

Encountering Jesus: Finding Grace in the Past, Present and Future

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. ***Premise:*** the issues that determine who we are and how we live are found in how we relate to Jesus in our past, present and future. All three provide keys that shape us and unlock our heart.
- B. We encounter Jesus related to our the ***past*** as we locate the places in which we are chained to the past by negative experiences and wrong paradigms as well as discerning how God's grace was manifest to us in positive ways. We encounter Jesus in the ***present*** as we grow in active intimacy with God (which includes various facets). We encounter Jesus related to our ***future*** as we believe the right things about our future and make godly commitments to it.

II. ENCOUNTERING JESUS RELATED TO OUR PAST

- A. ***Our past can affect us negatively*** – those trained in the social sciences often emphasize that what we are today is a result of how we have been conditioned in the past. In other words, we are mostly a product of our environment. They emphasize how our past experiences have shaped and molded us to be the people we are today. Some conclude that people are trapped and controlled by the past. Thus, it determines mostly who we are and thus what we will be in the future.
- B. We are partially the product of what has happened to us. Taken to an extreme, this relieves us of the responsibility of our negative responses. We are both ***victims*** and ***agents*** of our problems.
1. The Holy Spirit wants to reveal to us the places where we are chained to the past by ***bitterness*** and ***shame*** (*often based in confusion*).
 2. The Holy Spirit wants to reveal to us our ***wrong paradigms*** of God, ourselves and others (especially those significant to us).
 3. The Holy Spirit wants to reveal to us where we have ***misinterpreted*** crisis events and disappointments by lies (instead of in the truth of God's light).
- C. ***Our past can affect us positively*** – remembering our history redemptively has an impact on our hearts in the present tense. As we discern how God's grace was manifest to us in our past history (personal or corporate) impacts positively in three ways.

1. First, seeing God's goodness in our past includes His **forgiveness** and times of provision and deliverance. This effects our heart today providing us with a foundation for sustained **gratitude**. We remember specific times of deliverance as well as the general reality that once we were lost being in the state of darkness before we were delivered by Jesus (Eph. 2:1-12). Both individually and corporately, we honor and celebrate our **righteous heritage**. Blessed are those who honor their father and mother as people as well as the righteous heritage built along the way.
2. Second, what God did in the past gives us **insight** into what He desires to do in our future. God to do again what He did in former days (Deut. 32:7). Thus, we have **faith for the future** as we recognize the past manifestations of grace as evidence of future grace. As the Church, we look back to see what God did in history (revival) to give us insight into what He desires to do in the future.
3. Third, we wage war by our remembrance of God's promises to us (1 Tim. 1:18).

III. ENCOUNTERING JESUS IN THE PRESENT: ACTIVE INTIMACY WITH GOD

The Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God...12 we have received...the Spirit...that we might know (experience) the things that have been freely given to us by God. (1 Cor. 2:10-12)

- A. God invites us to experience the deep things of His heart (emotions, desires, affections, thoughts about us). Thus, to enjoy **active intimacy** with Jesus includes understanding and feeling His heart. The Bridal message is experiencing Jesus' emotions (desire, affections) for us.
You may be able to comprehend...the width and length and depth and height-- to know (experience) the love (affections or emotions) of Christ.. (Eph 3:18-19)
- B. Active intimacy with Jesus engages our hearts in God's light which is powerful. This proactive focus of our soul protects us from the inevitability of increased spiritual dullness and defilements.
- C. The foundation of intimacy begins in seeing our identity in Jesus. Our identity is the way we define ourselves. In other words, it is the way in which we determine and measure our value, importance and success. We receive our value and worth from God's passion for us.
- D. We all ask identity questions such as "Who am I? Where am I from? Why am I important? What is my worth? What is my destiny?" What makes our lives meaningful?
- E. Our identity must first be established in our relationship to God or in intimacy with God (who we are before God. Our intimacy with God is experienced as we encounter His heart for us. In other words, in understanding that we are loved by God and then in being a genuine lover of God. We confess "***I am loved*** (by God) ***and am a lover*** (to God/others) ***therefore, I am successful.***"

