

ESCAPE FROM CHRISTENDOM

by Robert Burnell

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The SeedofAbraham.net

Christendom offers you God and egoism. It offers you prosperity and pleasure, fellowship without obligation and success unhindered by devotion. It calls you to meetings, but not to commitment. It extracts the pain from discipleship and leaves you with an empty heart. It is counterfeit Christianity.

This allegory delineates the differences between the counterfeit and the true. It takes you, the pilgrim, through the self-effacing deserts of forgiveness, worship, prayer and service that leads to the New Jerusalem. It calls you from all that is superficial in much of today's religion to a life lost in God Himself. A serious paper, it is refreshingly demanding, rigorously invigorating and simple, as God's Truth always is. It sparkles with hope, like a diamond in the dark.

In the midst of an allegorical type dream, Robert Burnell comes face to face with the reality of how easy it is to believe we are on that narrow road that leads to life simply because we are engaged in the seemingly religious or spiritual activity that exists in the surrounding Christian culture.

Burnell insists that there are two revivals now in progress. The first consists of rapid church growth, remarkable buildings and dramatic Madison Avenue projects. The second one is underway across the desert somewhere, with almost none of the trappings of 'successful religion.' There, dying men and women are being set free from sin and disease by the power of God. One is a revival of the flesh. The other is a revival from the Spirit of the Living God. To be involved in the latter it is imperative that you flee from the former. You must escape from Christendom.

The Journey

In my dream I saw the lone figure of a man following a road. As the sun sets beneath the hills, a city comes into view. Nearing it, the traveler sees what appears to be a large group of churches. Spires and crosses pierce the skyline. His pace quickens. Is this his destination? He passes an imposing structure, a neon sign flashing 'Cathedral of the Future.' Farther on, a flood-lit stadium supports a billboard boasting that fifty thousand people crowd into evangelistic meetings there three nights a week. Beyond this, modest 'New Testament' chapels and Messianic synagogues cluster together on the street front.

'Is this the New Jerusalem?' I hear the traveler ask a woman at the information both in the central square. 'No, this is Christian City,' she replies. But I thought this road led to the New Jerusalem,' he exclaims with great disappointment. 'That's what we all thought when we arrived,' she answers, her tone sympathetic. 'This road continues up the mountain, doesn't it?' he asks. 'I wouldn't know,' she answers blankly.

I watch the man turn away from her and trudge on up the mountain in the gathering darkness. Reaching the top he stares out into the blackness. It looks as though there is nothing; absolutely nothing beyond. With a shudder he retraces his steps into Christian City and takes a room at a hotel.

Strangely unrefreshed at dawn he arises and follows the road up the mountain again. In the brightening light of the sun he discovers that what seemed like a void the night before is actually desert; dry, hot,

rolling sand as far as the eye can see. The road narrows to a path which rises over a dune and disappears. 'Can this trail lead to the New Jerusalem?' he wonders aloud. It appears to be quite deserted and rarely traveled.

Indecision slowing his steps, he again returns to Christian City and has lunch in a Christian restaurant. Over the music of a gospel record I heard him ask a man at the next table, 'That path up the mountain, where the desert begins, does it lead to the New Jerusalem?'

'Don't be a fool!' quickly replies his neighbor. 'Everyone who has ever taken that path has been lost; swallowed up by the desert! If you want God there are plenty of good churches in this town. You should pick one and settle down!'

After leaving the restaurant, feeling weary and confused, the traveler finds a spot under a tree and sits down. An old man approaches and begins pleading with him in urgent tones,

'If you stay here in Christian City, you'll wither away. You must take the path. I belong to the desert you saw earlier. I was sent here to encourage you to press on. You'll travel many miles. You'll be hot and thirsty, but angels will walk with you and there will be springs of water along the way, and at your journeys end you will reach the New Jerusalem. You have not known such Life and Joy. When you arrive, the gates will open for you. You are expected.'

'What you say sounds wonderful,' the traveler replies. 'But I'm afraid I'd never survive that desert. I'm probably better off here in Christian City.'

The old man smiles and says,

'Christian City is the place for those who want religion, but don't want to lose their lives. The desert is the territory of those whose hearts are so thirsty for God that they are willing to be lost in Him. My friend, when Peter brought his boat to land, forsook all and followed Yeshua (Jesus), he was being swallowed by the desert. When Levi left his tax collecting and Paul his ambition and opportunity to be great, they too were leaving a city much like this to pursue Yeshua out over the dunes and be lost in God. So don't be afraid. Many have gone before you.'

Then I saw the traveler look away from the old man's burning eyes to the bustle of Christian City. He saw busy people hurrying here and there with their Bibles and shiny attache cases, looking like men and women who knew their destiny, but it was clear that they lacked something, which the old man with eyes like a prophet possessed.

In my dream I imagined the traveler turning things over in his mind:

'If I do go out there, how can I be sure that I will really be lost in God? In the Middle Ages, Christians tried to lose themselves in God by putting the world behind them and entering a monastery. And how disappointed some of them were to find the world was still there! And the people here in Christian City who are preparing to go to some jungle or a neglected slum, maybe they're coming close to what it means to be lost in God, but then, a person can travel to the ends of the earth and not lose himself in Yeshua.'

