

October - December 2014

# ARMOR OF GOD

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH



## “Salt of the Earth”

Christ and the Human Factor • Remember Your Covenant with God • Lessons from a Wedding Parable



## Our Hope and the Pope

January 2015 may be considered a memorable and comforting month for the Filipinos. This is because the powerful head of the Roman Catholic Church visited the country. It was indeed a euphoric event, not only among the catholic faithful, but also with other religious groups; maybe because the Pope mentioned about “putting an end to religious disagreement”.

Unlike other visiting dignitaries, the kind of royalty treatment the Pope has been accorded was awesome to say the least. All the resources of the government to secure and provide convenience for the Pope were organized to the max. Notable among them were a 3 day non-working holidays; posting a large number of military personnel near the areas covered by the Pope's entourage; imposition of a “no-fly zone” for three days; suspension of commercial flights to and from Tacloban City last Jan. 17; and closing down to traffic several major roads in Metro Manila.

There is no question about the Pope's exceptional sociability. Everyone who were able to draw closer to him witnessed his fascinating charisma. In fact, residents of the calamity-hit provinces braved the bad weather just to be part of the huge crowd merrily hailing the pontiff. And some find it a fulfilment already for having a glance at the Pope as his entourage passes through an extremely jam-packed crowd.

Apparently, the material dole-outs were not part of the poor's expectation during the huge gathering held in Tacloban and Manila. The devotees were there to listen to the Pope's encouragement and exhortations. To them, his words were more than enough to compensate for the sacrifices they went through just to attend the gathering. They looked up to him reverently as the highest agent of Christ; and probably expect that things will be better off spiritually once the Pope piously waved his hands and pronounce his blessings on them. They wanted something more than physical. They have to have something to hope for; and they looked up to the Pope to fill it.

The Pope talked about things that may have lifted up the spirit of the people and become hopeful in the coming months; yet most of the topics dwelt on the evils mankind has been afflicted with ever since – corruption, family relations, inequality, poverty, environmental abuse, etc. Yet as a spiritual leader, he could have also deliberated on the more profound hope, like the one which the apostle Paul wrote, saying: “For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?” (Romans 8:24-25). What hope? Paul added: ... a faith and knowledge resting on the HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time (NIV; Titus 1:1-2).

Yes, eternal life is God's offer that one needs to consider and think about while we are still alive - whether you are a follower of the Pope or not. This famous verse is worth repeating: For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life, John 3:16.

**Eleno S. Mellomida**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>3</b>	<b>“Salt of the Earth”</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Remember Your Covenant with God</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Christ and the Human Factor</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>Lessons from a Wedding Parable</b>



# “Salt of the Earth”

## Why the need to become one?

by Winston S. Co

**J**esus, in the Sermon on the Mount declares: You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men (Matthew 5:13).

Sermon messages have been delivered, and significant write-ups have been published trying to emphasize the importance of this statement of Jesus. So far, very few if any, did ever pricked our consciences and moved our hearts to change our lives through the lessons behind what Jesus said. Perhaps the enormity of what Jesus wanted to convey in this statement has not been fully understood in its true context and intent.

This declaration of Jesus is supposed to be a life changing statement. It is important then to delve deeply into the heart and core of His message and find out how it relates to our individual lives - especially those who professed devotion to Christian tenets. And it is fervently hoped that as the reader go through this piece, he/she will fully appreciate the value of what our Savior truly meant when He said “you are the salt of the earth”.



## Salt

Now, what is salt? What is the salt of the earth? What is it supposed to flavor? How will it lose its flavor? How does one become the salt? And, what does it have to do with us? These are very interesting questions – the answers will give as an idea of what Jesus wanted to convey.

Everyone knew what salt is. Salt is a mineral. In the context of the discourse, the salt gives flavor to food. A dish, no matter how well prepared, is bland without salt. When salt is sprinkled into a dish, it melts into the dish, thus providing flavor and “unami”. It accentuates and perks up the flavor of the entire dish. Thus, you often hear the chef say, “add salt to taste”.

One of the best steaks I have eaten was a simple cut of grilled rib-eye steak seasoned with salt. The salt cuts the fattiness and gives flavor to the meat. Salt gives grilled meat its delicious flavor. In the temple in Jerusalem all the sacrifices were seasoned with salt (Leviticus 2:13). You can imagine the sweet fragrance and aroma of the offerings that fill the surroundings. The temple must have smelled like a huge high-end 5-star steak restaurant.

become an idiom referring to an individual or people considered as representative of the best and noblest section of society.

What did Jesus mean by 'salt of the earth' in this particular occasion? To Jesus, it meant that they are a group of people considered as the representative of God on earth. Notice how special the Israelites were according to the apostle Paul: For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God (Romans 9:3-5).

### Israel the Firstborn

Israel is the firstborn nation of God. God declared, “Israel is My Son, My firstborn”, Exodus 4:22. Israel is the first righteous family that became a nation. Israel was to be a priestly nation before God (Exodus 19:5-6). This is the reason why God

priests (Numbers 3:12-13; Numbers 18:5-7).

