

Understanding His Ways

by John Follette

The sermon explores the common questions Christians have about God's timing, methods, and purposes, encouraging trust and faith in His plan.

Scripture: Luke 1:26, Acts 1:6, Acts 1:8, 2 Corinthians 12:7, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Ephesians 2:10

Topics: "Trusting God", "Divine Providence"

Description

John Follette delves into three common questions Christians often ask: When, How, and Why. He emphasizes the importance of trusting God's timing, methods, and purposes, even when we do not fully understand. Through examples like the disciples' misunderstanding of Jesus' kingdom and Mary's acceptance of the miraculous birth of Jesus, Follette illustrates the need to surrender our own desires and perspectives to God's divine plan. He also explores Paul's experience with a 'thorn in the flesh,' showing how God's power is made perfect in our weaknesses, leading to a deeper reliance on Him.

Transcript

There are three questions that Christians often ask.

First, there are those who are always concerned about the time element in the Lord's dealings with them. For example, the Lord may have indicated that He intends to do something, and it appears to them that they should have it right now.

They begin wonder WHEN will the Lord come through? The answer to this is that the Lord is not to be "wheened" but rather, worshipped. He is not always pleased to reveal the time element. Instead, He may keep us under the influence and teaching of the promise.

Second, there are those who rightly believe, but wonder HOW the Lord will ever do it. They accept the fact that the Lord has spoken, but do not really believe that He will fulfill His Word to them.

In the natural, we go through difficult times that we do not understand. This is true also in our spiritual experience. We are to follow the pattern that the Lord makes. It might not always be as we would

desire, but we should quickly surrender our ideas and ways, and adjust to His. Over a good many years, I have learned the importance of being obedient to the methods and timings which the Lord uses. A baby goes through a crisis in being weaned. This does not happen in a few minutes. The child has a difficult time in giving up the bottle. So also, the Lord weans us of blessings, gifts, and means, which have brought us this far, but no longer apply. If you are going through this, do not think that you have been forsaken by the Lord as He is merely bringing a correction into your spiritual walk.

It is sad when the Lord seeks to feed someone strong meat and they cling to a milk diet. He knows they have the potential for a much deeper moving of truth, if they would only pay the price. The problem is that this involves the giving up of many things with which there is a present satisfaction and comfort. Often, those who are asking "how" are unable to understand any attempt at an explanation, as they must first go through the changes that will make the answer possible. The only encouragement that can be given is that the Lord will lead them step by step, until they are able to rest in the fact that He has the "how" in His own hand.

Thirdly, there are those who ask WHY?

This question is asked by those who have a limited perspective. They see only the local, or the present, while the Lord sees far beyond and seeks to move them toward a higher purpose that is known only to Him. Thus, we may not understand why we must go through certain things. It is extremely important that we recognize and accept the fact that the Lord knows what He is doing, and that His intention is to bring forth within us the very best.

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" Eph 2:10.

This tells us that the Lord has a plan and purpose for each one of us, which He knew before we were born. However, we do not always accept this and cooperate with the Lord as we should. Thus, there are those who are disturbed by the time element and ask, When? Others are concerned by "How?" and question the means, while still others seek the reason, Why?

These are three basic questions which the Lord seldom answers. Therefore, we should not complain

due to His silence concerning these areas of our spiritual life and experience.

The first of these, "when," can be seen in the account of the disciples asking Jesus concerning the Kingdom (Acts 1:6-7). When Jesus came, He did not come to establish a kingdom on the earth, rather, He came to die. The traditions that worked in the minds of the Jews and also His disciples, was that the Messiah would establish an earthly kingdom.

Therefore, they were unable to understand His magnificent teachings concerning the great objectives of God. They had developed a kingdom complex, which they held so tenaciously that it became a fixation within them. Thus, when Jesus wrought a miracle, they did not see it for its present effect, but channeled it toward something greater. This tendency hinders the moves of God, even today. People seek to use what God does to promote their own purposes.

His disciples intensely wanted this kingdom to come into being. But Jesus had something different in mind, as He could look ahead and see the building up of a spiritual body, His Church. Therefore, Jesus is about to present His disciples with a seeming disappointment. There will not be a present restoration of the kingdom to Israel, BUT ...

From their perspective, this was a terrible disappointment. But from His view, it was not a disappointment at all. It was a necessary thing that He had to bring them to, in order to give them the divine substitute for the thing they thought they had to have.

This happens to us many times. We interpret a word, or a promise, in a certain way and "read" our circumstances into it, when this was not what the Lord intended at all. This is because we see it from our perspective, and in time it becomes a horrible disappointment to our religious flesh and ambitions. The Lord will not come to us in the beginning and explain the unknown to us. This is where our faith applies. We must come to the place where we trust the Lord and become willing for Him to do it His way. Finally, the Lord will show us what He really said.