The traveler turns again to see the old man starting up the road for the narrow path down to the desert's edge. Suddenly, he decides and jumps to his feet, chasing after him. When he catches up to him they exchange no words. The old man makes an abrupt turn to the right and guides him up still another slope that steepens as it rises towards a peak shrouded in a luminous cloud. The climb upward is very difficult. The traveler appears dizzy and begins to stagger. His guide pauses and offers him a drink from a flask hanging

over his shoulder. Panting, he drinks it in great gulps. 'No water ever tasted sweeter than this,' he says with great feeling. 'Thank you.'

'Now look there.' The old man points beyond them to a vista not nearly as monotonous and desolate as it had seemed earlier. The desert below has taken on many colors and graduations. In the far distance a blazing Light is throbbing and moving on the surface of the horizon like a living thing.

'There is the New Jerusalem! Before you reach it, though, you will have to pass through four wildernesses. Directly below us is the Wilderness of Forgiveness.'

The traveler notices small, dim figures making their way slowly in the direction of the City, separated from each other by many miles.

'How can they survive the loneliness?' asks the traveler. 'Wouldn't they benefit from traveling together?'

'Well, they really aren't alone. Each one of them is accompanied by the forgiveness of God. They are being swallowed up by the desert of the Lord God's vast mercy. The Holy Spirit is saying to them as they travel, 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away your sin!' They are made whole as they travel.'

Just beyond there is an expanse of blue. 'Is it a sea?' inquires the traveler.

'It looks like water, but it's a sea of sand. That's the Wilderness of Worship. Here, look through these glasses and you will see that people are walking there, too. Notice how they begin to group themselves there. They are having their first taste of the City; worship. They are discovering how they themselves were made for the worship of God. It is becoming their life, the white-hot source of everything they do.'

'Don't people also worship back in Christian City? What's so special about the wilderness?'

'Worship, that is true worship, can begin only when a life has been utterly abandoned to the desert of God's Presence. Out there the heart begins to worship God in Spirit and Truth.'

Looking beyond the blue wilderness to where desert rises in red and fiery mountains, the old man explains to the traveler that among those reddish mountains is the Wilderness of Prayer.

'Passing through that wilderness, travelers find it necessary to turn away from every distraction and concentrate on prayer. They quickly learn that there is no possible way for them to survive, but by crying out to Yeshua continually. By the time they reach the outer extremes of the Wilderness, prayer is their consuming passion and their supreme joy. It appears at first that the New Jerusalem is just beyond the Wilderness of Prayer, but there is one more wilderness hidden by the mountains, which you will pass through before you reach your destination. It is simply called the Harvest. You'll know it when you reach it. Beyond the Harvest is the heavenly City itself. Your name is known there. Your arrival is awaited with eagerness. Come, let's begin the journey.'

The two men begin their descent. The sun is again setting as they arrive at the edge of the desert. The traveler hesitates. 'Night fall doesn't seem to be a particularly propitious time to begin a journey like this,' he says. 'Don't go back to Christian City,' the old man exhorts, gazing at him earnestly. 'Not even at this hour? That way I could get a good night's sleep and start first thing in the morning,' the traveler adds hopefully. 'But your rest is out there,' the old man urges. 'Walk on now, into the desert. The Holy Spirit will help you. Don't be afraid to be lost in Yeshua. You'll find your life nowhere else.'

The Wilderness of Forgiveness

The old man has left the traveler standing alone at the edge of the desert as darkness falls. The lights of Christian City beckon from behind him. I can imagine him thinking of the warmth of a friendly conversation over a warm meal and of going to sleep in a comfortable bed, but then his expression becomes resolute and he says,

‘This is doubtless the road I have to take. I will find my life only by losing it; that is a certainty, but how can I know that if I take this path into the desert I will assuredly be lost in God and not merely lost? I can remember many people who took a solitary path which led them not to the New Jerusalem, but into such unreal thoughts and spurious experiences that their minds and lives were destroyed. Surely the danger of settling for less than life in Christian City has to be weighed against the possibility of losing it in the wilderness of spiritual delusion. I’m sure that the darkness beyond contains not only the path to the New Jerusalem, but also countless trapdoors to Hell where one can be lost in lonely vanity. How can I be sure of distinguishing the true path?’

A star appears hanging low over the horizon, directly above the path in front of the traveler. He looks up and sees it. He whispers quietly, ‘Forgiveness.’ And then with deep reverence quotes:

“‘Yeshua also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through His own Blood. Therefore, let us go forth to Him outside the Camp, bearing abuse for Him. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the City which is to come.’ Yes, I will go on.”

As dawn breaks he sees nothing but sand and sky and a path which can be distinguished from all others by the star which hovers where the trail meets the horizon. As the day wears on it is obvious that the traveler is weary, thirsty and sick with heat. Just when it appears he can not trudge another step, a man appears at his side. ‘Over the next hill you will find a spring,’ he says. ‘Keep on going, you’re almost there. He is soon lying by a spring, drinking water and eating food, which the man provides. This is the Wilderness of Forgiveness. People often expect God’s forgiveness to be like a beautiful park with fountains and rivers and green grass. They cannot understand why it should be a desert. Yet, one has to learn that God’s forgiveness is everything—everything.’ This is possible only in a desert, where a believer comes to see nothing, appreciate nothing, hope in nothing, but the Blood of Yeshua.

‘Far be it from me to glory except in the death of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for salvation, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God.’

