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REFLECTIONS



MINISTRIES



THE PROMISES OF GOD

THE TRUSTEE OF OUR INHERITANCE – Galations 3:26-4:7

When Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis died in 1975, he left just under half of his enormous estate to his sole surviving child, daughter Christina, then age 25. Christina Onassis tried to become involved in running her father's vast business enterprise, but the excesses of her lifestyle brought her own life to an end at age 38. Three years before her death, she had a daughter by her fourth husband, whom she subsequently divorced. Therefore, at the time of her death, Onassis' three year old daughter, Athina, became the sole surviving heir of a fortune estimated to be between two and three billion dollars.

For a child whose world is made up of concrete concepts, the abstract idea of an almost limitless supply of money would be impossible to grasp. In the case of a young child like Athina Onassis, trustees and overseers would guard and manage her resources until the day she was legally able to assume ownership of them herself. Until that time, a child with an enormous inheritance legally owns nothing. She is no more wealthy than a maid or servant in the household. The guardian, therefore, plays a critical role. He or she determines when it is time for the inheritance to be received and how it is to be dispersed.

Paul says that the transition from law in the Old Testament to grace in the New Testament parallels that of a child who inherits enormous wealth. In the Old Testament, life under the Mosaic law was like living under the oversight of a guardian, or trustee. Believers had not experienced the riches of their inheritance that was destined

to come with the manifestation of God's grace in Jesus Christ. But at the right time, God sent His Son to redeem us from under the law "that we might receive the full rights of sons."

God alone had the wisdom and power to release His children into their full inheritance as sons and daughters. If you think several billion dollars would be an exciting inheritance to receive, then you haven't yet realized what it means to become an heir of God in Christ. In addition to His Son, God has given you everything (Rom. 8:32).

God's Promise to You:

"No one is richer than the believer who is my heir."

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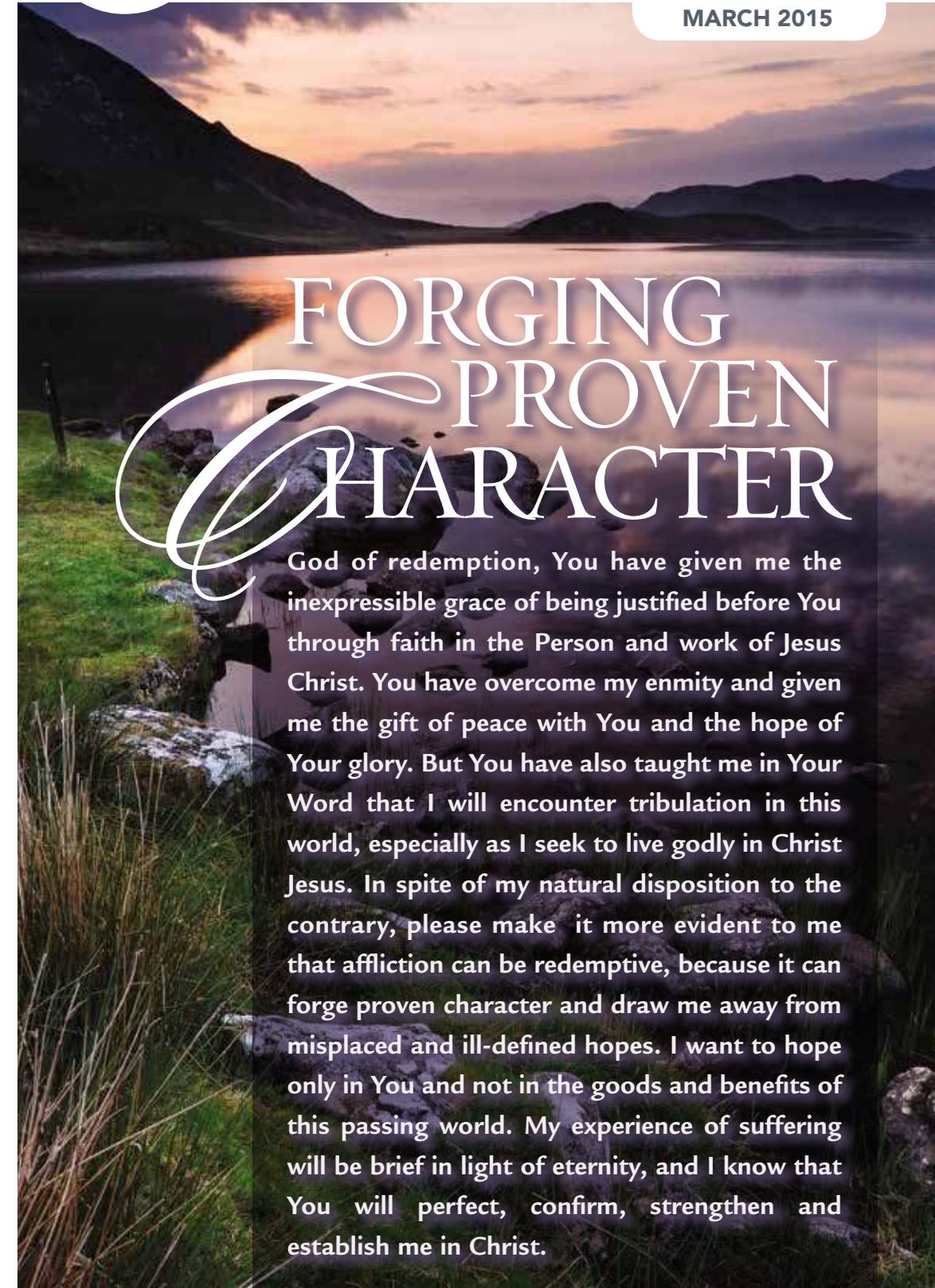
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REFLECTIONS

