

God is with us, for us and in us!

1) Whom are you with?

Jesus said, with men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. This brought Peter into a position where he asked: "We have forsaken everything that has to do with men and have followed you. What will be our reward?" Jesus answered: "Assuredly I say to you, there is no-one who has left his house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for the sake of the Gospel who shall not receive a hundred fold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last" (Mark 10:27-31). That means, to have God with us is to have everything. The rich ruler who is mentioned in this chapter seemed to have it all with men. He asked the classic question which was: "What do I still lack?" (Verse 17-27). The only thing he was lacking was that he was not with God. And therefore, God was not with him to make his impossibilities in life possible. In a similar situation, the writer of Hebrews wrote to the people in that church who were facing difficulties because they had it all not with men but with God, but since of the pressure of persecution which came from outside, they decided to give it up with God and hold on to men. The writer did his best carefully, explaining the superiority and finality of God's revelation and redemption in Jesus Christ. He shows that God's redemptive provisions under the old covenant have been fulfilled by the sacrifice of Jesus' coming and establishment of the new covenant through His atoning death. Historians help us to understand the situation at this time when a letter would be needed to address half of a church known as the Hebrews. Because they were Hebrew Christians, their children were not allowed to take part in the Hebrew children's school of thoughts. The parents' businesses were being burnt down, and the families' houses were being destroyed. This all was done by radical Judaists. And all what these Jewish Christians were supposed to do to be accepted in the Jewish community was to go back to the synagogues and to denounce Jesus as their Lord and the Saviour of the world. Then, their lives would get normal, again, that they would find peace and acceptance in the community. This was why many of them were returning to the synagogues and denounced Jesus. Doing this, they thought they would be returning to the same God. We live in a turbulent world where change is rapid and frequently dramatic. Jesus said that He alone can provide the help and the peace we need to live and work with integrity in this world (John 14:25-28). No job is engaging, no position powerful, no material rewards substantial enough to give us the kind of inner peace and confidence that we long for. Only Christ will never leave us nor forsake us. If you have a choice in your world, then chose to be with Jesus!

2) Did you ever doubt?

In his encouragement, the writer of the Hebrews opened a historical fact by saying: "Be aware, brethren, least there be among you anyone with an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. But exalt one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end" (Hebrews 3:12-18). Then, he used the children of Israel's departure from Egypt as an example of the Christian journey which speaks of us, also, today. The New Testament gives us three relations that God sustains towards His people, and that is God with us, God for us, and God in us. To have God with us, grants us success. God being for us means that no-one can be against us (Romans 8:31). With God, our impossibilities will be possible, even though sometimes situations don't look like His

presence is with us. But the truth is, He's there all the time, and there are no impossibilities in Him. So the writer told the Hebrew Christians to encourage one another of the better covenant which is based on better promises (Hebrews 8:6). For under the old covenant, God was with Israel and for Israel, but not in them. But for us people of the new covenant, God is with us, for us and also in us, for He made our bodies His home by His Spirit, and we can have faith in Him to fulfil the dreams which He has given us. Too few of us are really conscious of God in our bodies. Some Christians do constantly talk of their lack of power, their lack of ability and their limitations. But if we would realize that God is in us, we would know that nothing is impossible to them who believe. The writer of Hebrews used the wilderness of Paran at Kadesh as an example of what words can do. But according to Moses' welfare message in Deuteronomy 1:22 which reads: "Then, all of you came to me and said: 'Let us send men ahead to spy out the land for us and bring back report about the route we are to take and the towns we will come in'". In this way, probably, the pressure of the people became the pressure of the leader Moses. Then, he prayed to God, and God granted that request. So Moses sent the twelve tribal leaders to survey the land of Canaan (Numbers 13:1-16). They were not prepared to have faith in God to fulfil their dreams of going to the Promised Land. But rather, they wanted sense-knowledge to be sure of what was waiting ahead of them. So after forty days, they returned to the people of Israel and brought them the information which they had gathered on their trip. They said: "Indeed, the land is really fruitful, but nevertheless, God was not right when He said that the land would belong to us. There are strong people in the land. The cities are fortified and very large..." These discouraging news were an exaggeration, but they were based on facts. The Canaanite cities were indeed well defended, especially the walls of Jericho which were double and almost impossible for an attacking army to break through. But we should remember, with men things seem to be impossible, but with God, they are possible.