In the distribution of land by Joshua, the Levites did not get a portion. Instead, they were given cities. Numbers 35:1-3 reads: “And the Lord spoke unto Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho saying: Command the children of Israel, that they give unto the Levites of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in; and open land round about the cities shall ye give unto the Levites. And the cities shall they have to dwell in; and their open land shall be for their cattle, and for their substance, and for all their beasts.” Joshua 21:41-42 “All the cities of the Levites in the midst of the possession of the sons of Israel were forty-eight cities with their pasture lands. These cities each had its surrounding pasture lands; thus it was with all these cities.”

God scattered His representatives all around the Israelites. The Levites were ordained to be teachers of the people and were distributed over all the land so that people would be taught and reminded how they should live (Deuteronomy 33:10). The Levites were scattered among the people. They were the original salt of the earth. They were sanctified as servants of the Lord. Their role was to teach and be a light to the people and the nation Israel. They were scattered like salts on earth to season the world with the word of God.

### Lost Their Saltiness

Talking to the crowd, Jesus hinted that their leaders, the Priests, the Levites and the whole nation had lost their role as teachers of righteousness.

**The Levites were sanctified as servants of the Lord.  
They were the original “salt of the earth”.**

## Salt of the Earth

When Jesus addressed the crowd at the beginning of His ministry, He said: “You are the salt of the earth.” Jesus was referring to the people who gathered to Him who were predominantly common Jewish people. Today, the phrase has

called out Israel (Isaiah 42:6-7). Israel had a special calling. She was supposed to be the 'salt of the earth' to give flavor to the whole world.

God has a special plan for Israel. Originally, He called every firstborn to be priests and eventually God decided to take the Levites as His own to serve as



Jesus lamented how it can be made effective again. He said in the latter part of verse 13: “But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.” They have lost their role, significance and sanctification - hence they are good for nothing but only to be trampled by men.

### **Covenant of Salt**

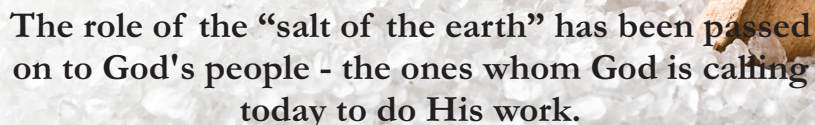
The salt of the earth refers to the priestly role of God's people. God made a covenant of salt with the Aaronic priesthood to remind them of their continual service at the temple and their role as salts of the earth (Numbers 18:18-21). The role of the “salt of the earth” has been passed on to God's people - the ones whom God is calling today to do His work. If they are true to their calling and faithful to Christ, they are considered as the priests of God today.

1 Peter chapter 2:9-10 tells us the role of modern day Christians: “You (present day Christians) are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”

It is not easy to be the 'salt of the earth'. We are scattered abroad to spread and preach the word of God. Peter warned that when God's people carry the light of the gospel of Christ to the world, they will be subjected to insults and threatenings. Persecution has always been a

major attachment to the true followers of God. (Mk. 10:30, John 15:20, 2 Tim. 3:12, 2 Thes. 1:4). Yet, the true word of God has to be preached by God's own people regardless of the consequences.

give divine flavor to the earth and to provide light to a world engulfed in darkness. And God expects them to be a 'light and a salt' within their sphere of influence, in their homes, their workplaces and their



**The role of the “salt of the earth” has been passed on to God's people - the ones whom God is calling today to do His work.**

Finally, Jesus encouraged His followers saying:

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:11-16).

### **The Duty and the Reward**

True Christians are truly the salt of the earth and light of the world. They are a royal priest which belongs to God. Today, the world is oblivious and ignorant of the true God and His righteousness. People continue to live in darkness. God has scattered His people as the salt to

communities (1 Peter 3:15-16).

Jesus said a light is supposed to be put on the hill. Thus, if one is armed with the truth, hesitancy, shyness and timidity in declaring it is not pleasing to God. Otherwise, God Himself will be ashamed of them (Mk. 8:38, Luke 9:26, Rom. 1:16). They should instead be filled with boldness, confident, outspoken in the truth - as all their predecessors fearlessly were (Acts 4:13, 29, 31; Eph. 3:12; Phil. 1:20). They should act as Ambassadors of God to spread His word across the globe and share the gospel which is the only hope in these times of uncertainty.

As the salt of the earth, they will assume a priestly role in their sphere of influence, unmindful of the inconveniences attached therewith because it is their sworn duty. And God will never ever count their efforts in vain. Paul wrote: Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58). In the future, the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” will not only become a priest but also a king when Jesus returns (Rev. 2:26-27; 5:10; 20:4,6). **AG**





# Christ and the Human Factor

by Eleno S. Mellomida

**J**esus is definitely our Saviour. But how well do you know Him? Aside from the common knowledge that He voluntarily offered His life in death to pave the way for the salvation of humanity, do you know that there are other important information that will magnify and substantiate His Divine origin? The Bible revealed through numerous accounts that He is the God who dealt with the biblical patriarchs of old like Noah, Moses, Abraham, the Prophets and the rest of the personalities who stood faithful to God. And these people were instrumental in propagating God's plan of salvation to the world in their own right. Some of them are mentioned in the 11th chapter of the book of Hebrews.

