



UPON THIS ROCK I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH

ELDON OLSON

(All scriptures are quoted from KJV)

Peter was chosen by Jesus. Why? Let us examine.

"Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples" (Matthew 26:31-35).

How presumptuous we answer sometimes when we do not have the wisdom to know the answer. We look at a problem with the mind of man rather than the wisdom of God. We presume to know, without a shadow of a doubt, what the other person was thinking. Only by the Spirit should we give answers. Peter did not know himself what he was going to do, but Jesus did. How did Jesus know? He knew what Peter would do by the Spirit that dwelt within Him. Next, they went to Gethsemane where Jesus wanted to

pray to His Father. Taking His disciples with Him, He told them to remain, and He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with Him. He said unto them, *"My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me"* (Matthew 26:38). When He had prayed He came back and saw Peter and the other two men asleep, He admonished them and went back to pray a second time. He came back and found them asleep again. He left them and went back and prayed a third time. When He came back the third time He told them to sleep on.

Do we sleep on? When Jesus is calling us to pray concerning certain events, do we sleep on? It is a question we should ask ourselves, but I digress.

Jesus was taken into captivity by the betrayal of one of His disciples. There was quite a commotion that ensued. Even one of the servants of the high priest lost his ear in the skirmish. Jesus told them that all this must come to pass, as it is written in the Scriptures. His disciples forsook Him and fled.

His captors then rent Jesus' clothes, saying all kinds of malicious things to and against Him. Peter, who was fairly close at hand, was recognized by a servant girl saying, *"Thou also wast with Jesus of*

Galilee” (Matthew 26:69). Peter denied before everyone that he did not know what she was saying. Then Peter went into the porch and another young girl said to all present, *“This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth”* (Matthew 26:71). Peter again denied (with an oath) that he did not know Jesus. Then after a while, several others said, *“Surely thou art one of them, for thy speech betrayeth thee”* (Matthew 26:73). Now in the strongest speech, Peter could muster up he said, *“I know not the man”* (Matthew 26:74).

Immediately the cock crowed and then one of the most important events in Peter’s life occurred, *“And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, ‘Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.’ And he went out, and wept bitterly”* (Matthew 26:75).

Think now, how many times do we make promises to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit and then deny we have done any such thing? But I digress, as this story is about Peter, but perhaps, in our personal lives, we can relate to it.

In John, chapter 6, Jesus talks about eternal life and concludes in verse 58, *“This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live forever.”* Many of His disciples said, *“This is an hard saying, who can hear it”* (John 6:60). Jesus went on to say, *“It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life”* (John 6:63). Jesus knew some would not believe, but that did not stop Him from speaking the truth. Some left to walk with Him no more.

He said to the twelve, *“‘Will ye also go away?’ Peter said, ‘to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God’”* (John 6:67-69). How many times are we like Peter, believing that Jesus is the Christ, yet in our worldly fashion, not so much denounce Him, but ignore Him? Thinking, tomorrow I will be a better person. Tomorrow things will change.

Peter found out that words alone do not make a difference. When Jesus looked at him having denied Him thrice saying that he never knew Jesus, he wept bitterly. Do we?

After the resurrection, Jesus met with Peter and the disciples and

opened their understanding of the Scriptures and said unto them in Luke 24:46-49, *“Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of all things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.”*

They, his followers, then understood what they must do, and they did as recorded in the second chapter of Acts. They were filled with the HOLY SPIRIT and were changed, men and women.

In Acts 2:14, Peter spoke to those assembled and preached the Gospel with assurance and with power, not being concerned about what the people thought, just speaking the truth as the Holy Spirit gave him unction. By the end of the day, 3000 souls were saved.

Peter was a changed man, along with the others. He no longer feared those who would oppose him or them. How are we doing?

Are we filled with the Holy Spirit to the tearing down of strongholds in this rather corrupt day, or are we satisfied to hide our light under a bushel or basket? Maybe we turn our light down so dim that hardly a light shines forth, and no one can tell us from those who belong to Satan.

There is more to being saved than just accepting Jesus as our Saviour. We must be filled with the Spirit in order to accomplish what God wants us to accomplish. Have you had your upper room experience or has Satan convinced you that it is not necessary? Have you been deluded into thinking that just living a good life is sufficient? Satan would suggest that the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12 mean nothing to you. Those beautiful attributes are for the others, whoever THEY are. In reality, the Beatitudes are for you.