3) Knowledge is not the same as vision

Our world has entered the "information-age". Never before has humanity known so much. Yet, Moses and the Israelites discovered at Kadesh Barnea that possessing facts do not necessarily lead to wisdom. For that we need leaders with visions. Apparently, only two of the men whom Israel sent to "spy out the land of Canaan" (Numbers 13:2.17) were visionary leaders. The rest of them came back with depressions because of the data. Actually, the English term "to spy" is a bit misleading. The twelve tribal representatives were not engaged in cloak-and-dagger espionage. They were more like explorers and land surveyors. Many of the details of their work were laid out in Numbers 34 and became the basis for apportioning the land, 40 years later. But the chapters 13 and 14 show that even though these men had technical skill to assess the lay of the land, most of them lacked the vision and courage needed to take hold of it. Despite of God's repeated promises to help His people by driving out the Canaanites, these men lost faith in Him. Indeed, they lost faith in themselves: "We were like grasshoppers in our own sight" (Numbers 13:33). Thus, twelve experts read the same data, but ten made a different conclusion than the other two. What was the difference? The difference was a vision and obedience to God's Word. All twelve could see that this was "indeed a land flowing with milk and honey". Likewise, all twelve could see the powerful forces to be overcome if they were to take possession of the land. But ten could not see past those immediate obstacles. The other two did. They were looking to a God Who was more powerful than all of the Canaanites put together (had He not defeated the Egyptians?), a God Who had pledged Himself to deliver the land to His people. Today's world cries out

for leaders with godly visions. There is no lack of data, but the question remains whether we interpret the data according to our own human limitations or whether we factor in the power and promises of God. If not, we doom ourselves, like Israel in this story, to aimless “wandering”.

4) The power of the tongue

Many of us Christians, today, are not aware of the word “confession”. We know it from confessing our sins. But the word “confession” means “saying the same thing”. For instance, we’re saved by the confession of Jesus Christ that with the heart, we believe unto righteousness, and with our mouth confession is made unto salvation (Romans 10:10). Confession is a way of life. The love which promotes marriage begins in the heart. And before the marriage bond will be taken, the couple will confess their love to get the start started. The classic example of this can be found in Proverbs 18:21: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it, will eat its fruits. He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favour from the Lord”. The unbelief of the ten leaders had two dimensions: God’s past faithfulness to His people did not bring these ten men into a loyal relationship with God, and secondly, they did not trust in God and His faithfulness for their future. Their lack of faith stood in a marked contrast to that of Caleb and Joshua. These two men opposed the majority opinion of the other surveyors (Numbers 13:25-33). They based their report on a firm commitment to God and full confidence in His promise to Israel, but the congregation of Israel refused to accept the overwhelming decision of Caleb and Joshua who even risked their lives to confess what God had told the children of Israel (Numbers 14:6-10). This crucial event in Israel’s desert journey teaches us that we must not assume the majority opinion even of the church to be always right. Faithful believers must be willing to stand on God’s Word, even if the majority is against them. As the Israelites refused to accept the good reports by even trying to stone Caleb and Joshua, the presence of God fell upon the place, and God said: “How long will I bear with this evil congregation who complain against me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel made against me. As I live, says the Lord, just as they have spoken in my ears, so will I do for them” (Numbers 14:26-29). Death and life are in the power of the tongue. God was with them and for them, and He heard their evil complaining about their situation. God didn’t deny that there were difficulties. But His people did not have faith in Him and therefore, did not confess what He had told them, before. If God has an ear for a complainer, how much more will He have an ear for a believer who confesses His Word? The truth of the matter is, if what we are praying is not in agreement with what we are confessing, than what we are confessing with our tongue will destroy what we are praying for.