And this may be surprising for some to note that Jesus, as the second member of the God family (He has a Father, John 8:18; 28, 29), is the same I AM who spoke and commissioned Moses to lead Israel out of slavery from Egypt (Exodus 3:6-14). He is also the same I AM who claim to have already

existed before the patriarch Abraham came into the scene (John 8:58). And above all, He is the same Jesus through whom God the Father created all things (John 1:1-3; Eph. 3:9; Colossians 1:13-19; Hebrews 1:2). And right now He is sitting at the right hand of God the Father in heaven (Heb. 1:3; Heb. 10:12; 1 Peter 3:22).

## **The Unrelenting God**

As the God of the Old Testament, we find several accounts which somehow reveal His stern and exacting characteristics. In some instances, the Bible recorded His furious temperament to the point of considering the complete annihilation of mankind were it not for the mercy that He extended in behalf of the few individuals who found favour in His sight (Genesis 6:5-8; Ex. 32:9-10).

Also at times, He is “selective and discriminating”. He told Moses “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (Rom. 9:15). Unfortunately for Moses,

he was not one of the personalities who thoroughly profited from this heavenly “fringe benefit”. Yet Moses played a major role in the history of mankind; and up until today his acts served as beacon of light for Christians to follow. He took enough risk and overcome unusual difficulties just to exhibit his loyalty and trust in the living God. And God used and worked with him effectively. Moses wrote the first 5 books of the Bible. The writer of Hebrews had this to say about him:

“By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by



dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned" (Hebrews 11:24-29).

Yet in all these, and despite his passionate entreaties to enter the promise land, God denied Moses' request. Humanly, this was a reasonable plea; and perhaps Christ at that time may have a very good reason for turning it down without explaining His verdict other than recalling the unpleasant incident at the waters of Meribah (Deut. 32:51).

### **Moses' Appeal**

"Then I pleaded with the LORD at that time, saying: 'O Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand, for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do anything like Your works and Your mighty deeds? I pray, let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, those pleasant mountains, and Lebanon.' "But the LORD was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me. So the LORD said to me: 'Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter. Go up to the top of Pisgah, and lift your eyes toward the west, the north, the south, and the east; behold it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan'" (Deuteronomy 3:23-27).

Moses may have his own shortcomings. But considering that he was trapped in a situation where patience is the only suitable virtue to exercise, he regularly reached his breaking point and failed. But who would not "blow his top" if you are leading a pack of recalcitrant, unruly, uncooperative and disobedient bunch of mostly uneducated hordes of humanity?

In fact, it was because of the peoples' loathsome conduct that provoked God's anger with Moses. Yet, he was very much concerned for Israel's welfare.

Moses wanted them to enter the promise land. When God was hell-bent on destroying Israel and considered raising for Himself a new breed of people through Moses, Moses reasoned with God against it (Numbers 14:11). Obviously, this was not the conduct of a self-centered person. Rather, it was an expression of love even to those who disliked him and his leadership. Now, was Moses' dishonouring Christ at the waters of Meribah unforgivable which cost him entry into the promise land? We can only ascribe it to God's judgment in the light of His declaration saying, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD (Isaiah 55:8). However, the Bible "intimated" that Moses may be one of the important figures in the Kingdom of God alongside with Christ and Elijah (Mat. 17:4; Mk. 9:5; Luke 9:33).

### **Did Jesus Change?**

Now, the scripture says Jesus Christ (the One whom we have proven as the God of the Old Testament) is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). But what about His perspective, His emotional approach, His analytical disposition, His understanding of the capability and nature of His creation - particularly humans? Was there a "change" after He took on the nature of a man? Are these "changes" crucial to individual Christians while Jesus is sitting on His throne (Rev. 3:21) with the

Father in heaven now?

The apostle Peter tells us to emulate Jesus saying, 'For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps' (1 Peter 2:21). In much the same way, he exhorted Christians to 'grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Peter 3:18).

Question: Did Jesus also grow in grace and knowledge during His human lifetime? Is He improving or expanding, or even changing His personal observation and assessment on the lives of His creation? We know Jesus is the epitome of Christian virtues; and the goal of His disciples is to reach the kind of maturity patterned after His standards. One main objective of the church ministry is for all God's people to come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:12-13).

Did Christ simply "retained" His wisdom, knowledge and understanding? Did He open up to learn new things? Did He grow in knowledge or improved His perspectives during the time He associated, worked with, and get exposed to all types of personalities? Was His disposition 'firmly fixed' from the time He dealt with man as the God of the Old Testament - maintaining it all throughout - without compromise and without adjustments when He became human? Or did He embraced some kind of a deeper understanding about human nature while living with His creation as a man?



## **Upholding Original Principles**

Now, Jesus never compromised nor deviated from His original principles. He said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil; For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Mat. 5:17-18). However, increasing, expanding, adjusting and magnifying the virtues of understanding, patience, love, perseverance, with putting up and giving way, and prolonging one's ability to endure is a laudable act. It is commendable and worth striving to acquire. These do not necessarily nullify nor abrogate or go against the principles one espoused, stood for, represented and advocated from the very beginning.

