

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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GODS WHOM YOU HAVE NOT KNOWN #2

“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. ‘You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.’” (Deuteronomy 13.1-4 NASB)

The last issue ended with a question: Who is the God that I have known? Israel knew the God of the miraculous but also the God of trial and terror, and we should add, the God of testing. After all, He warned the Israelites that when they crossed over to the land of promise, they would be tested to find out their love for Him. This is what the above verse tells us. He sought for their whole love, for them to love Him with all their heart and with all their soul; the proof of this love would be manifested in them keeping His commandments, listening to His voice, serving Him, and clinging to Him. In other words, love is not mere words, it is action, and, in the case of God’s people, the action is summed up with the word *obedience*. Let us not forget that they failed, in spite of the miraculous!

This poses a question: Would God go so far as to send similar prophets and dreamers of dreams to test the heart of His people as we approach the end of the age? If He did it then, would He do it today? I don’t know the answer to this question, but it is something that we should be alert to and guard ourselves against in this present wicked eon, especially as the end of it nears.

I am reminded of the Lord’s warning to His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. They did not understand what He had spoken, so Jesus exhorted them: **“Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up? Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up? How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees”** (Matthew 16.9-11 NASB). In other words, the meaning of the miracle of feeding the masses was totally lost to the disciples. They did not get it! The masses didn’t get it either. For them, it met a need, but it didn’t lead them to cling to the Lord out of love for Him.

We should also consider the Lord’s exhortation to His disciples regarding the sign of His coming and the end of the age: **For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect** (Matthew 24.24 NASB).

Or, consider Paul’s warning regarding the end of the age, that is, the coming of our Lord Jesus and our gathering together to Him, when there will be **the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders** (2 Thessalonians 2.9). In our zeal to see God manifest His power in our day, which is a good desire, we must be cautious that we not fall for something that is false and driven by the powers of darkness or, possibly, that is of the Lord for our testing.

John has left a warning and a safeguard for these last days.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and

every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. (1 John 4.1-3 NASB)

Now, we might protest that it is not possible for the Lord's people to be so deceived. After all, the prophets and dreamers sent to Israel essentially stated: "Look, our gods can do all that your God does. Come and follow our gods and serve them; they are just as good." Who born from above with the seed of Christ residing within them would fall for such a line? Well, the Lord Jesus warned that, if possible, even the elect would be deceived. I believe the deception will not be so blatant as to outwardly declare that there are other gods. Rather, it will be done in the name of the Lord. As I shared in a previous issue (#02-0815, March 11, 2008), the Lord warned that many will come (have come) **in My name** who even say that Jesus is the Christ, but they will mislead many (Matthew 24.4-5).

So, on the one hand, I express some caution over what is happening in the name of the Lord in our day in the realm of the so-called miraculous, and on the other hand, I say let us not close the door to it either, but let us be open to it and test the spirit of it. I am not opposed to the miraculous, nor am I in the camp of those who say the Lord does not work in such a way in our day. Actually, I had a very vivid dream last year of a war with mangled and dead bodies all about. Then I saw limbs growing back and whole bodies coming back together and rising up from the dead. Am I a false dreamer of dreams? I saw this before I heard of recent reports of people's limbs and fingers growing back. Do we reject this out of hand because it does not fit our template or because fundamental teaching cries out: "No way!?" Be open, but be cautious!

My wife and I have experienced the miraculous of God, especially in healings. I have had four different healings in my life, one of which I literally felt whatever had gripped me leave my body as it went from my feet to my head and out of my body, never to return. Almost five years ago, my wife was healed of stage 4 cancer that the doctors described as a great tragedy with little chance of survival. The grace of God took something that was ugly and transformed it into something joyously beautiful. Thank God! But none of these healings came through some great outpouring of emotion or through some ministry. My wife's healing didn't even come from some great measure of faith that declared healing. We had nothing of the sort. In fact, we had only one prayer: "Thy will, will be done, and to You will go all the glory." In other words, in life or in death, God would get the glory. So we give Him all the glory for the marvelous work that He did in healing her, and I am extremely grateful for His grace that was lavished upon us during that time and for the fact that, after 35 years, we are still together, bound in Christ. But what binds us? It is the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

To me, the key to discerning all that is happening in our day as we approach the end of the age [eon] is found in the answer to two questions: Are people simply seeking after more of the miraculous, even seeking after more and more experience? I have heard it expressed in such a fashion that it appears as if seeking after experience is driving people. Or, is there real fruit coming forth that lifts up our Lord and gives glory to God? Does it lead people to seek after the Lord, to even hunger to be in His presence, even to love Him more than they have ever loved Him? Don't you long to be in the presence of your lover? What fruit should we look for? The answer is given to us by Moses: "**You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.**" These words are summed up in the word *obedience*. If we are not obeying God, then we are in rebellion. **If you love Me, you will keep My commandments!** (John 14.15). Also, in Hebrew, the word for *cling* figuratively means "to catch by pursuit." Do the signs and wonders lead the Lord's people to pursue the Lord with a passion, as if in pursuit to catch Him? Paul declared that he had one passion, and that was to know Christ, to gain Christ, and to be found in Christ (see Philippians 3). To live is Christ; to die is gain for Christ!

May the God of the miraculous be manifested to us in this day that causes us to run in hot pursuit of the Love of our life! May we reject all false gods and declare: **I know My God!**