‘I have been crucified with Messiah. It is no longer I who live, but Messiah who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.’

‘Do you think the Apostle Paul traveled this Wilderness?’ the traveler asks.

‘Yes he did. For years Paul had worked very hard in the City of Religion to be a religious man. His zeal was so great that it clouded his thinking about Messiah, until he met Him, that is. From the beginning, Yeshua meant one thing to Saul—forgiveness. He was overwhelmed with it because he knew the great sins he committed against God before Yeshua revealed Himself to him. Saul’s first experience of the Kingdom of God as a reality in his life was right here in this Wilderness.’

The traveler's voice was full of awe when he said, 'So, I'm walking where the Apostles walked.' The man said,

"Remember when Peter lowered the net at the command of Yeshua and brought it up loaded with fish? His immediate response was, 'Leave me, Lord, for I'm a sinner.' Yeshua said to him, 'Don't be afraid. From now on you will be catching men.' Implied in Yeshua's answer was, 'I will take care of your sin.' When they brought their boats to land they left everything and followed Yeshua. They followed Him right here into this Wilderness of Forgiveness. After Yeshua died for Peter's sins and rose for his justification, He said to this man who had denied Him three times, 'Simon, son of Yonah, do you love me? Feed My sheep.' And in this interaction of three questions and commands, Peter's three denials of Him was nullified and his heart healed."

'For years,' the traveler told him, 'I've been trying to get beyond theoretical or doctrinal forgiveness in order to really know that I have been forgiven. I've wanted to be immersed, baptized, lost in it. I have longed to hear Yeshua say to me, 'Take heart My son, your sins are forgiven.' I've wanted the Blood of Yeshua to flow into my heart and heal and purify me.'

'You have come to the right place. Before you reach the other side of this Wilderness, you will experience the relief of having that load of guilt, that weighs you down like a rock, rolled away. You will begin to walk before God without shame. Just as you were once obsessed with the need to guide yourself up, you will soon be obsessed with the forgiveness of God.'

'Obsessed with the forgiveness of God?'

'You will be so obsessed with God's mercy that you will be free for the first time in your life, of other people's opinions. The woman who washed Yeshua's feet with her tears was obsessed with His forgiveness to the point where she was heedless of the jeers and opinions of others. The cleansed leper joyfully fell at Yeshua's feet, and gave thanks for more than just the healing of his leprosy, which was an ancient 'mark' of sin. Also, when Zachaeus climbed a tree to see Yeshua, he was watching his own forgiveness walking toward him down the road. So obsessed was he with the forgiveness which visited him that day that the chains of covetousness broke from his heart. You will come to the place where it will happen to you.'

The traveler resumed his journey, his mysterious companion walking silently by his side for about an hour and then suddenly disappearing.

'What Joy I feel! This must be what the disciples felt as they returned to Jerusalem after Yeshua was taken up in the Cloud.'

In the light of the star, the traveler makes out the figure of a woman rising over the crest of the next dune, walking slowly down the slope toward him. He looked like he recognized her. From his expression I gathered that this person had wronged him. Her eyes are fixed on the traveler as she comes up to him. 'Will you forgive me?' she asks. The traveler stops still. The woman draws closer, asking a second time. 'Will you forgive me?' They are face to face when she asks the third time.

The traveler's mysterious companion is again at his side, quietly instructing him. 'This Wilderness of Forgiveness is not only a place for receiving forgiveness, but for giving it as well. This woman is but the first of a procession of people from your past whom you have never really forgiven. The divine Joy that has flooded your soul all day is being challenged by the bitterness buried in your soul all these years. You

have to make a choice. The sterile, shallow lip-service forgiveness of your past life is powerless even to be polite to this woman, but the forgiveness of God which has been flowing in to the point of becoming an obsession can flow out now if you will allow it to.'

The traveler looks into her eyes and says, 'I forgive you.' She weeps, and just as she forms the words, 'Thank you,' she is gone.

Then the man who called the traveler a fool in the restaurant back in Christian City comes running and panting toward him. Mopping his face with his handkerchief, the troubled man begins to beg for forgiveness. 'Of course, of course,' the traveler replies heartily. It's nothing. Don't think another thing about it.'

'Please don't take this matter so lightly. I need your forgiveness. Will you really forgive me? From the bottom of your heart?'

'But I already have,' returns the traveler. His companion illuminates the situation for him.

'He needs your forgiveness, not your courtesy, but active, genuine forgiveness. He needs your love.'

'My friend, you are forgiven,' the traveler tells him earnestly with respect in his voice. With visible relief the man sighs, 'Thank you,' and disappears into the desert air. His companion reminds him of the verse in Matthew which reads, 'Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' Yeshua answered him and said, 'I do not say seven, but seventy times seven.'

The Wilderness of Worship

'Water! Who would have thought that in the middle of the desert there would be a sea?!' From a mammoth dune the traveler looked down into an expanse of blue stretching to the horizon. 'But no, it isn't water,' he remembered. 'The old man on the mountain pointed to this as the beginning of the second wilderness.' As he descended the hill to its edge, the strange sea of sand is not as flat as it seemed from above. There are waves of blue extending into the distance, like a frozen ocean.

'Perhaps there is some relationship between this and 'the sea of glass' before the Throne of God? Perhaps the waves will flatten out as I approach the New Jerusalem?'