Now, like anybody else, Jesus was exposed to all kinds of inconveniences. If He did not "downgrade" His status from God to human, He would have been spared from it. As a God, He doesn't have to undergo the kind of trials that He went through. Paul wrote: Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

Having the opportunity to mingle and get exposed to people with different backgrounds,

contrary views and divergent exposure, is one effective way of understanding the nature of man. Of course Jesus possess a sharp discernment in the attitudinal disposition of man (John 2:25); but it does not follow that He will always know how people will react in every situation at any given circumstance. Although God wanted man to choose the right path, He also empowered him with the capability to make choices and decide on his own (Deut. 30:19).

**Adjusting, expanding and advancing the virtues of patience, love and perseverance do not go against the principles one espoused and stood for from the very start.**

### **Jesus and Forgiveness**

Now, during His ministry, Jesus preached unlimited forgiveness - as long as the offending party ask for it (Mat. 18:21-22). He espoused mercy rather than sacrifice (Mat. 9:13 23:23). Today, He is sitting at the Father's right hand (Heb. 10:12) pleading our cause, mediating on our situation, especially that Satan is incessantly accusing us before the Father day and night (Rev. 12:10). And mind you, not all of the devil's accusations against us are false. John wrote: My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence—Jesus Christ, the

Righteous One (1 John 2:1). And Jesus is there defending and probably saying, as He said before breathing His last, "Father, forgive them; for they *know* (gk. *eido* - perceive, understand, unsure) not what they do." (Luke 23:34).

The writer of Hebrews alluded to why the "change" of heart: "For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people" (NIV, Heb. 2:16-17).

How and when did Jesus learn to mediate and defend our cause? "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb. 2:18). The verse tells us that after He suffered temptations as a man. If Christ maintained His outlook as God of the Old Testament, do you suppose He will have the kind of temperament that He possesses now - of a forgiving, defending, pleading to the Father on our behalf every time we stumble in our Christian walk? Obviously, the human experience added and widened His empathy and understanding of man's nature.

### **Fear, Humility, Obedience and Perfection**

*Jesus learned fear.* Heb. 5:7 says: "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that He feared." If Jesus sinned He cannot be our Saviour, and

probably He may not be able to claim His former glory. Who then will not cower in fear if you fail in a mission where the chance for a second chance is nil? Fear is not in the nature of the God who spoke to Moses. He was a God whose voice shook the earth (Heb. 12:26) and whose audience tremble and feared to death before His presence (Deut. 5:24-26). But Jesus in His human lifetime learned fear.

*Jesus learned humility.* “He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). As the God of the Old Testament, He was not humble. Here's one example: Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return; that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear (Isa.45:22-23). There are hundreds of passages that has a similar sound; so far we have yet to find a passage in the Old Testament referring to God's humble nature.

*Jesus learned obedience through His sufferings.* Heb. 5:8 says: “Though He were a Son, yet He learned *obedience* (gk. *hopakoe'e* - attentive hearkening, submission, compliance) by the things which He suffered.” Was Jesus disobedient before? Definitely not! The scripture is replete with statements from Christ that He and the Father are in complete agreement; and that He speaks and do only what the Father tells Him (Jn. 8:29; Jn. 10:30, 38).

Here's one act of Christ obedience which can't be mistaken for a new experience:

“He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will. Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." (Mat. 26:39,42; Mk. 14:36; Luke 22:42). Unwilling though Jesus was, yet He choose to submit and bowed down to the Father's will. And the three gospel writers did not miss this statement.

**Jesus learned fear  
(Heb. 5:7)  
Jesus learned to be humble  
(Phil. 2:8)  
Jesus learned obedience  
(Heb. 5:8)  
and  
Jesus was made perfect  
(Heb. 5:9)**

*Jesus was perfected*, by the things that He went through. “And being made *perfect* (gk. *teleio'o* - complete, consummate, fulfil, finish) he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:9). Perfection has a process. That process require changes. The idea that change is applicable only from bad to good is fallacious. Change can happen from good to better, and better to best and best to perfect. That is growth. Perfecting the virtues of Christianity is a continuous process. Was Jesus imperfect prior to His human incarnation? Definitely not! But can perfection be advancing and more progressive? Will Jesus

expects us to grow in Christian values while He Himself is 'stacked' with His previous mood before becoming human?

### **Our Saviour - Our Judge**

A judge has to possess ample knowledge and understanding on how his subjects act, behave and respond. He has to have a sharp perception of the demeanour of the litigants and the accused. The human factor - the element of humanity - serves as guide in making judgment and decision. Thus, Jesus is more than qualified to render judgment upon everyone.

Paul understood and wrote: Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us (Romans 8:33-34). Paul clarified further: For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). And Jesus confirmed saying: For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22).

If Jesus will use the kind of judgment the way He exercised it in Old Testament times, in all probability He will not be so kind enough to mercifully consider the human factor. Jesus went through all the sufferings to try, prove and show to His would-be followers that as a human being, it is possible to become victorious against the obstacles that we have to face in life. Paul categorized some of the Christian adversaries as beings

- continued on next page



of 'superior nature' (Eph. 6:10-12). Yet victory against them is assured because the word of God guaranteed that, 'You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world' (1 Jn. 4:4).