Do not be fooled; there IS God, Jesus the Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Read the epistles of Peter to see how the Holy Spirit changed his whole being.

When Peter finally realized the truth, the truth of Jesus came to pass. *“Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”* (Matthew 16:18). †

ON GROWING TOMATOES

NOREEN AARRESTAD

I am writing about growing tomatoes because I see many parallels between growing tomatoes and our walk with the Lord.

Before I ever plant tomato seeds I think about what I want in the

mature fruit. Do I want the sweet little tomatoes that Sweet 100 produces or the large slicer that Beefsteak tomatoes produce? Maybe I want the zingy-tasting Manitoba tomato that is so good for eating, canning, and freezing. I choose according to my needs and wants.

God does the same. He chooses us long before we are born to be what He needs us to be. He can see ahead that He needs a person who will show mercy and who will have the heart of an elder, a teacher, a prophet, etc. He chose you for a particular purpose in his kingdom. He planted you in a particular family, in the place where He saw that gift would grow, and where He knew you would mature and produce those particular traits. Don't ever doubt that God chose you. He set you. He nourished you. You are chosen and special in His sight. You are no accident of nature. God chose you for a particular place in His body.

When I plant my tomatoes, I prepare a growing medium that will nourish my plants and hold the moisture needed for my plants to grow. I choose a south-facing window to provide as much light and heat as possible because I know my tomatoes need both to grow. Perhaps I will lay a heating pad beneath my tray of tomato plants, and leave it on low. I will keep the growing medium damp with a light spray of water.

God does the same thing. He situates us where our souls will be nourished by our parents and families, our elders, and other members of His body. He waters these little souls with His anointing and feeds them with the ministry of each member. It is very important for every member of the assembly to be present, when the church gathers, for that nourishment. We must prepare our hearts so that we can give what the Lord has given us to bless each member of the body.

In a few days the first leaves appear; just two little leaves, clasped together as they make their way up through the soil. I always look at those two little leaves clasped together and think they must be praying for strength to make their way up through the soil to the light. We need to do a lot of praying and seeking the Lord as we grow and make our way into His holy light. Watch the leaves as they spread out, and you can see them following the sunlight from morning to dark. We must face toward the light of our Lord, the Son. What we see and where we walk and what we do make the difference in the amount of light we receive from the Son. So strive to walk in such a manner that you will be facing the Light at all times, and grow.

I often look at those two tiny leaves and think, what a great potential God has placed within that little plant. It's hard to believe this is the start of much fruit. It doesn't look like much. We can't eat the leaves, and there's no fruit in sight, it is small and fragile, but it is the beginning.

God sees our children, even ourselves, and often says, "It is a beginning. Give them time and they will produce fruit." We are often anxious about our children. Give them over to the Lord, and give them time and the nourishment of your love and care. They will grow and produce, and you will say, "I never knew that was in them." But God knows what potential He put in them.

It seems a long time that the tomato plants sit on my shelf, sopping up the water and taking in the sunshine, but a wonderful thing happens. More and more leaves appear, and they begin to grow taller. However, we don't want them to grow too tall. They will soon topple over because they have little strength in that long stem. So, I'll bring out the fan and blow on them a gentle breeze. With a little stress, the tomato plant will produce lignin cells to strengthen the stem, and the leaves will become

more compact.

God puts stress in our lives sometimes to actually strengthen our walk with Him. In difficulty, He often produces faith and trust, and hope in Him. He detours us into His channels and out of our wishes because He can see we need more strength to follow Him.

Finally, the day comes when I put the tomato plant tray out on the deck, but I don't leave it out there indefinitely all by itself. Again, it is strengthened by the gentle breeze and bright sunshine. I would only leave it out there for a short while because I know it is a frail little plant and will soon begin to wilt. God never puts us out on our own without first finding a safe place for us. He keeps an eye on us. We need to really put in a lot of time reading His word and praying for His will when we first leave the safety of our home.

Sometimes we have strong wind or frost or hail in those first few days out on the deck. Then I will cover my plants or bring them inside. God does this so often with us. He brings us into safety and replenishes our spirits. Gradually I cut back on the water, and the roots grow downwards hunting for moisture. When those growing times, those times of being stressed come, we need to grow roots that go down deep to find God's will for our lives.