Suddenly, a person of unearthly beauty is standing a few feet away from the traveler.

'Greetings! It's a long way across this stretch. Many have perished trying to make it on foot. I offer you a better way.'

'A better way?' asks the traveler.

'Yes. I have the power to cross this wilderness in a split second. If you will let me, I can take you with me. I can have you safely on the other side directly.'

'What must I do?'

'All I require is a token act. If you will merely kneel down to pay me homage, I will lift you across this wilderness with the speed of light.'

'But that would be to worship you, wouldn't it?'

'Why do you find that strange? People do it every day. You did it yourself long before you came to this wilderness. The citizens often worship me in Christian City. Some there

worship money; serve it like slaves. Their eyes light up at the thought of it, but the love of money is only a symbol of my reality.'

'You aren't reaching me with your talk of money. It's never been a problem in my life,' the traveler retorts.

"How about romance? What could be more innocent than being in love? But when the state of being in love becomes a goal and dominates the mind, there is idolatry involved. And it's 'yours truly' behind that idol, he triumphantly says. But the most personally satisfying worship I receive comes from men and women who are pursuing religious success."

'Well, if I have to worship you in exchange for a quick trip across the wilderness, I'll gladly walk, even if it takes forever,' the traveler says, putting a dent in his boasting.

With that, Satan was gone.

I soon heard the traveler reasoning with himself again:

"In Christian City it is possible to go through all the surface motions of faith in God while one's real worship, the thing which obsesses the mind day and night, is an idolatry. Now that I have left there I can survive only if I'm lost in the worship of Yeshua. God has said,

'Behold! I am doing a new thing! Now it springs forth! Do you not perceive it?! I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert to give drink to My Chosen People, the People whom I formed for Myself that they might declare My praise.'

'Perhaps such worship can be formed only in this desert, with its dryness and pounding heat, searing light and deep silence.'

These reflections were interrupted by a sudden crescendo of indescribable music and singing of unearthly beauty. Voices seemed to be everywhere, yet no one was visible. From the top of a blue wave, the traveler saw seven people standing in a hollow with their hands raised toward the Heavens, praising Yeshua, but the singing had the fullness of millions! Then the traveler opened his mouth and out of it came a torrent of praise to Yeshua. In the midst of this, his companion returned. Filled with Joy, the traveler tells him,

'Do you notice how the seven worshipers are really surrounded by a multitude of magnificent beings whose voices blend with theirs? I feel that out here in the desert I have already entered the outskirts of the New Jerusalem.'

His companion responds with a passage from the Book of Hebrews,

'But you have come to Mount Zion and to the City of the Living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels gathered for the Feast of Tabernacles, and to the Assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in the Heavens, and to a Judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Yeshua, the Mediator of a New Covenant, and to the sprinkled Blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel...Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming Fire.'

After some time the singing ceased. Everything became still. No one was in sight, but the seven worshipers bid the traveler God's peace and leave him alone with his companion. He leads him to a rushing

stream and provides him with another meal. ‘So this is the Wilderness of Worship,’ he exclaims, still in awe from his experience.

‘Yes. Here believers learn to worship the Father and the Son in Spirit and in Truth. You might call it the outer court of the New Jerusalem. As you have seen, the inhabitants of that city are all around you. Back in the Wilderness of Forgiveness you began to experience the power of Yeshua’s Blood cleansing your innermost heart. Here in the Wilderness of Worship, you receive His Holy Spirit. God immerses you with power from on High in order for you to worship Him, which in the wilderness beyond will take the shape of deeds. The Prophet Joel tells us,

‘And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy and your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions. Even upon the male and female slaves, in those days I will pour out My Spirit.’

‘I have never experienced such worship as this, but will it last?’ asks the traveler. ‘Will I still be able to worship the Living God with such grace in the deserts beyond?’

“Changes are taking place within you which if you let them, will last forever. Your heart is being opened by the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit. Your mouth is being opened to speak as God gives you utterance. ‘Your sons and daughters shall prophesy.’ And your eyes are being opened to see visions and dream dreams. You are receiving eyes which see Yeshua.”

‘But don’t these same things happen back in Christian City? I am told that this sort of thing goes on in the Apostolic Church of the Future every Sunday night.’

‘The difference, my brother, is that here you do not merely taste worship or dabble in worship. Here in the desert you are lost in worship of Yeshua so that all your praise and thanksgiving goes to Him. Everything you do is done for Him.’

‘But isn’t there a danger of fanaticism?’

‘Fanatics worship principles, ideas, human personalities and even demons, but never Yeshua. Consuming worship of Yeshua is the doorway, not to fanaticism, but to freedom such as you have never known. When you are lost in worship of Yeshua, you no longer worship such things as money, romance or success. You have found the one true object of worship, and as you worship Yeshua, you are fulfilled.’

With those words his companion departs. Once again the traveler is alone on a sea of blue sand, lost in worship of Yeshua.

The Wilderness of Prayer

Now the sea of sand comes to an abrupt end in the foothills of a fiery mountain range. There is no vegetation, only walls of dry, hard, burning rock. Bones cluttering the sand at the base of the rocky barrier are mute testimony to the dangers of this desolate land. The traveler fixes his gaze on the star and as he walks, recites to himself:

‘Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that

leads to life and those that find it are few.’