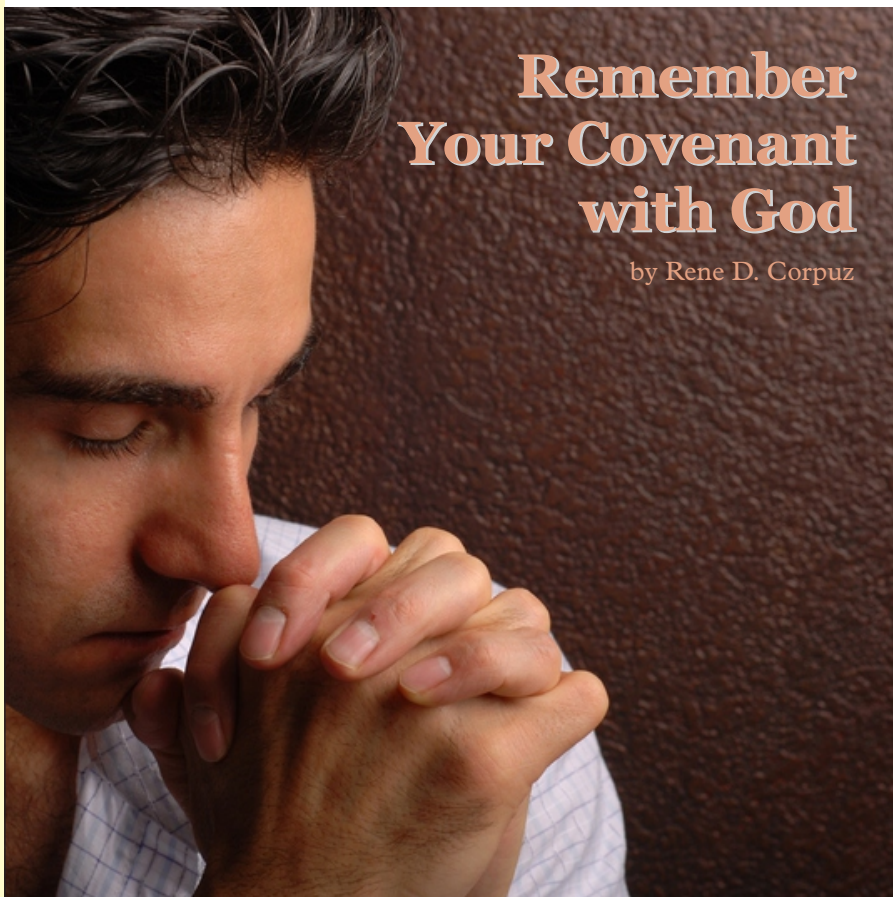
### Take the Risk

Our Saviour tried, tested, proved, and experienced it Himself. He showed us that it is possible to emerge triumphant in our Christian struggle. He said: In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (John 16:33). He can easily mediate and explain to the Father more effectively on our behalf because He understood the difficulties of sustaining the requirements of physical survival while keeping up with one's spiritual commitment in a world highly influenced by the adversary's wavelength (2 Cor.4:4). Jesus undertook the human experience not only to save humanity but to experience humanity.

If Jesus took the risk by placing in the line of danger His divine origin when He took the nature of a mortal man, why can't humans whose life is inherently temporal take the same risk? Our physical status, regardless of how lofty we have "arrived", is extremely insignificant to equalize the value of eternal life. Jesus assured and made it easier for us to gain eternal life by undergoing the kind of suffering very few if any can withstand (John 3:16). So take that risk now – the stakes are just too high; you have nothing to lose, but everything to gain because your Saviour will never leave nor forsake you (Heb. 13:5). **AG**

## Remember Your Covenant with God

by Rene D. Corpuz



**A**mongst the covenants we enter into in this life, perhaps the two most important would be that of marriage, and our spiritual covenant with God. That would be because these are the kind of covenant that bind us for life, and requires of us to perform specific duties, responsibilities, and obligations. And when we violate them, they often come with unpleasant, or dire consequences. Have you entered into a covenant with God? Honor that covenant, and if you have turned your back on it, now is a good time to return to that covenant.

There is no agreement or contract that we can enter into in this life that is more important, more binding, more rewarding, than that of the covenant that we have entered into with God. If we

fully understand the value of the gift of life, and wish to keep living for the next ten thousand years and beyond, the little inconveniences we go through in this short physical life is nothing in comparison to the great things God has in store for us.

### A Covenant of Promises

In our covenant with God, we have everything to gain and nothing to lose. Since God owns everything in this material universe, and in the spiritual realm, there's practically nothing we can offer God in exchange that is equal in worth if only to express our gratefulness for His generosity. Though God isn't really expecting anything from us in return, it is His desire that we see the true value of His gift and work hard so that we may receive it. God would be happy that we

receive such a precious, priceless gift.

God promised to reward us with a combination of eternal life and spirit body for our obedience and faithfulness. And with it, we become an heir of the universe along with His Son. Covenants are composed of promises and actions. We make promises, and we act on them.

