



Ears

to



Hear



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EARS TO HEAR

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CONTENTS

1. God Speaks	page 3
2. His Word is Life	page 6
3. God gives us Choices (freewill)	page 8
4. Making a Good Choice	page 11
5. Mistakes and Repentance	page 14
6. Godly Wisdom	page 17
7. The wrong message	page 20
8. An Open Ear	page 24
9. An Open Mind	page 29
10. An Open Heart	page 32
11. Continuous Revelation	page 35
12. The Heart of God	page 41

Foreword

These are strange days in our world where godlessness is increasing everywhere. Although some terrible things are being exposed and dealt with, by law, evil people are getting away with acts which are increasing in corruption and violence; people who have been trusted are being shown up as totally untrustworthy; unscrupulous people are trying to extract money however they can from unsuspecting people, even with lies. God is never caught unawares by Satan's manoeuvres and has strategies ready for His people to use to combat his actions. **Are we, His people, listening to Him and obeying His voice so that we demonstrate His power in our world?**

1. God Speaks

There are so many different attitudes that we can take when someone speaks to us. When we respect the person speaking we listen intently with full concentration. On the other hand, when we think someone is nagging us we turn our listening ears off. The person speaking might as well be talking to a brick wall. Then there are attitudes of disinterest, even boredom, inattention when we only hear half the speech or get the wrong message. There is also the attitude of only thinking what we want to say next and completely missing the point.

These different attitudes usually arise out of our attitude to the person speaking.

From the very beginning of the revelation of the Bible God is revealed as Creator who speaks with such authority that awesome things happen just by His spoken word. This is an authority that should be heard, just because of the power in the words.

It is a mystery, therefore, that Eve and also Adam did not listen carefully to what God told them about their responsibility in the Garden of Eden.

There were two trees in this garden – the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Both of these trees were in the middle of the garden. (Genesis 2:9) God's instruction was that they could eat from any tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:16) Only one tree was forbidden. Getting the trees mixed up could be fatal. **One gave eternal life but the other led to death.** You would think that Adam would want to get it right and to help his wife get it right too. Of course they had no concept of death so they could only choose to obey, just as children should with their parents. As we know, Eve listened to other advice, rather than follow God's instruction, and Adam and Eve had to leave the Presence of God and their idyllic life-style, to work hard. Not only that but the rule of the earth was now in the hands of God's enemy, Satan, who had one victory under his "belt" and knew exactly how he could lead "man" astray again.

God is recorded as speaking again to Cain, to warn him that sin was crouching at his door and desired to have him. (Genesis 4:7) God is incredibly gracious and His Spirit warns us all the time when we are in a bad place.

The Bible tells us that God does speak – now one way, now another – though man may not perceive it. "In a dream, in a vision of the night, He may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride, to preserve his soul from the grave, his life from perishing. A man may be chastened by illness and pain...so that he prays to God and finds favour, he sees God, and he is restored and is redeemed". (Job 33:14-28) God always wants the light of life to shine on His man. Though God is speaking to His children all the time it is rarely in a naturally heard voice, although this can happen. In the Old Testament the text says that God spoke to Moses (Exodus 3:4), Abraham (Genesis 22:11), Isaac (Genesis 26:2) or Jacob (Genesis 32:28) and the Angel of the Lord spoke to Joshua (Joshua 6:2), Gideon (Judges 6:12), Manoah (Judges 13:9), Samuel (1 Samuel 3:10), Job (Job 38:1) and others. It does seem that this was an audible voice but some of these references also say that the Lord appeared as a "man", others in a vision.

There is also something special in some of these encounters. The name of the person to whom God is speaking is said twice – "Moses, Moses" or "Abraham, Abraham". This indicates that this person had a personal relationship with God. God sought them out as specially chosen for God's own purpose. As they listened to God and followed what He said He sought them out more, revealing Himself and His own heart.