Hearing voices in the distance, the traveler follows the path at the foot of the mountain toward them. There the path abruptly turns into a gash in the mountain. Entering the opening he listens as a voice echoes and resounds with such intensity that no words can be distinguished. Moving deep into this rocky pass, the traveler nears a huge wrought-iron arch under which a man is addressing an assembly of men and women.

‘This is the way, believe me!’ pleads the man, his words now distinct. ‘This narrow gate to my left is so rusty it will hardly swing. Who in his right mind would want to follow that steep path when this well-paved, well-traveled way is open and ready? Come through this gate and you will be out of the wilderness before the day is over. Good food and a clean bed await you at the other end. There are prayer meetings arranged at the rest stops every hour along the way.’

Without hesitation the traveler passes under the wrought-iron arch and proceeds down the road. Others join him. The route on which he now walks is smooth and pleasant in contrast to the blue sand he has just plodded through. A sign repeats the information that there are rest stops every hour, consisting of a prayer meeting and light lunch. At the first such stop he talks with a pleasant hostess. ‘I’ve come a long way. Please tell me where this path is taking us.’ She smiles and replies, ‘You will be beautifully housed and well taken care of. Your journey will be over by nightfall.’

The traveler walks on, increasingly perplexed. Just as darkness begins to fall after a scenic journey through the rocks and trees, he finds himself on the brow of a hill looking down on a city. ‘Welcome!’ exclaims a man standing beneath a wrought-iron arch identical to the arch through which he had passed earlier. ‘Thank you,’ replies the traveler. ‘But where am I?’ ‘Why, this is Christian City!’

Without a word the traveler turns and runs back the way he came. With Christian City out of his sight, he slows to a walk, but doesn’t stop until he’s reached the other arch, the end of this false path. He cries out,

‘I have only one desire! To find the narrow gate and enter it before I take a single rest. How could I have been so blind? Of course the wide gate would lead to Christian City. It’s the place where one can have his ease and does not have to deny himself. He takes no risks or suffers any pain or loss of sleep,’ he adds bitterly.

Finally, the traveler discovers the old rusty gate. So narrow is it that he can barely squeeze through it. The gate had been almost hidden by weeds and vines. Daybreak finds him on a narrow path winding up through scarlet rocks. There is a hum in the air as of a wind through trees, but neither wind or trees are found here. The hum grows louder and finally can be distinguished as a melody of many voices. Now the traveler sees the people on the path ahead. He has become part of a procession of people all moving toward the New Jerusalem. As they walk they are each talking earnestly to someone unseen. Some of them are crying. Some are exuberant. Some are mentioning people’s names and asking good things for them. Some ask their neighbors ahead or behind for help, but their main concern is with their unseen listener.

The traveler’s companion now returns and addresses him:

‘Here in the Wilderness of Prayer, the contrast with Christian City is extreme. There they do have prayer meetings and people pray before they go to bed. When life becomes difficult, their prayers become intense, until the crisis passes, but in the Wilderness of Prayer, prayer becomes one’s way of life, the source of one’s whole existence. The time has come for you to be lost in a life of prayer. Meditate on these passages in Luke,’ and he handed him a sheet of paper containing these verses of Scripture:

“Now when all the people were baptized and when Yeshua also had been im-

mersed and was praying, the Heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form, as a dove, and a Voice came from the Heavens, saying, 'You are My beloved Son in whom I am very pleased.'" (Lk. 3:21-22)

'But so much the more report went abroad concerning Him and great multitudes gathered to hear and to be healed of their infirmities, but He withdrew to the wilderness and prayed.' (Lk. 5:15-16)

"In those days He went out into the hills to pray and all night He continued in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His students and chose from them twelve whom He named Apostles." (Acts 6:12-13)

"Now about eight days after these sayings He took with Him Peter and John and Jacob (James) and went up on the mountains to pray. And as He was praying, the appearance of His countenance was altered and His clothes became dazzling white." (Lk 9:28-29).

"He was praying in a certain place and when He ceased, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his students.'" (Lk. 11:1).

"And He came out and went, as was His custom, to the Mount of Olives and the disciples followed Him. And when He came to the place He said to them, 'Pray that you may not enter into temptation.' And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw and knelt down and prayed.'" (Lk. 22:39-41)

"And when they came to the place which is called the Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals—one on the right and one on the left. And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.'" (Lk. 23:33-34)

'A prayer life is something we engage in alone, yet it brings us into fellowship with God and man as nothing else will,' his companion told him when he had finished reading.

'Prayer is going to God, to the Father's door, and asking for bread so that you can give it to your needy brother. When you knock and keep knocking, it will always open. Always. Out of that relationship with God comes something you share with others. And as you share what God gives you, you have a relationship with them. A person will have this relationship even if they are shy or clumsy. For this life of prayer delivers one from the fear of other people's opinions and the fear of one's own blunders.'

'But, does it take these eerie mountains, these cliffs, this continuous danger to learn to pray?' asks the traveler.

"Well, in the past you cried to Yeshua in your occasional emergencies. Here you are learning to see your life as a continuous crisis, driving you to call upon Yeshua day and night. 'Shall not God vindicate His elect who call on Him day and night?' The clearer our vision of what happens in the world, for example, how close to the edge of chaos the nations are; the more we understand that the only way to know life is to come close to God the Father through Yeshua His Son in prayer and to cry out to Him day and night. We pray without ceasing because the crisis in earthly life is never over.'

