

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God*

IN CHRIST JESUS.

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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THE LORD STOOD WITH ME

In a previous issue titled *Through Whom He Also Made The Eons* (#01-0730 December 25, 2007), I made reference to an elderly brother in Christ with whom I periodically have fellowship. During our time of sharing a meal together, this dear brother made another one of his maverick statements to me that caught my attention. It went something like this: "The early church thought the Lord was coming back in their time, but that must have changed as time went on. I don't think the Lord is coming back in my time or your time. I have no interest in Him coming back. I don't care if He does or not. But I believe that He is coming all the time. He comes into our lives frequently."

He has told me before that he does not care about the Lord coming back, as if to bring some reaction out of me. I find this rather curious because, regardless of whether He comes in our life or not, it should be our desire to see our Lord, the love of our life. I did remind him that we should desire to see Jesus, the One who saved us and is coming for us. He nodded his head slightly to acknowledge that I might be right. I am often reminded of Paul's word to Timothy as he was about to be martyred for the cause of Christ.

I have gone through the glorious contest; I have run the race; I have guarded the faith. From this time onward there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who love the thought of His Appearing [epiphaneia] (2 Timothy 4.7-8 WNT)

There is a day coming that Paul called the day of Christ in which those who are asleep in Christ, having conquered through Christ while in bodies of death, will rise from among the dead in the *out-resurrection* or *first* resurrection. They will be considered worthy to attain to the age [eon] to come and the resurrection from among the dead; they will be sons of the resurrection (see Luke 20.34-38). Paul saw the *out-resurrection* (some call it the *select* resurrection) as a prize to be won, so it was his goal, while he was in his body of humiliation, to strive to be found worthy to receive this prize. The *out-resurrection* is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3.14); it is the call to reign with Christ in the eon to come for all who endure to the end (2 Timothy 2.12). Believers are promised immortal life in the general resurrection after the millennial reign of Christ, but to enter the next eon to reign with Christ is a prize to be won.

Now, having made my point about the coming of the Lord to meet His people and to usher the conquerors into His millennial kingdom, I have to agree with my brother in Christ that our Lord Jesus does come to meet His people, not only as a future and glorious event at His *epiphaneia*, which is His literal and visible manifestation, but as a present spiritual event in which we experience some aspects of His life. In other words, I believe He does show up as He comes into situations in our lives to manifest His victorious life and some aspect of who He is. He may show up in our situations to reveal His overwhelming grace, His abundant love, His mercies which are new every morning, and many of His other attributes.

For many years, I have heard His voice speak to my heart that He is coming soon. I used to think that this meant that He was coming in His manifestation for us to see Him with our eyes. But many days have come and gone, and I have often grown discouraged that I was not hearing His voice, or I have grown weary of waiting for what has not met my idea of soon. As I reflect back over the last 25 years

or so, I now realize that Jesus has shown up in our lives on many occasions. He did come soon into situations in our lives, not so that we could see Him with our physical eyes but to know Him in our hearts, which is far more important. Jesus showed up the day He broke into my life, overwhelmed my unbelief and ignorance with His lavish grace, and gave me His faith to believe on Him and His love to love Him. I did not see Him with my physical eyes, but I knew Him in my heart as the Savior and Conqueror from that day forward. He showed up when He called us to make our first trip to Ghana. He was with us the entire time and on trips that followed over the next six years. He showed up over eight years ago when He called me to leave my secular job and come out to sit at His feet. He showed up when my wife was diagnosed with stage-4 cancer as He began to heal her and restore her back to health. During that time, He showed up many times and reassured us that He was doing a mighty work. We saw His mighty hand of love, His abundant grace, and His glory. He showed up as my parents were going through their remaining days in their earthly dwellings, and I was called to care for them and manage their affairs. He showed up as we rushed to my mother's side as she passed away quietly and peacefully. In all these times, we learned more of the very heart and nature of our Lord God.

But is this all fanciful thinking, or is there precedent for such a thing as evidenced in Scripture? Consider Paul's testimony.

But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. (2 Timothy 4.17 NASB)

The Lord, as well as an angel of God, stood with Paul. Obviously, some of Paul's experiences with the Lord were literal; that is, I believe the Lord or angels of the Lord literally appeared to Paul (e.g., Acts 27.23-24). However, the Lord surely stood with Paul, spiritually speaking, on many occasions. Whenever the grace of God was manifested through Paul's life, the Lord stood with him. The Lord spoke to Paul: **"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."** Paul responded: **Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me** (2 Corinthians 12.9 NASB).

James gives us another indication of the Lord showing up. Many see the following verses as strictly referring to the coming of the Lord, which is most likely the primary meaning; however, I submit that perhaps there is more to James' words.

Be patient, then, brethren, till the presence of the Lord; lo, the husbandman doth expect the precious fruit of the earth, being patient for it, till he may receive rain—early and latter; be patient, ye also; establish your hearts, because the presence of the Lord hath drawn nigh.... lo, the Judge before the door hath stood. (James 5.7-9 YLT)

The word *presence* comes from the Greek word *parousia*, which means "an arrival and a presence with." To James, over 2,000 years ago, the Lord had drawn nigh, meaning He was near. Does not the Lord judge His people in this day? Does He not draw near in situations involving His people? Does He not bring His judgment into the situation? Judgment begins with the household of God (1 Peter 4.17). Truly, if the Lord does not show up in the situations of our lives, how will we know and experience His life? Consider a man who lived many centuries ago who James tells us is an example of one who endured and saw the outcome of the Lord's dealings (James 5.10-11). The man is Job, who declared: **"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes"** (Job 42.5-6 NASB). Job came to know the full compassion and mercy of God as the Lord stood with him in his trial.

Dear brethren, may your testimony be: **The Lord stood with me!**