It must have been a great grief to God when He wanted to reveal Himself to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. What they heard was noise. They saw what they did not like, what made them afraid, and they

rejected their opportunity to meet God. The eye-gate is a stronger influence than the ear-gate. Maybe that is why we close our eyes to talk to God. To talk to someone we cannot see we must use our other senses and our imagination. As humans we know what it is like when someone we are trying to communicate with does not listen. Our words are usually just conversation but God is speaking words of **life** which are really important so we need to learn how to listen when He speaks.

2. His Word is Life

When God spoke to Noah and told him to build the Ark, Noah could not have imagined why. He could not have conceived a flood which would destroy the earth as he knew it and this Ark took a long time to build (maybe up to 100 years). It would have been very difficult to hear the taunts and questions from his neighbours who, right to the end, did not want to get involved. The Bible says that Noah walked with God and was both righteous and blameless. God had confidence that Noah would obey, and hearing God's voice saved the lives of Noah and his household. Hearing is supposed to be followed by action. They go hand in hand because God is like this.

The Apostle, John, understood this when he wrote, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we ask of Him." (1 John 5:14&15) This seems extraordinarily gracious on God's part and yet He

imparted life to His children so that they could truly represent Him on this earth (2 Corinthians 5:20). Therefore we must rely utterly on hearing Him so that we do. It is certain that Jesus could do nothing by Himself; He could only do what He saw the Father doing, because whatever the Father did the Son also did." (John 5:19) This is the Life of God ruling in the Father's own children, who have been born again by the Spirit of God. These are no longer under the control of Satan, the prince of this world, but made alive, created in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:5) Jesus is confident that His sheep, His followers, hear His voice and follow Him (His ways) (John 10:27). He also states His expectation that those who have faith in Him will do what He had been doing, and even greater things through the indwelling Holy Spirit. (John 14:12) His work was to continue to the close of the Age. He said to His Father that He had completed the work He had been given on earth (John 17:4) but that He would continue to make the Father known. (John 17:26)

Such is the mercy and grace of God the Father that He made His Word to become flesh. The Old Testament is a sorry record of a chosen people, God's representatives in this world, who did not listen and obey "to be a Light to the nations". Isaiah prophesied, "Though hearing they do not hear or understand." (Isaiah 6:9) The prophet's warning had no effect and this became a permanent problem for God's chosen people. Matthew records that the prophecy was fulfilled. "You will be ever hearing but never understanding...this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear..." (Matthew 13:14&15) Yet God has allowed this to happen "until the full number of the Gentiles has come into the Kingdom". (Romans 11:25) The Life of God is for all who call on the Name of the Lord. (Romans 10:13)

The Word of Life is in our mouth and in our heart – confess that Jesus is Lord and that He is alive, raised by God from the dead and that He is interceding for us right now.

When Peter confessed that Jesus has the words of eternal life (John 6:68) it arose out of Jesus' statement that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood. There does not seem to be any reference to cannibalism in the Bible but this seems to be how those who heard Him took it. It is very interesting in these days that those who have a heart transplant apparently take on the characteristics of the person whose heart they have received. It is also interesting that those pagans who have practised cannibalism did so because they wanted the characteristics of the person they were eating, believing this would happen in a distorted form of faith. This then is one of Jesus' sayings that requires ears to hear.

3. God gives us Choices (freewill)

A long time ago God offered His chosen people a choice. (Deuteronomy 30:15-19) The alternatives were life and prosperity or death and destruction. Then He begs that they choose life so that they and their children may live and love the Lord their God, listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him. Even then the word was very near; in the mouth and in the heart, so that they may obey it. God has never changed His plan for the good of His family.