When we make a covenant, be it with God or with anyone else, there will always be conditions and obligations to fulfill. This is true of relationships or even of items bought. If we buy an electronic gadget, there's a 'continuing relationship' between the seller and the buyer that goes for a couple of months to a year covering the usage of the purchased item. We normally refer to this as a "warranty" period. If the item fails under normal usage while the warranty is in effect, the seller agrees to replace, repair, or even refund the item. However, if the buyer breaks, or damages the item due to carelessness, then the warranty is void and the seller has no responsibility or obligation. The same holds true in the conditions of the marriage covenant and that of our covenant with God. For as long as we are faithful and true to the terms and conditions of our contract with God, He will fulfill

His end of the agreement. And God is known and proven to be true, faithful and trustworthy, He always keeps His promises. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of us. We have a long history of breaking our promises, and failing to perform what is expected of us.

Of course, God is aware of our 'weakness,' of our unfaithfulness and unreliability. Yet despite such glaring fault in our behavior and nature, God is not giving up on us. Instead, He is willing to give us a chance and paid for our 'failures' (that is, sins), by offering His Divine Son—the Lord Jesus—as “the [sacrificial] Lamb that takes away the sin of the world.” He died in our place so that we won't have to pay the penalty for our sins, saving us from the certainty of death, and giving us another chance.

### **The Terms of the Spiritual Covenant**

A covenant is an agreement or contract between two or more parties which include certain conditions such as duties and obligations or responsibilities, a time period, compensation or rewards and benefits. This is also true of our covenant with God.

God makes and enters into a covenant with individuals from generation to generation. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the

Israelites, the Disciples (that is, Christians). The covenant is quite simple. It is not complicated as many preachers make it out to be. It is essentially a “family relationship covenant”! God the Father shall be God, we shall be His children.

Revelation 21:6-8 tells us:

“And He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

And in John 1:12-13, we read:

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

While God made a promise to give us the gifts of life, inheritance, and become children in and of His Divine Family, there are also conditions such as a desire to receive (thirsts), to overcome, to be God's son, to believe in His (Jesus') name.

Most people think of gifts as something given without any 'prior' corresponding action on the part of the recipient that is deserving of the gift. That's probably true in many instances. But with “the gift of eternal life” that God is freely giving us as the prime benefit of the covenant we enter into with Him, there are certain conditions we needed to

**When we make a covenant, be it with God or with anyone else, there will always be conditions and obligations to fulfill.**



fulfill. Although, we would not be 'truly' deserving of God's ultimate gift even if we did what God asks of us, still it is clear from Scripture that God is not going to give us the gift outright.

Many Christians don't seem to grasp that the covenant they entered into with God is a covenant of salvation, the ultimate reward of that covenant being the 'gift of eternal life.' We are being saved from death! We are mortals, we are subject to death. And while there are those that would separate 'physical death' from 'spiritual death', in the Scriptures, death is death—total cessation of life. Our chance of life, whether temporary or permanent, is in God's hands. People talk of 'not being afraid to die' since it's only 'physical death' (as if they have the power to bring themselves back to life) don't have the slightest inkling of what they talk about. When we die, that's the end of it, whether we live again rests upon God and His promise of resurrection. Man does not have a soul that separates from the body and lives on after his death.

**- God's Terms.** We know God to be kind, loving, merciful. And this is very true. But God is also full of wisdom, prudent and not reckless. While it is His intent and desire to give eternal life, He will not give it to the disobedient. When Adam and Eve decided to disobey and eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, they were driven out of the Garden of Eden and prevented from eating the fruit of the Tree of Life. And God made sure they can't sneak in by having the Tree guarded by a Cherub and a Flaming Sword. In an evening conversation between the Lord

**To honor our covenant with God is to show Him respect and reverence. To turn our backs on the covenant is a show of disrespect, and God will not tolerate it.**

Jesus and Nicodemus (John 3), the Lord made it clear that “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5)! There is no 'free pass' to entering the Kingdom of God! There are conditions that must be met. If we are to inherit God's promises, we are told: “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son...” (Revelation 21:7). And this covenant shall have a seal, or a sign, a visible, physical display so that people would know that we are in covenant with God. The sign is the keeping and observance of the Sabbath, the 7th Day of the Week (Exodus 31:12-17). Quite simply, God's term is that we obey His commandments and follow His instructions.

**- Our Duty and Obligation.** We obey God's commandments and follow His instructions. No **if's**, no **but's**, no compromises. Overcome. It won't be easy, but it will be worth our while.

### **Honor Your Covenant With God**

God has a very strong sense of attachment to those He is in covenant with. He also expects us to have a very high sense of loyalty and faithfulness to honor the covenant. Also, God has a strong dislike for those who take

their agreement lightly when their personal interests take precedence over that of God's. We see God's heart in how those who did not comply with their part of the agreement in the wedding parables, and in the master-servant parables of Jesus, were dealt with. It is especially frightening when we consider that in those parables, there were no second-chances, let alone opportunities for repentance and forgiveness.

To honor our covenant with God is to show Him respect and reverence. To turn our backs on the covenant is a show of disrespect, and God will not tolerate it. But God is not willing that any should perish, rather, that all would come to repentance. For our sakes, it is in our best interest to return and honor our covenant with God. Let go of the mundane concerns of this world, they are not what we are here for. God has great things in mind for our future, we must focus our energies into entering the Kingdom. All these little, material pursuits and things that we are consuming ourselves with are insignificant.