5) The spirit of faith

God said that Caleb would go and possess the land because he had a different spirit that followed God whole-heartedly (Numbers 14:24). What spirit is that? It is the spirit of faith. Paul the prince of preachers, wrote to the Corinthian Christians and said: “I believe, therefore have I spoken” (2nd Corinthians 4:13). With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore, speak. The question of thought is: What are we speaking concerning the circumstances in which we find ourselves? Are we speaking the words of faith that our God can do all things through Christ Who lives in us? Or are we spending time to talk about how bad our circumstances are and how worse they’re going to be in the future? But we should understand that it is an insult for God if we don’t trust Him to provide what He already promised us to do for us. We should continue to tell what the Lord has promised, what He is doing and what He is coming

to do. The more we talk about it, the more real it will become to us. The less we talk about it, the less real it will also be for us. Faith is like love. The Bible even says that faith works by love (Galatians 5:6). It is of the heart and of the spirit, and it lives and finds its joy in the continual confession of it. In the natural, the more a husband and wife confess their love for each other, the more it grows. If we will notice carefully the life of Jesus, we will find that from the beginning of His public ministry until He was led to the cross, He was ever confessing Who He is, what He is, and His mission in life. The classic example of this is found in John 16:28: "I came from the Father, and I entered the world. Now I'm living in the world and going back to the Father". This was a fourfold confession. It covers Jesus' life from His incarnation to His ascendance.

6) Obedience of faith

Just as the writer of the Hebrews told the Hebrew Christians that without faith, they could not please God, in the same way you and I can also not receive from God if we are not obedient in faith (Hebrews 11:6). James says that a double-minded person cannot please God or receive from Him (James 1:7). If there is any subject that has been unpopular in the Christian world, today, it is the subject of obedience. Charles Finney, a lawyer who became an evangelist and is known in church history as the greatest evangelist since the time when the apostle Paul was ministering, said: "Revival comes through obedience of God's people". For everything that we do as Christians, requires our obedience, and every blessing from God will also require obedience on our part. So many of us, today, are wondering why God is not blessing us and why our churches are not growing. But what we don't see, is, that God is waiting for us to become obedient before He can fulfil His promises in our lives and in our churches. It is one thing to boldly proclaim what God can do, and it is quite another thing that we do trust God to do what He has promised. He will do it in His own time and in His own way, but through us if we obey and do what He wants us to do. Perhaps, two million or more people left Egypt at the start of the Exodus. Of all grown-up men of this multitude of people, only two men Caleb and Joshua made it to enter the Promised Land, because only they had faith in God. Even Moses did not reach Canaan. Shortly before his death, he passed the coat of leadership in military, politics and spiritual leadership to Joshua. He laid his hands on Joshua, and Joshua was filled with wisdom (Deuteronomy 34:1-9). This way, Joshua got equipped to lead the new generation of the Israelite people to the Promised Land. Maybe Joshua wanted a divine confirmation from God, Himself, that he should overtake this leadership. God confirmed his leadership in making Joshua strong and courageous, and the Lord reminded Joshua three times to be so. There must have been an important message in these words. A Hebrew historian says: "The word 'strong' referred to sound legs, while the word 'courageous' referred to having a secure grasp". The point is clear that God was telling Joshua that his success as a leader depended on whether he could stand strong and hold on tightly. What was meant that Joshua should "securely grasp on"? It were God's plans, purposes and values as we can find written about the book of law (Joshua 1:8). Here it says that he should spend time day and night to observe to do according to all that is written in it. It is not knowing God's Word that brings us His promises, but rather, obeying all what His Word requires from us. This way, our ways will be prosperous and successful. Joshua sent two men to go and spy the land, but this time to find out how they could go and possess the land. Another lesson for us to learn is what Rahab told the two men whom Joshua had sent: "We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out from Egypt and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites East of Jordan whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted,