In these days many people go to church. They have made a choice to be with God's people. They might love the Lord but for many their children are in rebellion and going their own way. This is very grieving but this is when we need to hear God's voice. We need to talk to God. Are our priorities wrong? Are we loving the Lord with all our heart, with all our soul (our mind, will and emotions) and with all our strength? Are we believing the precious promises that He has given us? This seems to be why it is so important to hear God's voice and have an intimate relationship with Him. Otherwise we will fall back on rule-keeping. This action nullifies the grace of God. (Galatians 5:4) This completely denies what Jesus has done on the Cross, to set us free from failure to keep the whole Law. God has promised that He would show mercy and love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments. (Exodus 20:4) Have we made excuses about our own shortcomings or are we exercising unforgiveness? This is fatal for having our prayers answered. (Psalm 66:18) (Matthew 6:15)

Recently we met a lovely Christian lady who confessed that her son is not saved and has no interest in hearing the Gospel. She attends a church where there is a very strong emphasis on the fact that we are sinners. Every Sunday they confess to God that they have sinned in thought, word and deed against His Divine Majesty or that they have strayed from His ways and followed the schemes and desires of their own hearts etc. We know she is a praying woman and serves at her church assiduously but what attraction is there for her sinful son if even the devotion she offers to God still leaves her the same as his

rebellion in God's sight. There is no appeal through us for God or to God in this. (2 Corinthians 5:20)

The Holy Spirit is such a gentle Guide but He is also the Enabler. God generously gives us the power to overcome our shortcomings and bad habits, our individual idiosyncrasies which cause us a lot of trouble. He does not deal with us as we deserve but speaks into our hearts, forgives our sins and removes our shame which would cripple us. Then we can move on and up to enjoy our life and to prosper in every way.

On the website (www.munumin.com) is a testimony about offences and unforgiveness which caused one of the writers to lose sight of God's love. (Under books: "Of-fences") Ignorance of God's advice can cause us great grief and troubles. Sin really does lead to death. Adam and Eve found out that spiritual death (separation from God) seems OK at first because God is so merciful that He does not punish us as we deserve or as He threatened, and we are deceived into thinking that because we are breathing we are still alive. But as we proceed through our life we find there are many frustrations and failures, sorrows and sicknesses, trials and troubles which we cannot solve ourselves. These can be easily solved supernaturally by God who loves us and knows why these things have happened to us, whether our own fault or permitted by Him through the neglect or deliberate action of someone else. Just a cursory reading of the Old Testament demonstrates this in the story of God's chosen people, the Israelites. It seems that God has given us freewill so that we are not puppets but can choose His ways as an act of love towards Him.

It is interesting that when Jesus came to His disciples in the Upper Room He told them an important principle. "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of anyone, they are retained". (John 20:23 KJV & Amplified Version) This means that the person who does not forgive is actually answerable for the sin that has been committed, by the other person to them – they have retained it. This is an utterly ridiculous state of affairs but this is what God has decreed, which is why Jesus warns us to forgive. In practice unforgiveness results in never being able to move on from the injury done to us by another person. We hear and see this every day in the News. Jesus gives us a perfect example when He said publicly, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

4. Making a Good Choice

Because the Bible is our manual for living God's way we need to read it regularly. If we call ourselves Christians, Jesus' followers, we need to follow His example. When Jesus was 12 years old He was found in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. Everyone who heard Him was amazed at His understanding and His answers. (Luke 2:46&47) From this point He grew in wisdom! Mary treasured these things in her heart and would have encouraged Him in His seeking His Father's will and His relationship with His Father, even as He subjected Himself to His own parents at home. As a human being Jesus identified with us in every

way. "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way – yet was without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

Paul's advice to children is to obey your parents and this is good advice for God's own children, born into His family by the Spirit of God when they first receive Jesus and believe in His Name. (John 1:12) John, the writer of the gospel, makes it very plain that this is not a natural birth, by human decision or a husband's will, but by the same miracle that Jesus Himself became God's Son on this earth. But this is therefore not obedience just to earthly parents but even more importantly to our Heavenly Father.