Honor and return to your covenant with God. It is God's great pleasure to reward you with immortality and make you an heir of the riches of the Kingdom. **AG**

# Lessons from a Wedding Parable

by Ferdie S. Padilla

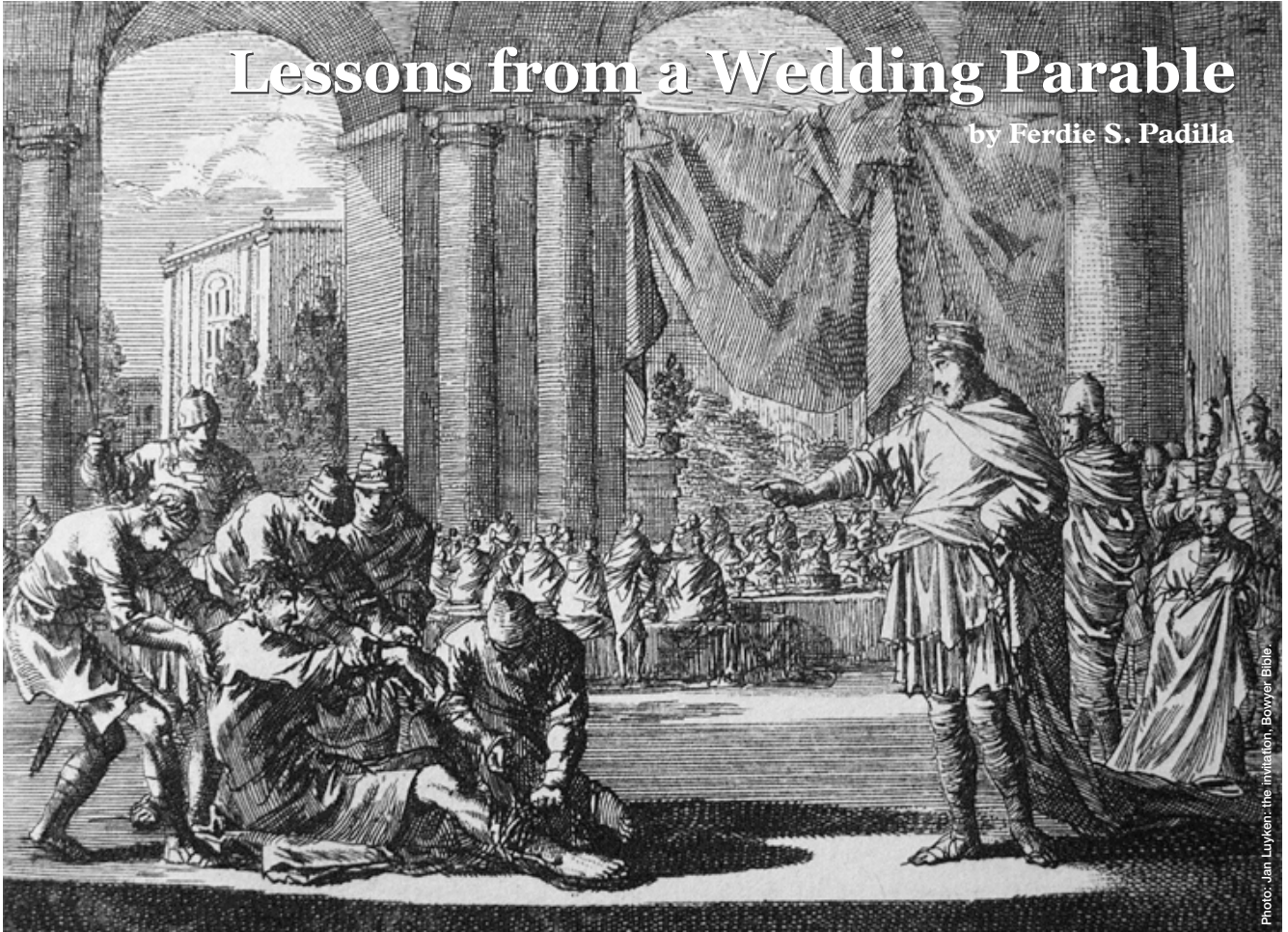


Photo: Jan Luyken: the invitation, Bower Bible.

**W**eddings are a part of our human experience. They are always an occasion of happiness, witnessing two people who are in love with each other join themselves into one by marriage. Weddings can be simple or elaborate. But regardless of its simplicity or grandeur, it has always had the same effect – two individuals of the opposite sex, in love with each other, looking forward to a new beginning, a new life together as husband and wife.

Now the Bible itself has a lot to say about weddings. In the New Testament, Christ often uses weddings or the imagery of weddings in His parables to drive home a point, a lesson to be

learned. Elsewhere also in the New Testament, particularly the book of Revelation, the Bible talks about the wedding of the Lamb. So we see the concept of weddings is embedded in the Bible. So in this article, we will take a look at one parable of Jesus using the concept of a wedding. And the parable, though it uses physical analogy, has a deep spiritual significance. We all should remember that Christ uses parables to teach important life lessons. And these lessons, if we learn them well and more importantly apply them, will serve us in good stead towards the fulfillment of our destinies. So, as we read the parable, let us keep that in mind.

