children of Israel. We find that He starts by asking them a series of questions. He wants to know why the children of the covenant keep rebelling against their God. Israel replies with a response aimed at deflecting blame from themselves and make it God's fault that they are in rebellion. You can almost hear the sarcasm of verses six and seven. To paraphrase, how can we serve God? We can not know God, how can we know what He wants? Do we need to bring more money, more sacrifice, do more for the ministry?

God is quick in His response. He has shown us what is good and right. He names three things that he has shown us. One we have talked about, that is to do justly. This is the same as hungering after righteousness. The next thing is to love mercy. God is telling that He has told and shown them that He wants them to live and show kindness, sympathy, and compassion.

The very way that the Lord identified Himself to Israel involves mercy. "The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." (Exodus 34:6-7) Notice that the very first verse that God uses to describe Himself. His love for us, it is manifested in mercy. It is His mercy that motivates His grace, goodness and truth. I find it very interesting that He does not mention the word love. He mentions all the things that we say are attributes of love. For us to say that we are loving as Christ loved, we have to be showing the attributes that makes love.

Certainly this is the one word that best describes the actions and words of Christ while He was here on earth. Mercy and compassion, moved by seeing desperate people in desperate situations. What was the cry of the blind man that caused Him to stop and turn and heal him? Have mercy, son of David, have mercy! To limit His mercy to just His miracles is to miss the greatness and true depth of His mercy.

"Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many ..." This is mercy at its highest expression. The great lowers Himself to the lowly, to lift them up. He does not lose His place by stooping, just a show of strength when He lifts up the lowly. In this way, He has showed us what He expects of us.

Mercy for the Christian is offering to lift up those around us (sinner and saint). It is love in action. Blessed are the merciful. Why? Because at that moment they are most like Christ.

With all of that in mind, what about the rest of the verse? "... for they will be shown mercy." There are two verses that explain it. One is in Psalms, the other is in James. Psalms 18:25 reads thus: "With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful" James says "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment."

One of the great evidences of a Christian is that they are kind to sinners. People without the renewing power of the Word of God and His Spirit cannot help but sin. We know that as doctrine, but I fear there is a disconnect between doctrine and actual practice. Remember it is the grace of God that has saved you not any work or goodness in you. That same grace can save the drunk, the child abuser, the murderer. It is the same grace that saves from other sins such as gossip, hatred and prejudice.

What about how you treat Christians? If mercy causes rejoicing, it is no wonder that there is so little joy in the church. The apostle has a good word for us here. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." And again, " So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him." Ask yourself this question just how would you want to be treated if you fell into sin?

### The Cross and the spirit of antichrist

As I look at the title of this article, it seems to me to be an ambitious title to say the least. Men of greater wisdom, schooling and piety have wrestled with this subject before me. Yet, a thought has occurred to me. In all of our study and talk about the Man of Sin, the Antichrist, I think that we have overlooked that phrase that St. John used, "the spirit of antichrist." Indeed he tells us that the spirit is already at work in the world.

To understand this spirit that is working in the world, it is important to look closely at the word antichrist. The prefix has one of two meanings. First, over-against or opposite to. Second, an exchange, instead of or in place of. It seems that from the five places that St. John uses the term, (1 John 2:18,22; 4:3, 2 John 7) he is using it in the sense of against or opposite.

The second part of the term is Christ. I think that we must take this as the Christian concept of Christ in all of its fullness, not a Jewish concept of Savior-King, nor any of the cults concept of guru or enlightened one.

With that in mind, there is one more consideration that is needed before we start to really discuss the phrase "spirit of antichrist." If we are going to define the term as Against Christ, or Opposite of Christ, then we must know who Christ is, and what He stood for. In other words, what is this antichrist spirit against.

1. Christ stood for God. I do not mean that He was God, I am talking about standing for sovereignty, majesty, and right of God in all matters. "Let this cup pass from me, but not my will, but thine be done." "... Lo, I come to do thy will, O God ..." Supreme in His mind was the concept that God was Authority, and that was it. His authority came from being under authority.

He then believed that the authority translated itself into other forms of authority. He submitted to His parents, the government, all authority that was over and around Him.

2. He stood for Life. Again not in the sense that He was the Life, but in the sense of His compassion, His teaching, His miracles. "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." Why was He angry in the synagogue when the man had the withered hand? Because the children of promise were not moved with love to fight for the man and his life. This concern for Life so permeated His being, that the woman with the issue of blood but had to touch Him.

