

Look at Him

The Wonderful Name of Jesus! The name at which every knee must bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord! There is no name above His Name! There is no throne above His Throne! He is above all authority and power and dominion, and He is above every name that can be named, in this age and in the age to come! And He has been made Head over all things to the Church! That's you and that's us! Isn't that in the Word somewhere?

"His Name's above all names; His power is above all power!..."

That's part of a little song. This is the stuff we need to sing about. The power and glory of Jesus, the wonder of His Name, the power of His blood, the goodness of God and His promises...

Look just at Him...and you'll be changed...

So often as I am singing a song like "I will praise Him...", or "I will glorify Him...", or "I will etc.", I begin to wonder, "How come I am singing about what "I" am going to do? Why don't I just praise the Lord and worship Him?"

I find I have to skip over a lot of familiar songs to get to the ones that just praise Him, instead of exhorting me or you to do it, or getting us to promise to do it...

"You are Lord, You are Lord; You are risen from the dead, and You are Lord..."
Now, there is some praise and worship. Eyes off of me, eyes off of you, no preaching and exhorting or promising God what I will do, just looking at Him and singing to Him...

Try it. Sort through your memory banks and find the songs that are pure praise and worship. Sing them to the Lord. You will soon be aware of His presence. And you will be changed in that presence!

Don't get me wrong. It is good to preach and exhort and declare your commitments in song. This is scriptural. David did it. Paul, by the Holy Spirit told us in Ephesians to speak to ourselves in psalms and hymns, etc...

But we need to be able to get our eyes totally off ourselves and totally on the Lord. Our relationship with Him can be clouded by guilt and self-consciousness, making us think we need to keep promising Him things, promising to do better, etc.

My promises to God weren't so good...

As a young adult wanting to be "sold out" to God, I sat down one day to formally write out my promises to Him. I typed them all neatly on good linen stationery, a list of 25 or so great promises to God that I fully intended to keep. I signed it in indelible ink, and was going to go and have it notarized, to prove my integrity to God. I somehow decided not to do that part, and simply folded it (very neatly) and put it inside my nice black Bible.

I never opened that Bible again for two years.

Within 24 hours I had broken one of my promises to God. Within days, I felt guilty for my failure, and didn't want to look at my beautifully typed promises again.

Actually it began a long road out into a spiritual wilderness, in which I wandered for more than seven years. (Took Jackie with me, unfortunately...) For five of those years this Bible college graduate didn't even go to church.

Once a year or so, I would venture out to some church to see if there was "life" there, but found none. We knew we were children of God, but that was about all we knew during those years.

My burning bush...

Working in a small business, one day I observed a dramatic change in a fellow worker. His face was glowing. It seemed to stay there day after day. This was surprising, because he was what could be called "on the bottom of the pecking order of chickens". That means he got picked on the most. Fellow workers liked to irritate him and watch his face get red with anger. (Not me of course.)

Well, the pecking continued for a while, but he didn't seem to care any more. He just stayed happy.

I knew He was a believer. Most of us in the business were believers. But not many of us were all that happy, especially me. But now he was glowing. For me he was like the burning bush that kept on burning, the one Moses had to go over and see out of curiosity.

This fellow worker began to say to me, "You want to come over to our church and hear the angels sing?" And other things more sane like the joy of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Where angels sang...

Finally I had to go. I crept in this little old frame building, jammed with happy people praising God, and sat in the corner seat right near the door so I could leave if things got weird.

Well, someone once said, the river of the Holy Spirit has got slippery banks....get too close, and you'll slide right in!

I did, and I did.