and everyone's courage failed because of you. For the Lord your God is the God in heaven above and all the earth below" (Joshua 2:10-12). Imagine- this was the testimony of the people whom the other Israelite generation had feared most! Wasn't it already forty years ago that the Red Sea had been divided? If now the Canaanites still feared the Israelites- how great must their fear have been forty years ago?! Often, the things of this world, the things that we Christians fear most, together with the prince of this world, Satan, make us tremble. We are worried in many ways that what God has promised us would not work. We think we could not come out of financial debts, could not have church growth and could not have unity of the singleness of purpose. But indeed, at the same time the forces of darkness are afraid of us that we confess the Word of God, bring our bodies under the subjection to the Word of God and allow the Word of God to have its way through us to fulfil what He has promised. God said: "The Word that goes out of my mouth will not return unto me until it fulfils what I have spoken" (Isaiah 55:11).

7) Sanctification before possession

Joshua told the people of Israel: "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you". Then, he spoke to the priests, saying: "Take up the ark of covenant and cross over before the people". So, they took the ark and went before the people. And the Lord said to Joshua: "This day, I will exalt you in the sight of all the children of Israel that they may know that as I was with Moses, so shall I be with you" (Joshua 3:5-7). God was invisibly present among His people. For the ark of covenant stood as a symbol of His presence. As they were now led into the possession of the Promised Land, the Lord also openly manifested Himself in miracles. The act of sanctification points to the principle that God will not act powerfully on behalf of His people if they are not inwardly clean and willing to obey His will. Before we ask God to perform signs and wonders in our midst and in our churches, we must first make sure that our hearts are pure and our desires are guided by the Holy Spirit. As soon as the priests who carried the ark of the covenant, stopped at the edge of Jordan, God divided the waters just as He had divided the waters of the Red Sea, forty years ago (Joshua 3:13). This miracle provided clear evidence that the Living God was among His people, and He was for His people. Also, this experience demonstrated the power of God, and God strengthened the faith of His people so that they could face the challenges of possessing the Promised Land. Without such power, they could not have conquered walled cities. As they looked at the priests carrying the ark in the Old Testament, so shall we New Testament believers look to Jesus Who endured all human limitations and established a better covenant for us. And as long as we look to Him, we will not go under but will go over. Joshua was made aware of God's presence and His heavenly army and so was prepared to do the battle alongside his faithful people. Joshua's experience teaches us that we as children of God are not alone in our struggling on this earth. There are spiritual forces fighting on our behalf as well as against us, but we have the Holy Spirit Who is with us, for us and in us, constantly, to help us to overcome. The victory of Israel in possessing the Land of Promise began on the first day when they accepted to obey God. And as they did things in God's way, the victory came to them. And Joshua knew that this way seems foolish to the human mind. So the only way to help the Israelites not to miss it, was to keep them quiet (Joshua 6:10). The problem with us, today, is that we always want God to make sense. But He is God "Who called things that were not there as though they were" (Romans 4:17). As long as you and I do the ridiculous, the miraculous will come. And if we face life's challenges faithfully, we will have testimonies in His name. This is what the New Testament encourages us to do, especially when it comes to

the statement of faith. When unbelievers are watching the outcome of what we say we believe, what good does it do to talk about trusting God only to abandon that position as soon as things get rough? We need to act in a way that is constant with the faith which we proclaim, and God's answers will come at His own appointed time if we don't give up.

My friend, you can trust God today for He is good, and He is for you. But as you focus on His goodness, don't miss His greatness. He is unparalleled and unprecedented. He is the centrepiece of civilisation. He is the superlative of all excellence. He is the sum of human greatness and the source of divine grace. His name is the only One able to save, and His blood is the only power able to cleanse. His ear is open to your call, and His hand is quick to lift you up from falling. He is the One Who eternally loves us all. You can trust Him by receiving Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. He supplies mercy for the struggling soul, and He sustains the tempted and tried. He delivers the captive, defends the helpless, binds up the broken-hearted. He is for you, and you can trust Him. Jesus is the key to all knowledge. He is the wellspring of wisdom. He is the doorway of deliverance, the pathway of peace, the roadway of righteousness, highway of holiness and the gateway of glory. He wants to be with you, for you and in you.