Reflections on God's revealed truth

MARCH 2015



FORGING PROVEN CHARACTER

God of redemption, You have given me the inexpressible grace of being justified before You through faith in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. You have overcome my enmity and given me the gift of peace with You and the hope of Your glory. But You have also taught me in Your Word that I will encounter tribulation in this world, especially as I seek to live godly in Christ Jesus. In spite of my natural disposition to the contrary, please make it more evident to me that affliction can be redemptive, because it can forge proven character and draw me away from misplaced and ill-defined hopes. I want to hope only in You and not in the goods and benefits of this passing world. My experience of suffering will be brief in light of eternity, and I know that You will perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish me in Christ.

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 Biblical teaching for the heart and mind



THE TEMPORAL AND THE ETERNAL (PART 30)

False Goal #2: Approval

Last month we looked at the false goal of pleasure. The second false goal is *approval*. Paul asked a question we should all consider asking ourselves: “Am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still striving to please men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10). That’s strong language. If I strive to please people, am I no longer Christ’s servant?

Let’s look to Pontius Pilate for our answer. The governor of Judea at the time of Jesus’ death, Pilate was a politician, but, apparently, not a very good one. Assigned the task of ruling over a conquered people who hadn’t quite admitted they’d been conquered, Pilate found himself in a very difficult situation which he did not handle well. It appears he was alternately cruel and compromising. History says Pilate hated the Jews and had a reputation for being brutal, even murderous. His harsh rule had been reported to the emperor, and he would have been under investigation at the time of the trial of Jesus. Perhaps because of this, on various occasions, Pilate would threaten the Jews and make great shows of power to accomplish his purposes; but when the Jews, seemingly unintimidated by these demonstrations, refused to relent, Pilate would concede.

His actions and the well-known question he asked of Jesus, “What is truth?” help to form a picture of a confused man who made his decisions without consulting any reliable standard. During Jesus’ two trials before him, his chief concern as governor should have been dispensing justice. However, it is more likely that his real interest lay in trying to placate an angry mob while his job as their ruler was on the line. To complicate matters, as he is sitting in his judgment seat, his wife sends him a message: “Have nothing to do with that righteous man.” *Now what does he do?* Pilate symbolically washes his hands, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” and sends Jesus to the cross.

Some claim that Pilate later became a Christian, even a martyr. History says he was banished by the emperor Caligula, suffered some kind of breakdown and committed suicide. Tragically, Pilate came face-to-face with the Son of God; but he was so concerned with the power of the emperor and the power of the mob that he failed to realize that the most powerful figure in history was seated right in front of him, yielding to his control. Striving to please people took him miles away from a possible relationship with the suffering servant whose help he desperately needed.

Missed opportunities and terrible decisions are only some of the consequences we suffer when people’s opinions become more important to us than God’s. Whether it is recognition that we want or, like Pilate, we’re just frantically scrambling to avoid consequences, when we try to please men, we will ultimately fail. It is God’s approval we should seek. The *incidental* outcome of seeking God’s approval may be that men esteem us; but it is the goal that matters. We cannot simultaneously seek to be impressive to men and pleasing to Christ.