As we become adults we no longer obey our parents in the way a child does. They have trained us according to their values as they had a right to do. Paul writes that when we become adult we put childish ways behind us. (1 Corinthians 13:11) Here are some childish ways we can suggest – temper tantrums, wanting one's own way, greed, buying toys that last only for the moment, selfishness (me at the centre of my world), inability to anticipate consequences of an action, inability to 'hear' when being asked to come and do a task, and leaving tasks to others. From this list alone we can easily see that there are many who have not yet grown up, even though they are not a child in age terms and consider that they should be treated like an adult. Paul addresses the Corinthians as worldly, mere infants in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:1) because they were jealous and quarrelled, especially about their group superiority and their status within that group. This, unfortunately, is very prevalent today in church circles.

When we are spiritually mature we honour and obey the values of the Father who has trained us in His ways.

We meet many people in the streets who have made bad choices. This is inevitable without God's wisdom and that is why we are so keen to go and ask people to receive the Holy Spirit, who knows the mind of God and guides us into all truth. The very first good choice to be made is to come into God's own family by adoption, through the grace extended to all by the death of Jesus for the sin of the world. When any person really meets Jesus and feels His warmth and His love through the one who introduces him/her to Jesus they will remember this in a cold and uncaring world. Jesus truly is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is such a beautiful person to know and have fellowship with, and many people do not know that He is alive and that it is possible to have fellowship with Him.

There is a second choice here too. When we have "met" Jesus we should want to know Him better if this person has really been confronted by Jesus, not just knowledge about the facts of what Jesus completed for us on the Cross, but "tasted and seen that God is good" through the representation of one of Jesus' followers. "By this all people will know that you are my disciples – if you love one another". We have written many times that love is unconditional acceptance of the person (and the faults). Sin is never condoned but the sinner who has just changed direction is honoured because of being chosen by God for salvation, indicating that they are "elect". In our ministry we ask people to invite the Holy Spirit to come to them every day (and more). Our experience is that those who are truly

hungry to know Jesus have no trouble doing this and He is always faithful to give new revelation when people do so.

God is completely faithful to His promises and when we claim them He always delivers. Every promise is "Yes" in Christ. Sometimes the answer comes instantly and sometimes He stretches us out so that we increase in faith, but He has said His answers are "yes" so we accept that as final. (Choice 3)

5. Mistakes and Repentance

If the sin of the world has been dealt with forever and there is nothing that would prevent us receiving all that God has prepared for us then hearing, really hearing this message is of vital importance. "If you confess with your mouth", you hear yourself preach to yourself. "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13) "Faith comes from hearing the message." "God's kindness leads towards repentance." (Romans 2:4) The message is GOOD news and it is the Holy Spirit's responsibility to convict of sin. The message is that God LOVES unconditionally. "While we were still sinners Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) We cannot change ourselves unless the root iniquity is pardoned because it will rule our lives. Jesus is always ready to receive a repentant sinner.

One of the things that have been misunderstood is this word 'repentance'. This does not mean that we grovel before God. This word comes from Latin ("mores suos mutare" and means change your attitude, your direction in life, even your characteristics). This

means that we determine to change our direction and our own ideas in favour of God's perfect ways. Once we change direction the Holy Spirit convinces us of righteousness and we can focus on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. (Hebrews 12:2) We begin to walk in the new life and begin to renew our mind and learn God's perfect will. Repentance is another good choice and as we renew our mind we really begin to hear God speak to us because Jesus has promised that His sheep listen to His voice. (John 10:27) This act is a daily thing because Satan is always wanting to pull us back to remember our past failures, but the Gospel is concerned with our future, helping us to walk on the Highway of Holiness (Isaiah 35:8 & 62:10), and to "ride on the heights of the land". (Isaiah 58:14) "Without holiness no one will see the Lord", (Hebrews 12:14) and He has called us to be holy and blameless in His sight. (Ephesians 1:4)

It is very easy to make a mistake as we learn to follow Jesus. We are beginning as a new-born baby even if we are not physically. No one slaps a baby for falling down and God is infinitely patient, not wanting anyone to perish. (2 Peter 3:9) He has promised that when He begins a good work He will carry it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)