'But why does it all have to be so hard: It looks to me as though the climb through these mountains is the toughest part of the journey yet.'

'Because prayer is our main work. It takes thought, concentration, an active will and the best of one's strength to pray for the sanctification of Yeshua's Name, the coming of His

Kingdom, to pray for the laborer's in the Harvest, or to pray for specific people and their needs. You have barely begun to scratch the surface of the awesome things that wait to be done in answer to your prayers, if you will keep going.'

'That's it, though! To keep going! I'm getting so tired.'

'This is because your prayers are becoming engaged in the real battle. Prayer is the ground where we overcome evil with good. In these mountains you will learn to pray for your enemies. The life of overcoming evil with good starts with asking that good will come to those who have done evil to us.'

The narrow path leads to a lookout where the traveler and his companion share a meal. Afterwards they walk to the edge of the lookout where he points to the path winding down through mountains, which diminish in size until somewhere near the horizon they appear to reach their end.

'You see, there begins the Harvest,' the traveler's companion says pointing to a view beyond them.

'Remember these words, which Yeshua said, 'Do not say, 'There are yet four months and then comes the harvest.' I tell you, lift up your eyes and see how the fields are already white for harvest! He who reaps receives wages and gathers fruit for Eternal Life so that the sower and the reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'one sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor; others have labored and you have entered into their labor.'''

The traveler looks into the distance while his companion explains:

'In Christian City there is a fine wide street called Missionary Boulevard, lined with spacious well-kept buildings and adorned with fountains and lawns and lovely shrubs. Those buildings house every missionary enterprise known in the Christian world. There are headquarters for literature outreach, editorial offices for elaborate missionary magazines and smaller facilities that provide a prayer-letter service for lesser-known laborers. There are studios that produce world literature telethons for missionary appeals. There are institutions that offer refresher courses for missionaries on furlough, and a computerized itinerary service for missionaries that need to broaden their financial base. There are recruiting centers, rest facilities for retired missionaries and even a budding record company. Lately, though, Missionary Boulevard has been thrown into a panic by some disturbing news. Word has been received that large numbers of missionaries have suddenly committed an unpardonable breach of missionary etiquette. Instead of taking as their mission field the approved territory of the known world, missionaries have plunged into the desert toward the New Jerusalem.'

'But what kind of mission field is this desert?' the traveler asks.

'Whose soul are you going to save in the Wilderness of Forgiveness except your own? And when you get to the Wilderness of Worship, everyone there is already alive with God's Glory. In the Wilderness of Prayer there is wonderful relationship with other travelers and I'm learning to intercede, but there aren't any lost souls.'

The Harvest

Reaching the outer extremity of the Wilderness of Prayer, the traveler in my dream took his first clear view of his destination. In the far distance, radiant with a holy splendor, was the New Jerusalem. Visibly overcome with emotion, his steps quickened. Suddenly he encountered a terrible stench of smoke and decaying bodies, corpses everywhere. Forms with life left are moaning for help. A woman doubled with pain begs the traveler, 'Please, please, help me! I can't tolerate this thirst any more!' 'I'm powerless,' he tells her. 'What do you think I could do for you?'

'A little water is all I need. Please bring me some water!'

'Where am I going to find water in this desert?'

'How long do you think you'll last,' she replies, 'unless you find water for yourself? Please find some and bring it to me.'

As the traveler scans the desert in bewilderment, his companion returns and guides him to a spring surrounded by thousands of empty flasks. 'Drink some for yourself and then fill a flask for the woman,' he tells him. After drinking the water, the traveler is immediately strengthened and brings some to the woman. By the time she has finished drinking, her health is restored. Immediately she takes the flask, runs to the spring and begins helping her neighbors. Three are men with deep wounds; children lying on their backs with faint, rapid breathing, and elderly people with dirty bandages around their worn faces. Some victims are screaming with pain and others are weeping silently to themselves. Some are revived with a single flask of water. Others need two or three. I see other travelers engaged in the same effort.

As victims are healed, they too help in the labor of raising up others. As they carry water from the spring, the traveler shares this passage from John:

"Meanwhile, the disciples besought Him saying, 'Rabbi, eat!' But He said to them, 'I have food to eat of which you do not know.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Has someone brought Him food?' Yeshua said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His Work.'"

'I guess we're learning what that means,' said the traveler. He spent many days in that place, involved in the work of revival. One evening, as he rested by the spring, his companion returns and sits down beside him. 'I don't suppose we'll be able to go on to the New Jerusalem until we've finished here?' the traveler asks. 'That's true,' he replied. 'But will they wait for us?'

"Don't worry. Just keep reviving these people until they're all well. Then the gates of the New Jerusalem will open and the inhabitants will come out and escort you in. Bear this in mind; 'do you not say, 'There are yet four months and then comes the harvest?' I tell you, lift up your eyes and see how the fields are already white for harvest. He who reaps receives wages and gathers fruit for Eternal Life, so that the sower and the reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you didn't labor. Others have labored and you have entered into their labor.'"

'But these needs are so staggering that I am beginning to feel overwhelmed. The joy of seeing restoration take place before my eyes is offset to some degree by the vastness of this sea of despair. Is there an end to it?'