Finally, the day comes when I know the danger of frost is over and my plants are just getting too big for the tray. I select a place on the south side of my house where my plants will have lots of sunshine and will be sheltered from the rough northwest winds. God always keeps us within His protection. He doesn't put us in places where life is just too much for us. He protects us because He loves us. He will always walk with us and never leave us.

I plant those tomato plants deeply, right up to the leaves. On the stem below the leaves, are little hairs, that when planted in soil, will become extra roots. Extra roots equal extra nourishment. In addition, you don't easily uproot my plants as I also put a few grains of fertilizer in the soil that covers the roots, and a Tums tablet (contains calcium) that will protect my tomatoes from blossom end rot. God so often gives us just that little bit extra strength for what is ahead.

I water my plants regularly, and weed them and watch for the first blossoms. Often my plants grow so crazy, it is necessary to cut them back. Too many branches, too many flowers and I know all that growth will never produce ripe fruit before the season's end. So I cut back many of the branches, and nip off a lot of flowers. And I support them with tomato cages. How often does God need to cut us back so we will produce better, bigger fruits for Him? Often I find myself saying, "Why Lord, why would You hobble me in this way, and put me into a cage?" God knows what is best for us, and how to encourage our ministries.

Finally comes the day when I see the first red, ripe fruit. It is so delicious and I exalt in the work of my hands. I can just see God being excited when He sees the fruit of the Spirit being produced in us. He knows that fruit contains the seed that will enlarge his kingdom. He knows it has been worth all His careful choosing, and nourishing and protection to bring us to maturity in his kingdom. †

OUR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

STEVEN LEVSON

(All scriptures are quoted from NKJV)

The Bible is full of verses that encourage us to take care of and reach out to each other. We need to do so, perhaps even more during the current pandemic than ever before.

I know of an elder from a local church that since March has been checking on his flock regularly to make sure they are doing okay. What a wonderful example of a shepherd but also of an active member of the body of Christ. I believe that 'checking in' is part and parcel of each of our responsibilities as we look after one another in much the same way as we care for our physical bodies.

Furthermore, consider the early church as recorded in Acts 2:44-47. The way they treated one another is a good example to us. They shared all things in common as the greater good was more important than the individual good.

Some scriptures that speak of our social responsibility include:

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39).

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

"Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh?" (Isaiah 58:6-7).

"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me'" (Matthew 25:37-40).

"Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:12-14).

Our carnal nature, and often our culture around us, encourages us to focus on ourselves instead of each other. Many advertisements for example, subtly or boldly, suggest that we need some product or service that helps us. Our carnal minds are conditioned to focus on ourselves first. Let us be careful not to fall into this trap.

Let us rather take hold of this scripture, *"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith"* (Galatians 6:9-10).

May we look to God for Him to help us fulfill our social responsibility. Jesus was a wonderful example of loving thy neighbor as thyself. May we follow Christ, by loving our neighbors.

May we look to our neighbors, both in the natural and in the spiritual. As Bro. Kelvin Martin taught at North Carolina camp in the summer of 2019, our neighbor is essentially anyone we come into contact with throughout our lives. That could be in person or even online. These days many of us are spending a lot of time online, so let us not forget who we interact with through email, social media, online platforms like Zoom, etc. They are also our neighbors.

May we reach out to one another in the church. We have thankfully built up relationships over the years, and let us continue to follow up with each other. There was a story of one elderly sister that had no mobility. Instead of wallowing in self-pity, she decided to do what she could. She wrote letters, sent cards, and made phone calls. What a wonderful ministry she had, all from the confines of her home! †

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Headquarters:
802 Airport Road
North Battleford, SK S9A 2Z3 Canada

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 934
North Battleford, SK S9A 2Z3 Canada

Telephone:
(306) 445-2733

Email:
info@globalmissionsinc.org

Online:
www.globalmissionsinc.org

Traveling Ministry Contact List:
www.globalmissionsinc.org/about

SHARON STAR

The Sharon Star is a monthly publication and mailed as a free-will offering plan. The articles within are intended for inspiration and information to those who are interested in the unfolding revelation of the Word of God.

Published by:
Global Missions Inc. in North Battleford,
Saskatchewan, Canada.

The Sharon Star is found online at:
www.globalmissionsinc.org/sharon-star

Publications Mail Agreement 40012206

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