When we understand God's loving and patient heart for us, His children, by adoption through the death and resurrection of His own dear Son, we really want to be "good children", like any child does. We need to rely heavily on the training of our Parent who knows our nature, our weaknesses and our strengths (for after all, He made us), and He has planted in us His own hopes and dreams. He undertakes to train us to fulfil everything He has conceived for us. His "difficulty"

is that He has given us freewill and we can choose wrongly. The Bible warns that the devil is prowling around, "crouching at the door", waiting to thwart God's plans and dreams for us. This is why repentance is so important. When a loving Father makes His wishes plain, in the Bible and through speaking into our conscience, it is up to us to acknowledge our mistakes. The Bible recommends "Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to Him 'forgive all our sins'". (Hosea 14:2) It is absolutely fatal to try to justify ourselves and make excuses. God goes quiet on us and we are very vulnerable to the devil's voice or even our "old nature" which was crucified with Christ when we first asked Him into our lives and became a child of God. God's seed has been planted within us and so we do not continue to sin. (1 John 3:9) This is the mark of being born again. This is the New Covenant that God has made with us, all of His grace but through our faith (which He gave to us to enable us to accept such an extraordinary concept).

Jesus told Peter that we are to forgive seventy times seven. (Matthew 18:22) This means that God also forgives at least this many times. When we have really "blown it" the most ridiculous thing we could possibly do is to run from God. We meet people who say God could not forgive them because of what they have done. When we feel guilt for any deed, this is our conscience telling us to be cleansed because Jesus has already made the way. This cleansing is a supernatural act of a gracious God who knows full well that guilt will warp our souls. Just as Adam and Eve did, we will begin to blame others in order to assuage the guilt but this does not work and the guilt remains. We can also try to justify our actions "because everyone

else does this or worse" and all this does is further lower society's standards. It is not surprising that Paul wrote to Timothy, "There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive...ungrateful, unholy, without love...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God". (2 Timothy 3:1-5) Maybe these things have always been around but as Godlessness increases so do the demons that "feed" on these terrible traits.

Repentance is God's solution to this ugliness because God promises that if we confess and repent of (turn away from) these acts that have caused us guilt, He is faithful and just to not only forgive but to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9) This is the God we have committed ourselves to, who "pardons sin and forgives the transgression...delights to show mercy...have compassion on us; tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea". (Micah 7:18&19) If admitting our failures to God means that our sins are wiped out for ever, why would we not want to say sorry to God?

6. Godly Wisdom

The wisdom of God is foolishness to men. When man decided to become the centre of his world, having accepted the concept from Satan, through our antecedent, Eve, God has countermanded man's wisdom. He has had to do this because, as James puts it, (James 3:15) this "wisdom" is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil, and promotes the ego.

God's wisdom is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere, and raises a harvest of righteousness. (James 3:17-18) If we lack this wisdom God gives it generously to all who ask Him, without finding fault.

(James 1:5)

How could this wisdom be foolishness to men? It is easy to see that the ego is completely demolished by such attitudes. Paul makes this plain. (Ephesians 2:2&3) We used to follow the ways of the world, and the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient...gratifying the cravings of the flesh (sinful nature) and following its desires and thoughts. John defines these as the lust of sexual cravings, the things we see (and covet) and the things we are so proud of that we own and that we do. (1 John 2:16) It has been said that men want girls, gold and glory and women want men, money and magnificence. When we make these our aim these also become our gods.

His hearers were amazed at Jesus' wisdom, but He sought His Father's wisdom all the time. He spent whole nights in prayer, communing with His Father. He chose to do the Father's will at all times and even He needed guidance to do this. While on this earth Jesus was fully human and called Himself the Son of Man. He had laid aside His rightful glory to become as one of us so that He could truly represent us, and then pay our penalty for sin. This is the wisdom of God – the message of the Cross. (1 Corinthians 1:18) Worldly man wants to see and hear ostentation and arrogant self-confidence and is impressed by these. On the other hand, self-sacrifice, weakness and humility, dependence on God's power, is what

impresses and honours God. These qualities are what the world considers foolishness and those who think like this are actually challenged by these qualities, often mocking and criticising people who exhibit such God-honouring ways.