## The Parable

The parable we are referring to is in Matthew 22:1-14 (NIV) Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’ “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and



killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, 'How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' The man was speechless. "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

### **Lessons from The Parable**

This parable says that those who were originally invited to the wedding banquet disregarded the invitation. Some went ahead with their usual business. Some mistreated the king's servants and murdered them. After dealing with them, the king issued another command to his servants: invite anyone they could find. Well, obviously the king in the parable was so disappointed with those whom he had in mind to invite to the wedding that this time, anyone would do. It didn't matter anymore who they were. But then again, the king was up for another disappointment when he came to see the guests. Lo and behold, one of them was not wearing wedding clothes. So he ordered his servants to tie him

hand and foot and throw him out into the darkness. Remember, this was a parable about the kingdom of heaven. There are two obvious lessons here with regards to the kingdom of God and us: we must not disregard or take lightly the invitation of God and when we accept the invitation, there is a proper attire to wear.

#### **1.) Do not disregard the invitation of God.**

We read in Revelation 19:9 (NIV) "Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God." It is very clear then that God does send out invitations to the wedding supper of His Son, in this instance referred to as the Lamb. We all know that the Lamb refers to Christ. In the parable, there were two groups of people invited: the original guests and those who were invited later as a result of the first group's callous disregard for the king's invitation. It doesn't matter now whether we belong to the first group or the second one. The question now is, if we are invited, would we accept the invitation? Many people have actually heard the words of truth that would make a difference in their lives. During Christ's time, many heard the truth directly spoken of by the Lord Himself. Yet, many still did not believe. Only a handful of them did. Today, the same sad fact remains. Sadly, the worries of this physical life or the pursuit of worldly wealth or plain disbelief has hindered a lot from exploring further what goes beyond this invitation. Today, the invitation has reached us. Today, we have accepted that invitation.

But the question still remains, would we still be committed to honoring that invitation? The truth is, we can still change our minds with regards to that invitation, just like we can change our minds to any event we have been invited to and accepted previously. And that is something we must be on guard against. If we know that we have already accepted that invitation, then there is still a commitment on our part to keep our promise to attend the wedding of the Lamb. Indeed, we are blessed that we have been invited. But that blessedness will find fulfillment if in the end we can make it to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

#### **2.) When we attend the wedding, we must wear the proper attire.**

Whenever there is an occasion, we dress up for it. For example, when we are invited to attend a wedding or some other important occasion, we dress appropriately. Whatever was prescribed, whether formal or semi-formal, we all dress up for it. In church services, everyone is encouraged to wear their best clothes. We take time to select which clothing to wear. For the women, accessories are also selected accordingly, those that would match what is worn. So it is when we are to present ourselves at the wedding supper of the Lamb. Let's go back to Revelation 19:7-8 (NIV) "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)" Now did we catch that? The bride was given fine linen, bright and clean. The bride

stands for the Church of which we are part. What is interesting is that the fine linen, says your Bible, is symbolic of the righteous acts of the saints. Remember that the parable we have read is about the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, it could only mean that for us to enter the Kingdom of God, we must be appropriately clothed. And that clothing is really about the Godly character we have developed in this lifetime. There is an interesting passage in Romans which would sum up it all up for us and make it even clearer as to what should this clothing be: Romans 13:14 (NIV) "Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." What does that mean but that we should think, act and have the same attitude like Christ in everything? We are Christians and our lives should manifest the same life that Christ lived on this earth. We are Christians and we should let the Christ in the Christian label shine and be known in our lives so that God can see it! That is the only guarantee that we will finally make it into the wedding supper of the Lamb.

### Conclusion

The parable has a warning of sorts to us in the latter portion: Matthew 22:13 - 14 (NIV) "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are invited, but few are chosen." The consequence of accepting the invitation but not dressing up appropriately for the event (the wedding) is terrible. One will be thrown out into the darkness, excluded from the

happiness that can be experienced that the wedding supper of the Lamb affords. Weddings, as we know, are occasions of happiness. And this happiness from the wedding supper of the Lamb, dear readers, is not fleeting. It is a happiness that can be ours for all eternity with God our Father and our elder brother, Jesus Christ. We will be spending eternity with them.

Finally, Jesus closes the parable closes with this words: Matthew 22:14 (NIV) "For many are invited, but few are chosen." In the context of the parable, this was uttered immediately after Christ described the fate of the man not wearing wedding clothes. The man surely was invited but he was not chosen because he was not wearing the right attire. From the king's line of questioning in Matthew 22:12 (NIV) "'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?'" , there was an expectation to wear the appropriate clothes. The man in the parable apparently chose to ignore this fact and was speechless when asked by the king. Therefore, his fate was his own making.

Now, how does this apply to us? Just this: We are to honor the invitation that God has granted us and remain committed to honoring it. And in the process of waiting for the event to which we were invited, we are to prepare ourselves. We have to make sure that we are developing the godly character that God expects from us. We are to continue developing righteousness in our lives. If we do this both, we are sure to make it into the wedding supper of the Lamb. **AG**

**"Thy word  
is a lamp  
unto my feet,  
and a light  
unto my path"**

Psalms 119:105

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