'Brother, replies his companion, 'just as you had to lose yourself in God's forgiveness and in worship and prayer, you are now losing yourself in the harvest. It's one thing to

dabble in the harvest. It's quite another to be lost in it.'

'But will I have strength to keep on working among people with such great needs?'

"Isn't that what Yeshua did? 'And as He sat at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Yeshua and His students. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to His students, 'Why does your Rabbi eat with tax collectors and sinners?' But when He heard it, He said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.' Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous but sinners...'"

'It must have become discouraging for Him though.'

"Yeshua wept over religious Jerusalem for hardness of her heart. Obviously, His greatest encouragement on the human side came from those repenting sinners. Of these He never tired. You can confidently abandon yourself to this harvest without danger of being engulfed by it, provided you keep your vision on Yeshua and do your work here with a whole heart. The Holy Spirit will sustain you if you will be careful to listen to these people as Yeshua listened to the woman at the well, to the lepers, the lame, the blind and the father of the demon-possessed boy. Don't be in a hurry. Take time and listen and ask the right questions. Find out where people are really hurting and what they really need. Also, you must tell them about Yeshua as you go about with your flask. The Water in the flask and this Message of yours are identical. These dying people are thirsting for Yeshua, not theories about Yeshua, but Yeshua Himself. The Message of Yeshua is a drink of refreshing water which gives them life. Remember the verse, 'Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and cast out demons. You received without pay, give without pay.' Don't be satisfied until the mercy of God has raised them to their feet.'"

'Until the mercy of God has raised them all to their feet'? echoes the traveler.

'Yes. Think about this passage in Revelation:

'And I saw the holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of the Heavens from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great Voice from the Throne saying, 'Behold! The dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them and they shall be His People and God Himself will be with them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'

"As you first experience the labor of the harvest and discover you are actually able to raise these perishing ones to their feet by giving them Living Water from the divine Spring, Yeshua, you have tremendous Joy. The wilderness experience of forgiveness, worship of God and prayer have issued in the power to heal the sick in the Name of Yeshua. 'He who believes in Me will also do the Works that I do. And greater Works than these will he do because I go to the Father.'" The challenge is to endure.'

The Vision

When I next saw the traveler in my dreams he had begun to complain:

‘How long is this going to go on?!’ I would have thought that by now the Work would have been finished and we could go on. I’m sorry but I’m tired. I’m going over by that boulder to rest in the shade for a couple of days.’

Later, another traveler passes the boulder and finds him lying there almost dead. Running to the Spring, he fills two flasks, returns and pours the precious Water down his throat. ‘Drink it, my brother.’ ‘Thank you. Oh, thank you. I was almost done for,’ says our traveler between gulps. ‘But how did I come to this? What went wrong?’

His companion joins him again. ‘You lost your strength because you lost your vision. The New Jerusalem over there is still your destination. It is your home, the dwelling place of our God and His Messiah King. While you work, be sure to take time daily, hourly, to pause and look at the New Jerusalem. If you fail to stop and hear its music, neglect to breathe the atmosphere it sends forth to you or to drink from that Stream which flows out from beneath its Gates, you will soon be exhausted. You must remember that sustaining Power comes from the City where the King lives.’

The traveler resumes his work in the Harvest with fresh vigor, but at nightfall he is overcome by weariness. He goes to the Spring. Approaching it is a woman who looks quite elderly, yet doesn’t appear the least bit tired. ‘What’s your secret?’ asks the traveler. ‘You look so youthful and vigorous while I have no strength left.’

‘I have patterned my life after the Prophet Daniel,’ she tells him. ‘Daniel must have been a busy man, yet in the midst of the daily pressures he continued to return to his upper chamber where the windows opened westward toward Jerusalem. There, looking to Jerusalem, the city that he loved, hundreds of miles away, he prayed and gave thanks to Yahveh. Even though it meant the lion’s den, Daniel refused to neglect his prayers. Daniel kept his vision alive by making Yahveh and His City the focus of his life. That’s what I do. The more problems I have to face in the Harvest, the more time seems to press in on me, the more firmly I set my eyes on the City of the great King. I commit myself to keep looking to Him. Every time I eat bread and drink wine, I do so in anticipation, as well as in remembrance. This is the food of the City, you know. It keeps my eyes and my heart there.’

When the traveler left the old woman, he seemed to be consciously attempting to keep his vision before him. In a low voice he was singing the words of Revelation:

‘And I saw the holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of the Heavens from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great Voice from the Throne saying, ‘Behold! The dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them and they shall be His People and God Himself will be with them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away!’

When I last saw the traveler, his companion had returned with a final admonition for him:

‘Keep looking to the City and remember Who waits for you there. He has prepared a place for you and will soon be coming for you. Meanwhile, as you look to the City, He will renew your strength so that you will mount up on wings as eagles. You will run and

not be weary and you will walk and not faint.’

Two Revivals

At this point I was swept away from the scene of the traveler’s journey and to the top of a high cliff. I found there a stone tablet inscribed with these words from Revelation 19:

‘Then I saw the Heavens opened and behold! A white horse and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True! In Righteousness He judges and makes war. His Eyes are like a Flame of Fire and on His Head are many crowns. He has a Name inscribed, which no one knows but Himself. He is clad in a robe dipped in Blood, and the Name by which He is called is, The Word of God. And the Armies of the Heavens, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed Him on white horses. From His Mouth issues a sharp Sword with which to smite the nations and He will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the wine press of the Fury of the Wrath of God Almighty. On His Robe, by His Thigh, He has a Name inscribed—King of Kings and Lord of Lords.’