False Goal #3: Fame

Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth. (GENESIS 11:4)

Sounds good; doesn’t it? Take a look at Flemish painter Pieter Bruegel’s two fantastic paintings of the Tower of Babel to get an idea of what this ziggurat must have looked like. These were powerful men building an amazing monument. It took strong leadership to bring people together for a project of this magnitude, and it took a lot of people working to build one of these things. Who knows how far they got.

But where was God in the plans of the men who came together at Shinar to make a name for themselves? He was totally missing from their

equation. And verse 8 of the same chapter tells us how well their plan worked out for them: “[T]he Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.” The very thing they were working to prevent happened to them in an instant when God came down.

No one wants to leave this earth without making a mark. We all want to accomplish something that will matter. And if we are servants of God, it’s right to hope we will accomplish something that will last forever. We ought all to fear dying until we have done something that will always live. But it is *how* we go about accomplishing this that matters. In a total inversion of the world’s recipe for success, the Bible tells us we ought to humble ourselves, become servants, and trust that God will be the one to exalt us (James 4:10). He wants to accomplish great things through us; but he knows that, when we try to do it on our own, we become proud, and in so doing set ourselves up for failure.

How difficult is this other way? How hard must it have been for the 12 men sitting with Jesus when he told them that “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35). Each one of us has, indeed, been crafted by God to accomplish something that will last forever, but the number-one way we are to do this is by investing sacrificially in other people in the name of Jesus Christ, by being his servants.

Jesus knows what works. This becomes more apparent the longer you take him at his word. And he says that if we want to become great, we must become servants. Think about it. If you set your course for fame, it is up to people to determine if you succeed or fail, and people are fickle. Even if you do well, you may not gain their respect. Or you may gain it and lose it as they applaud you one day and turn their back on you the next. Popularity is fleeting, a fading good which cannot sustain itself.

How popular was Noah? While he was out there building a ship for a reason apparently no one could understand, how likely is it that people esteemed him? None came with him, except his own family. But to this day, we remember his name, because Noah was a servant of God.

In contrast, look at the popularity of the Pharisees. Until Jesus arrived on the scene, they had it all. They had special seats and demanded special treatment from the lay people. They had the things that fame can give; but they had nothing of substance. Jesus repeatedly pointed this out. They made a name for themselves, but the lasting reputation they earned was one of disgrace.

Now look at the ridiculed little band of servants from Acts 2, who obeyed Jesus when he told them to go to Jerusalem and wait. They didn’t even know what it was they were waiting for, but they were faithfully praying together at the time of Pentecost, when it came. The same power that was able to destroy the work of the men building the tower at Shinar came upon a group of uneducated men who could suddenly speak the language of every pilgrim in Jerusalem. When you read the words of Peter that follow this amazing event, it becomes clear. God was doing for them what the tower people in Genesis 11 wanted to do for themselves.

The Lord wants our egos to be destroyed so that we can hope in Him. Any towers on our drawing board without God’s supervision and direction are pipe dreams and just dare Him to undo them all.



The towers we attempt to build without God’s supervision and direction are pipe dreams and just dare Him to undo them all.



SMALL ACTS OF KINDNESS AND GRACE

Sir William Osler, visiting one of London’s leading children’s hospitals, noticed that in a convalescent ward all the children were clustered at one end of the room dressing their dolls, playing games, and playing in the sandbox—all except for one little girl, who sat forlornly on the edge of her high, narrow bed, clutching a cheap doll.

The great physician looked at the lonely little figure, then at the ward nurse. “We’ve tried to get Susan to play,” the nurse whispered, “but the other children just won’t have anything to do with her. You see, no one comes to see her. Her mother is dead, and her father has been here just once—he brought her that doll. The children have a strange code. Visitors mean so much. If you don’t have any visitors, you are ignored.”

Sir William walked over to the child’s bed and asked in a voice loud enough for the others to hear, “May I sit down, please?” The little girl’s eyes lit up. “I can’t stay very long this visit,” Osler went on, “but I have wanted to see you so badly.”

For five minutes he sat talking with her, even inquiring about her doll’s health and solemnly pulling out his stethoscope to listen to the doll’s chest. And as he left, he turned to the youngster and said in a carrying voice, “You won’t forget our secret, will you? And mind, don’t tell anyone.”

At the door he looked back. His new friend was now the center of a curious and admiring throng.

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A teaching letter of