3. He believed in sacrifice. He was willing to lay down His own life for those two things. He was not guided by what was in for Himself, but what was for the greatest good, and did it glorify His Father. Whatever He had to lay down, or lay aside He was willing to do it. I am talking about more than sin and temptation here. Things that are not bad in themselves He had no part of also. He did not own a house, clothing, other means or necessities of daily living.

Lastly, He believed that the now was only important as it related to the future. He was not manipulated by the emotion of it feels good now. He was not influenced by how easy something was, or finding the path of least resistance. Because of knowing His mission and purpose, everything is centered around the fulfillment of that mission and purpose.

## A God That Hideth Himself

by T. Austin-Sparks

"Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour" (Isa. 45:15).

It is as though the Prophet was suddenly overawed and struck with amazement at what he was being made to prophesy! In the midst of his ministry something of its wonder broke upon himself and he interjected this ejaculation.

Leaving, for the present, much of what this might imply as to prophecy as prediction and its vindication, we will stay with the exclamation itself. That statement is one in principle with several instances in the Scriptures. Looking at the present context we see that it is Israel's release from captivity, and return to the Land to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple, which is contemplated. No doubt there had been much speculation and discussing as to how the prophecies of their return would be fulfilled. Seventy years had been determined and made known as the duration of their captivity. The Gentile powers were in undoubted ascendancy and there seemed very little prospect or possibility of Israel's regaining their national power and glory amongst the nations. The state of things in their own country - the destroyed Temple, the burnt city, the land overrun with wild beasts, the enemy emissaries installed - and the disintegration among the people themselves in exile, made the outlook one fraught with seemingly insuperable problems, and it might well have led to complete bafflement and even despair.

Then the Prophet is made to foretell that it would all come about - this restoration - at the hands or by the will of the Gentile power itself; that the Sovereign Spirit of God would come down upon one who - as yet - was not in the position to do it, and probably whose name was not yet known at all. Babylon was not yet overthrown: the Babylonian Empire was not yet destroyed; Daniel's prophecies were not yet fulfilled. But the one who would do it was mentioned by name and the details of his conquest are given in this forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah's prophecies. (Read it fragment by fragment.) And then, even although this man would be in ignorance of God, he would be constrained and compelled by God like an Anointed one to fulfil the Scriptures, release the people, provide the means, and generally facilitate the restoration.

As the Prophet sees it all in his "vision" ("the vision of Isaiah," 1:1, one vision including everything) he is overwhelmed with wonder. All the problems are solved, the questions answered, the

"mountains" levelled! Who would have thought of that? Who would have dreamed such a thing? Oh, how deep are God's ways, beneath our imagination, hidden from our most intense speculations. 'Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour."

There have been several other great and outstanding instances of the mystery of God's ways in fulfilling His major purposes. All the race had gone from Him and become involved in Godlessness and idolatry. It was universal. How would God meet His own need? Well, He moved to put His hand on one man, and out of that one man He made a nation. In sovereign grace He made that nation His mystery, His secret, among the nations. Israel was God's mystery, God's hidden way. There was always something mysterious about Israel. Paul, in contemplating this method of God and finding it rise up with such overwhelming power, did just what Isaiah did. While writing it down he just interjected a loud and resounding ejaculation:-

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out!" (Rom. 11:33; A.S.V.).

He might well have added, "Thou art a God that hidest Thyself." Who would ever have thought of the Incarnation, and that, not in glory, but in humiliation unto offending every expectation of man? Who would have thought of the Cross for God Incarnate as the method and means of solving the greatest problem ever known in this universe? Who would have suspected that it was all embodied in that Man of Nazareth, "the carpenter's son" as they called Him? There was the greatest mystery of God! Did it work? Has it proved to be the way, the only way, and the transcendently successful way?

And what is true as to the mystery of Israel, and the mystery of Christ, is also true as to the mystery of the Church. There is a hiddenness about the true Church. No natural eye can discern it. No natural mind can explain it. Reduce it to human sense and description and you have lost it, you have got hold of the wrong thing. "God's wisdom (is) in a mystery," says Paul. Try to commend the Church to the world without faith and you have stripped your Church of its secret power! Unless men come right up against inscrutable God Who overwhelms them, that which claims to be His dwelling-place is an empty shell.

And we would remind you that what is true in these great epochs of sovereign progress down the ages, these interventions and advents in the history of this world's spiritual life, is true in the life of each one of His true people. Such will be constantly confronted with the how? of impossible situations, in order that they may be compelled to repeated exclamations in the presence of His simple solutions - "Verily Thou art a God That hidest Thyself."

*Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*

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