- F. We confess the truths of God’s Word against Satan’s lies (Mt. 4:4). The Word says that Jesus loves us like the Father loves Him (Jn. 15:9).
- G. As we become students of God’s emotions, we grow in revelation of His tender mercy, then His gladness and then His affection. In this understanding of God, we will run to Him with confidence even in our weakness instead of running from Him in condemnation and shame.
1. ***Exhilaration***: feeling God’s affection brings pleasure and exhilaration to our hearts.
 2. ***Confidence***: feeling God’s affection gives us the confidence in the grace of God to run to God instead of from God when we encounter our sin and weakness.
- H. We must intentionally pursue the radical Scriptural paradigm in seeing our true identity. It takes time and effort to cultivate the ability to see our value and to measure our success by these.
- I. Some in the secular social sciences propose that what the most important person in our life thinks of us has a significantly greater impact on us than what many others think. If the one we value most thinks that we are successful, then we are apt to feel successful. The power of this most important opinion has more significant influence on us. It more shapes how we view ourselves than what anyone else thinks. Therefore, it is essential that Jesus be that most important person. An inferiority complex is the result from putting too much value on the opinions of others.
- J. We talk much about the ***Bridal paradigm*** of the Kingdom of God. The word paradigm means perspective or view. Thus, we refer to the “bridal perspective or view” of the kingdom of God. We see the Kingdom through the eyes of a wholehearted Bride with loyal devoted love. If we do not feel loved and in love, then we more easily compromise, lack courage and become spiritually bored.
- K. To understand Jesus as a passionate Bridegroom is to soon see ourselves as a cherished Bride. Intimacy causes our hearts to be lovesick for Jesus (inflamed; enraptured; overcome by His love). We cry, “Come, Lord Jesus”, differently with the Bridal paradigm.
The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" (Rev. 22:17)
- L. How we feel about ourselves is significantly determined by what we believe Jesus thinks and feels about us. Therefore, the “Bridal paradigm” which points to God’s commitment and desire for us is foundational to emotional health and fullness. The common struggle with an inferiority complex and rejection includes wrong ideas about what God thinks about us.
- M. Some ask, how do we describe receiving God’s love or what is the sensation of God’s love? It is when our heart is tenderized or swells with pleasurable feelings and with the sense of responsiveness (sweet submission).

- N. We first see ourselves (our primary value and success) spiritually as before God, then in a secondary way we see ourselves as the one who God made us to be “as before men.”
- O. Our intimacy with Jesus is expressed in our pursuit of 100-fold obedience to God and in our meekness before people. The spiritual attainment that increases our greatness or success is meekness. This was the only character trait Jesus proclaimed about Himself (Mt. 11:29). We are more successful in God’s sight as we grow in meekness.
But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. (Mt. 23:11)
Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. (Mt. 20:26)
- P. We are most steady when we feel the power of being loved by God and of loving (God/others) in return because this is the Holy Spirit’s main agenda for our lives. To cooperate with reality is to have peace (as the Spirit powerfully bears witness to our heart in this pursuit). To resist this is to strive with the Holy Spirit.
- Q. We are successful before God according to our growth in the anointing of love and meekness. When we “feel successful” because of who we are in the love of God, then we have the foundation and strength to faithfully walk out our assignment before others (in times of honor and dishonor, prosperity and difficulty) without losing our intimacy with God nor our meekness before men. This is a dynamic place of stability and fruitfulness that helps us not waver in prosperity or difficulty.
- R. For example, King David felt the power of being loved and of loving therefore, he felt successful and thus had a “clear perspective” even when his kingship was threatened.
- S. Intimacy with God also includes experiencing the superior pleasures of the gospel. The greatest pleasure that we can experience it when God reveals God to our spirit. He does this most by causing the Word to become alive in us. Intimacy with Jesus includes the vibrancy that only comes by pursuing 100-fold obedience to God. The vibrancy of being wholehearted in our love back to God. The Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7) outlines this pursuit. Many today are spiritually bored which leaves them vulnerable to Satan’s tactics.
- T. Intimacy with God includes experiencing God’s delivering power from darkness (emotionally, physically and mentally) that we know the excellency of loving righteousness and hating sin.
- U. **Summary:** there is a dynamic “spark” in our spirit as we experience these different dimensions of active intimacy with God. In other words, when we feel God’s affection for us, the pleasure of His Word being alive in us, the vibrancy of being wholehearted and the freedom of deliverance. This is the place where our hearts are exhilarated and fascinated with Jesus. It is our inheritance to live with a fascinated heart. How we find entertainment, acceptance and value is an essential part of how we live today.