God's wisdom comes to us by revelation from His heart, through His Spirit. This is a gift of God and Jesus told us that He would be the Source of God's wisdom to us. This concept is developed by Paul to remind us. (1 Corinthians 2:6-16)

The Branch of Jesse is described in Isaiah (11:2-5) to be a banner for the peoples (v10) – The Spirit of Wisdom and of Understanding, of Counsel and of Power, of Knowledge and of Reverence of the LORD. The seventh quality is Delight. In Zechariah God's servant, the Branch has seven "eyes" or facets. (3:8)

These are the outworking of God's wisdom which leads to delight which are demonstrated by Jesus.

- He is described as having the Holy Spirit without limit. (John 3:34)
- He is described as growing in wisdom and favour with God and men from His childhood. (Luke 2:52)
- Those who heard Him were amazed at His understanding. (Luke 2:47)
- He is also prophesied to be Wonderful Counsellor and Mighty God. (Isaiah 9:6) Counsel is defined as formal advice or a plan of action. This is what Jesus consistently taught.
- He demonstrated the Power of God in all the signs and wonders He did. (eg, Mark 2:1-7)

- He knew His Father intimately and loved His fellowship with Him, always honouring Him and doing only what His Father did. (John 7:19-22)
- Isaiah prophesied that God delights in His chosen One and will put His Spirit on Him and He will bring justice. (42:1) Delight is a lovely word which includes rejoicing, the whole countenance lighting up.

When we desire God's wisdom, having come into relationship with Him, this is what God also imparts to us because He has chosen us to be His co-workers in the power of the Holy Spirit.

7. The wrong message

"In the last days there will be terrible times", Paul writes to Timothy. (2 Timothy 3:1ff) Apart from the selfishness, ingratitude and violence there is to be a time when people are always learning, but never able to acknowledge the truth. (2 Timothy 3:7) People will want to debate and argue about their opinions, what they believe being better than another opinion, and causing factions and sects based on those opinions. Paul warns that their teaching will spread like gangrene. (2 Timothy 2:17) This letter to Timothy warns of other problems related to these. It will not be about what we do but what we "know", but this will not necessarily be Godly wisdom.

Paul was continually concerned for his converts because of wrong messages from people who wanted to be considered "wise" and have all the answers, not needing to listen to or learn from others. These

arrogant teachers will teach what they think people want to hear, just as the false prophets did under the Old Covenant. They will pretend to speak God's words but it will actually be their own ideas, with impressive eloquence to deceive their listeners. It will be a time when Godly discernment is essential, when being filled with the Holy Spirit is the only safeguard against such an onslaught of information.

One of the identifying marks of a false teacher is that they claim to know it all yet they do not do what they tell others must be done – hypocrisy. It is easy to teach what the Bible says in a legalistic way and judge others that they do not do such a thing therefore they are wrong. (Romans 2:1) Jesus told the Pharisees "woe to you" because of their arrogance, their self glory-seeking, their condemnation of those who did not keep their rules, their proselytising to their own glory, and their bending of God's own commandments to suit themselves. (Matthew 23:1-32)

This puts a Bible teacher in a difficult position when they are teaching what the Bible says but their lives do not match their instruction. This calls for great humility. When they proclaim the Word of God as infallible and steer away from airing their own opinions and interpretations, and refrain from making judgments about others with a different opinion, the Anointing of God is on His proclaimed word and carries the same weight as the teaching of Jesus when He was here on the earth. Love never fails so all teaching that is done in love will be anointed.

Woe, alas, an expression of grief, is an interesting word. The dictionary takes this exclamation a lot further and we begin to think of the "woes" prophesied in Revelation. Affliction, bitter grief and

calamities, hardship, tribulation and gloom are a few of the synonyms given. Because Jesus says this to the Pharisees who are comfortable and smug in their self-confidence we know He has a true understanding of their dangerous position before God. Paul describes it later. "They did not know the righteousness that comes from God (and is by faith alone) but sought to establish their own."