When Jesus was alone with His disciples, He explained to them the truths He had spoken. Because their hearts and minds were set on establishing a kingdom, they had no capacity to understand what He was telling them. Thus, they never asked any questions concerning His purpose in coming to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. Even after the resurrection, the only question they had was about

this kingdom.

"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" Acts 1:6-7.

He is saying that there are some things that are not for us to know, that are in God's hand. Then He tells them that there is a divine alternative.

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" Acts 1:8.

Jesus is saying, "This is a horrible disappointment to you, as you are not coming into a kingdom. But, I have something different for you, and soon you will receive the empowering to make it possible. He is telling them that they are about to become the first "cells" of a mystical body. "And you shall become ..." He does not tell them a thing they are to do. Rather, He told them something that they were to become.

Today, we make the same mistake that they made. Many see the Baptism in the Holy Spirit as the power to accomplish a purpose. Rather, through this empowering of the Holy Spirit, we become a witness unto Him. Paul carried this thought when he said, "You are living epistles." You yourself are the epistle, not the thing you do. This is the vocation of the Body today, to become a living witness. Jesus is revealing to His disciples the birthing of a body which will be projected into the eternal ages. This word of transition is an example of the question, "when."

The second question concerns our difficulty with wondering "how" God is going to work this thing out. This can be seen in Mary, when the angel came to her about the birth of Jesus.

"And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph,
of the house of David; and the virgin's name was
Mary" Luke 1:26-27.

"And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for
thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou
shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son,
and shalt call his name JESUS" Luke 1:30-31.

"Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be,
seeing I know not a man?" Luke 1:34.

Mary immediately turned to the natural, "how?" The flesh had to come in and reason, yet how patient
the Lord is with us. She was not asking Him how the miracle would take place. It was more a question
of amazement. How could such a thing be, when it was not following the normal pattern - she had no
husband.

"And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy
Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the
Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that
holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be
called the Son of God" Luke 1:35.

He did not condemn her or give an explanation of the incarnation of God in flesh, but simply told her
what would take place. He said, "the power of the Highest" shall come upon you and God will work the
miracle.

Mary's response is much better in the original Greek. She said, "body and soul I belong to thee, so let it
be."

It is interesting to note that just as Gabriel told Mary that the power of the Highest coming upon her
would produce the body into which Jesus would be birthed, in like manner, Jesus told His disappointed
disciples that it would be the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon them that would birth the
corporate body of Christ that was about to come into being.

The question "why" can be seen in the account of Paul's "thorn in his flesh," which he was required to bear.

Paul tells us "how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (II Cor 12:4). Then he gives the reason why the thorn in his flesh, this terrible thing, came upon him.

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure" II Cor 12:7.

He is not talking about a thorn, as from a rose bush. In the original, it means like a javelin. This was not some little disagreeable thing that irritates. It was as a javelin which was thrown into his flesh.

In the Greek, there are several words for "flesh." The word used here for flesh is "sarx." This speaks of the total person; spirit, soul, and body. Thus it is wrong to apply this thorn as being sore eyes, or some other physical handicap. This javelin was thrust through his whole being. Because it moved within him in three realms, it became a great hindrance. As a result, Paul sought the Lord about it.

In effect he said, "Lord, you have called me to minister your Word and you have given me wonderful revelations, and just as I am about to minister these things, I am hit by this javelin." Paul clearly tells us that this "thorn" was "a messenger of Satan" that had access to him to distress him, so he would remain humble and dependent upon the Lord.

Paul disturbed by a demon? The Word does not say that he had a demon, it merely says that a demon had been permitted by God, as a ministering spirit would be, to develop Paul. The word "messenger" is the same word that is used for "angel." The angels are spirits sent of God to minister to us. This is exactly the same word, only it is from the enemy. There was an Angel, a messenger, a demon of the enemy permitted to come to Paul.

This was so Paul would not begin to exalt himself due to the abundance of the light and truth he had. The Lord was saying to him, "This will be for your salvation, as it will save you out of much trouble,

and it will be a means by which I can be glorified."

Paul besought the Lord three times that it might be removed. But the Lord said,

"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is

made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will

I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of

Christ may rest upon me" II Cor. 12:9.

Here again is this word "power." This is the same "power" that came upon Mary, that she might bring forth. It is the same "power" that the disciples received "to become." Here it is the "power" of God overshadowing, ministering. It is God saying that His power would be made perfect in our weakest condition.

Notice that Paul said, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities." Imagine glorying in infirmities. Paul did not ask to be excused and then sulk in a corner. Rather, he gloried. This power "rested" on him. In the Greek, it is to make a tabernacle or a tent that covers. Not just rest, but He builds a tabernacle over Paul for protection.

"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" 2 Cor. 12:10.

Paul is saying, "Since I have this thorn, I will rejoice in it." He had come to understand that when he was under the attack of these things, God would spread a tabernacle over him, and the power of God became manifest through him in a way that could happen in no other way.

Now Paul understood "why," as he could demonstrate the wonder, the grace, and the power of God, greatly affecting the world for the Lord.

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