IV. ENCOUNTERING JESUS IN THE FUTURE

- A. What we believe about our future and the commitments that we have made to it dynamically influence our present. What we believe about where we are going forms how we live today.
Where there is no revelation (vision), the people cast off restraint (discipline). (Prov. 29:18)
She (Israel) did not consider her destiny; therefore her collapse was awesome. (Lam. 1:9)
- B. The absence of commitment to the future brings an identity crisis in the present. Our commitments define who we are. We are concerned not only with where we have been, but where we are going. Hope is a key ingredient that transforms us. Hope is to be anchored in the future. The power of this truth is neglected by many. What we commit ourselves to in the future dynamically affects who we are now.
- C. Viktor Frankl (1905-1997), a Vienna born psychologist rejected Freud's over-emphasis on the past as being the primary force that formed us in the present. He was a survivor of several Nazi concentration camps (Theresienstadt and Auschwitz). After the war, he analyzed Holocaust survivors, categorizing them into two broad categories: those who were emotionally stable and those who were not. The predominant factor was not what they experienced before or during the concentration camps, but rather what they believed about their future.
- D. Our vision for the future includes our spiritual development not just our careers and ministries. People with a vision or goal to grow spiritually, use their time and money very differently than those without such vision. The lack of clear vision for our future spiritual attainment is detrimental to our present spiritual condition. To be ambivalent about the future has negative effects that lead us to passivity and lethargy. Without clear meaningful commitments, then the only other alternative is bitterness or self-centeredness. Indecision in this, causes us great hindrances today.
- E. What are your future goals for your spiritual development? Most usually have no concrete goals. Without vision any road will get you there. Many cannot form a picture in their minds of what they want in the future. Those without a vision for their future are stifled spiritually. What are your commitments to? What are you determined to be in God, now and in eternity? What are your desires? What do you believe about what you can be spiritually? What are you committed to being? What do you want to be a part of in the future?
- F. Paul prayed often that the saints would be filled with the knowledge of God's will for them (Col. 1:9-10; 4:12; Eph. 1:17-18) because he knew the power of having a vision for our future and a commitment to it.
- G. Our specific action plan to attain these spiritual goals includes time in the Word and prayer with regular fasting. I recommend reading 10 chapters of the NT everyday (thus, completing the NT once a month), praying in the Spirit one hour a day and fasting two days a week.

H. Our future in the corporate sense is also a vast subject that is to form our paradigm, character and actions today. The scriptural view includes the glory and difficulty in the End-Times (related to Jesus' Second Coming) as well as our eternal destiny.

I. Revelation is called the revelation of Jesus (Rev. 1:1) and it reveals His leadership. ***This is why the Revelation is not an optional subject*** for the Church. The Gospels (89 chapters) give us a record of Jesus' miracle power at His first coming to accomplish redemption. The end-of-the-age (with over 100 chapters in Scripture) tells us about Jesus' miracle power in taking leadership over the earth.

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for...the coming of the day of God...13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless... (2 Pet. 3:11-14)

J. Many dream of their future as though the Book of Revelation is not really true and that the Great Tribulation is not coming. In their future plans, they replace Biblical reality with the “common fantasy” of life in this age that consists mostly of honor, comfort and ease without pressures.

Hope deferred (shattered dreams) makes the heart sick.... (Prov. 13:12)

K. This common false thinking leads people to inevitable disappointment as their misguided dreams and expectations are shattered. One of the biggest sets back in our lives comes when we mishandle our disappointments

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:17-18)

L. ***Summary:*** our past, present and vision for the future conditions the way we live and feel today.

V. THE CALL TO FORGET AND REMEMBER: UNDERSTANDING THE BALANCE

One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God... (Phil. 3:13-14)

A. It is essential to “forget” and “remember” in a Biblical way. In Phil. 3:3-16, Paul was outlining his dedication to God along the sacrifices that he made to obey Jesus. He exhorted us to forget our personal responses both good and bad. To remember the good aspects of our dedication may tempt us to feel that we deserve better treatment from God in our ministry and circumstances. This undermines our gratitude for Jesus' extravagant goodness. We are to remember that once we were lost being in the state of darkness before we were delivered by Jesus (Eph. 2:1-12).

B. Jesus was pointing out the danger of His servants relating to Him on the basis of how much they perceived that they served Him instead of on the basis of gratitude.

Which of you, having a servant plowing...will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? 8 But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me...and afterward you will eat and drink'? 9 Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. 10 So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.' (Lk. 17:7-10)

- C. Because of the grandeur of the finished work of Jesus' cross, God forgets our sin. Therefore, we are to forget our failures and sins, by repenting of them then refusing to allow shame to damage our heart in the present. Guilt points to our responsibility in sinful actions. **Guilt says that our actions are bad. Shame says that we are bad,** even as we stand in the grace of God. Some easily confuse the issues by allowing guilt to become shame.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new... 21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:17-21)

- D. We are to remember God's promises to us and wonderful works on our behalf (1 Chr. 16:12).
This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare... (1 Tim. 1:18)

Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations. Ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you... (Deut. 32:7)

- E. God forgets our sin and remembers our obedience.

Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more. (Heb. 8:12; 10:17)

For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. (Heb. 6:10)

Whoever gives.....only a cup of cold water... he shall by no means lose his reward. (Mt. 10:42)

- F. **Our past can affect us positively** – remembering our history redemptively is has a great impact on our hearts in the present tense. As we discern how God's grace was manifest to us in our past history (personal or corporate) impacts positively in three ways.

1. First, is it the foundation for sustained gratitude. To see God's goodness in our past effects our heart today. We remember specific times of deliverance as well as the general reality that once we were lost being in the state of darkness before we were delivered by Jesus (Eph. 2:1-12). Both individually and corporately, we honor and celebrate our righteous heritage. Blessed are those who honor their father and mother as people as well as the righteous heritage built along the way.

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