One Sunday afternoon, I was in our living room talking to God. Or trying to. I hadn't done much of that for seven years. I said, "Lord, I have made quite a mess of my life. I have made a lot of promises that I couldn't keep, and I tired out long ago making promises to You. But, I'll tell You what I'm gonna do...I will give you the whole mess of my life in return for everything You can give me out of Your grace and mercy. I'll take it all, even speaking in tongues. I need everything. I'm desperate. In fact, this is my last agreement with you. If this doesn't work, I'm walkin' away...(I didn't know where I would go...but I meant it.) And Lord, anything you can give me, I'll take, but if it depends on me and my faithfulness, forget it, because my promises aren't much good." I was a little scared at that point, and somewhat angry, but hopeful because I had seen and heard some wonderful things in the three weeks at the little church where you could "hear the angels sing"!

Well, God then spoke to me for the first time in my life, even though I had been a believer since age four. I was defeated and scared one most of my life, but a believer. My greatest childhood fear was that Jesus would come back again for the Church, and I would be left! I was a believer, all right.

He speaks to me...WOW...!

Anyway, the Lord spoke in my heart that Sunday afternoon, February 1971. He said, "John, I have been waiting a long time for you to learn that My gospel does not consist of all your promises to Me. My gospel consists of all My promises to you." With that word, His presence fell on me in an unexplainable way, and the first thing I realized was a great healing of a wound in my heart that had been there -- it seemed like -- forever. Then I said, "Lord speak to me some more!" At that very moment, a choir on the radio started singing a great and familiar anthem:

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word.
What more can He say than to you He has said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?*

Immediately I knew that He had spoken to me right through that divinely timed song on the radio. He was telling me that His chief way of speaking to me was in His written Word. And He has never stopped speaking to me in that wonderful Bible. Sometimes, He also speaks special words in my heart. But thank God for the Bible, and for the Holy Spirit who inspired it and brings it to life daily for all of us -- if we will read, wait and meditate!

What happened to me!?

Oh, yes -- about that Holy Spirit. I had heard by this time some good teaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit in this little church where the angels were singing. At least, we all thought they were singing. During worship, we all heard melodies and tones above all the sound of our own voices. Something unusual was happening, and we decided it must be angels singing along with us!

That Sunday afternoon in my living room, I knew I wanted the Holy Spirit, but wasn't sure how to ask. So I just asked for everything God could give me! It wasn't that I was at a loss for words. Back in Bible college I had written a research paper on "The Baptism in the Holy Spirit". Got an "A" on it. Didn't have it though. Nor did my professors. Nor did anyone else in the school, as far as I knew. We had been taught that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey. (There is a verse like that in Acts.) I got the idea that the Holy Spirit was a reward for good behavior, so I kept trying to "make the grade" with God. I failed. It never dawned on me that to live a HOLY life, one might need the HOLY Spirit first!

Well, now it had been a seven year long lonely wilderness between me and Bible college, so I wasn't very interested in using the "right words". God knew my desperate, broken heart. And He filled me up with somethin' really good that day, even though I wasn't sure what had happened. I felt like I was walkin' six inches off the floor -- especially for the first two weeks. I thought maybe I got saved, and I hadn't really been before! I finally made an appointment with the pastor to find out what had happened to me. He listened to me describe what had happened, and said, "Hey, you received the Holy Spirit! You can speak in tongues now!" OOh, tongues...OK, let's let 'er go, I thought. I want it all! He said, just open your mouth and God will give the words.

I did, and He did.

Baby talk?

Sounded like baby talk to me. It struck me so funny, after all the religious fear I had known, how simple God had made it to receive. I began to laugh -- so hard I fell off the chair on the floor laughing. Pastor did too...laugh, I mean. I'm not sure he fell on the floor behind his desk, but he might have. I was too tipsy to notice. (This was 28 years ago.) The joy of the Lord, it was. It broke the power of long standing depression. Changed my life. Gave me a whole new life, really. In six months I was in full time ministry, teaching in a new Bible School at that little church. Jackie and I have been in full-time ministry ever since.

We didn't exactly live happily ever after. We had problems, the little church had problems, that pastor had bigger problems, but we had found the fountain of life in Jesus Christ and our personal Pentecost. And He continues to be the solver of our problems! Deeper than human happiness, we had found JOY!

John Matthews