Looking up from the tablet, I saw beneath me two revivals simultaneously in progress. Christian City was experiencing a revival, which manifested itself in massive and rapid growth. Within a very short amount of time the population had increased tenfold. Buildings were going up everywhere. New homes sprawled up and down the surrounding hills, but the most dramatic aspect of this growth in Christian City was the appearance of magnificent new church structures towering over the countryside. One cathedral was being completed which had a spire seventy stories high, housing the world’s most powerful transmitter. Another church was taking shape in the form of a giant glass dome, with a revolving stage and wrap-around sound systems. The most unusual one looked like an upright, traditional cross with fifteen elevators taking people up to the sanctuary housed in the south arm, and a Christian restaurant in the north arm. There were Christian educational facilities for every age group from pre-kindergarten to graduate school. This group, sponsored scenic retreat centers in the style of Swiss chalets, with vast seminar halls.

There was a feeling in Christian City that this growth was a sign of the world’s last days. Books on the End of the Age were up near the top of the Christian best seller list, second only to the Christian sex manuals. Reporters came from all over the world to do articles on the booming conditions. The inhabitants of Christian City were claiming that when the End came, they would be caught away to the New Jerusalem before the chaos erupted.

At the very same time, I saw across the desert, far distant from Christian City, a very different revival taking place, with none of the accouterments of successful religion. Dying men and women were being raised to their feet like the dry bones that the Prophet Ezekiel saw. They were being delivered from their diseases, their sins and their spiritual prisons, merely by drinking Living Water from the holy Spring. Those who tasted the life-giving Water shared it with others, bringing healing to them. As by a spreading Fire, or a surging Flood, the sick ones were being swept to their feet. Laborers there, who’d spent years seeing limited results, found that now it was taking not more than a single drop of Water on a parched tongue to raise the dying to life. And each day, the process was accelerating.

Finally, I saw the last prone body raised to life. What once appeared as a battlefield of defeat had become the camp of a mighty army. Suddenly, an earthquake shook the ground beneath my feet. The Heavens darkened and a sound of war rolled in from the east.

Then I saw Christian City being invaded and destroyed. The magnificent cathedrals, the world’s largest cross, the retreat centers and seminar halls were splintered apart and flattened by deafening explosions.

Dead bodies of the inhabitants, who had thought they would escape the destruction, filled the streets. The armies of destruction now pressed on into the desert toward the scene of the second revival. Soon this seemingly indestructible horde was engulfing the Wilderness of Forgiveness, Worship and Prayer. When the New Jerusalem came into view, a single roar, like that of a wounded beast, filled the air. The horde drove on toward its goal, appearing about to storm the New Jerusalem.

But near the walls of the City, the Army of the revived ones waited, poised and ready. When the enemy came within range the Gates of the City burst open. Out rode an Army of Light, led by a King of such Splendor that the enemy horde had to shield their eyes. The revived ones merged with the Army of Light and joined battle with the enemy. Three and a half days later the war was over. The enemy was destroyed and the triumphant ones entered the New Jerusalem for which they had been chosen before the foundation of the world. Again I was swept away to read another large tablet engraved with further words from Revelation:

“Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in mid-heaven, ‘Come! Gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders and the flesh of all men both free and slave; both small and great!’”

‘Then I saw the Beast and the kings of the Earth with their armies gathered to make war against Him who sits upon the horse and against His Army. The Beast was captured, with the False Prophet, who in his presence had worked miracles, which had deceived those who worshiped the Image. These two were thrown alive into the Lake of Fire that burns with brimstone. The rest were slain by the Sword of Him who sits upon the horse, the Sword that issues from his Mouth, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.’

‘Then I saw an angel coming down from the Heavens, holding in his hand the Key of the Bottomless Pit and a great chain. And he seized the Dragon, that ancient Serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years and threw him into the Pit and shut it and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be loosed for a little while.’

‘Then I saw thrones and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who were beheaded for their testimony of Yeshua and for the Word of God, and who had not worshipped the Beast nor its Image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Messiah a thousand years.’

When I finished reading this, as abruptly as my dream had come to me, it ended, leaving me with a deep sense of awe, a new awareness of the undercurrents in my own life and renewed desire to seek to know the Father in Spirit and in His Truth.

Never has it been more clear to me that two revivals are in process on Earth. One is the revival of the Spirit of God by which dead men and women are freed from their sins by the Blood of the Lamb, raised to a life which bears God’s nature and manifests His mercy.

The other revival is the revival of religious flesh, a revival which is so appealing and gathers such multitudes and wields such power in this world because it offers all the comfort of religion, while allowing one to keep one’s ego and all rights to one’s self.

Surely each of us has to decide which revival we are going to be a part of. Am I going to invest my life in some enterprise of booming Christian City? Or am I going to lose my life in the pursuit of God’s Messiah King and His Work? Am I going to concentrate on building something that will cause the citizens of

Christian City to sit up and take notice? Or am I going to spend my life bringing Living Water to those who are perishing?¹

¹ Revised on 4 July 2016.