(Romans 11:3)

Because the true gospel is a simple message, false teachers can make it more complicated so that people get discouraged. Recently we were taken to task by someone who said we were not preaching the true gospel because we were not teaching that you must pray in tongues to indicate that you are saved. Praying in tongues is a great gift but it is not essential for salvation. Another person criticised us because we do not make people join a church when they pray with us in the street. Attending a church is a good thing and we encourage it when asked, but the gospel is much simpler than that – confess with your mouth and believe in your heart. When the Holy Spirit is welcomed into our lives He is a very good Counsellor and speaks constantly to our consciences and our hearts. The only unforgivable sin is against the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 12:32) This is because we put ourselves out of reach of God's voice to us. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts of sin and convinces us of righteousness and judgment. (John 16:8)

The history of the Church has shown that men either choose to resist the Holy Spirit or submit to Him. When men have wanted the power over the people under their leadership there has been persecution and trouble but **when the leader wants the Holy Spirit**

to rule there has been revival and joy, and a seeking after holiness.

The wrong message dilutes the standards that God has decreed. Even as sin increases we cannot afford to lower God's standard and deny His word. **Compassion for the sinner cannot compromise God's word in any way.** Just because things have become common practice in our world does not make them right. The precepts of God are for our good and our health, spiritual, moral and physical (or spirit, soul and body). Sickness is increasing because of defiance against God's standards and the Church's failure to broadcast the true gospel in word and action has let God down terribly. Love does not flow freely from the Church, which is the body of Christ by God's choice, and is a great privilege which has been abused. God has poured His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5) so that it can flow out as a stream of living water to thirsty people. (John 7:38) Compromising God's standards cannot achieve God's will, and Godlessness and demonic activity will increase. When the message of God's people is purity of life, although there will be many against us, at least God is "for" us and we are able to win those who are destined to be in His family.

The most dangerous thing is that the wrong message can sound correct, biblically, but does not echo the mind and heart of God, who first and foremost loves people, even sinners. There is no sin that shocks Jesus. If He had not seen it all while He was with the Father in Heaven He would have seen it all when He was here on the earth, yet He paid the price demanded by God so that all could be set free from the guilt, shame and slavery of their follies and iniquities. We

can remember easily enough things we have done of which we are ashamed and then recognise that Jesus also felt that shame when He took on His body the sins of the whole world...and He has forgiven us and put the guilt and shame into the deepest sea. The shame and disgrace is gone forever in God's sight. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us". (Psalm 103:12) We are **not sinners** any more because **we are saved by His grace**. Do we listen to this message or do we listen to the message of the Old Covenant of perfect obedience to the Law? "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.'" (Galatians 3:10 and Deuteronomy 27:26) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming the CURSE for us. **We ought to receive this priceless gift of righteousness by faith to acknowledge and honour Him.**

8. An Open Ear

There are two Old Testament customs which focus attention on the ear. (New Bible Dictionary) One was the rite of confirming a slave in voluntary service for life by nailing his ear to the door when his right was to be set free but he loved his master so much that he wanted to stay. The other custom was putting the blood on the right ear, thumb and toe of the priest. (Leviticus 8:23&24) (Sanctified hearing and revelation, and obedience)

Isaiah writes of the Servant's obedience. (Isaiah 50:4&5) "The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back." There is a commitment to obey God in every request of the Master whether priest or slave. But **commitment is what is required**. There can be no half-hearted attitude for a slave, even a "slave to righteousness". (Romans 6:16&18)

King David also speaks of the pierced ear. (Psalm 40:6) "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." Even though he made many mistakes, it is written of him that he was a man after God's own heart. (Acts 13:22) **It would seem that an open ear is most important to God**. "The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him." (2 Chronicles 16:9) It would also seem that God does not train any who will not commit to listening to His voice. He waits for a response to the wooing of His Holy Spirit. (John 6:44&65) Jesus says that if we want to follow Him we must deny our self-will (Mark 8:34). Paul advises that we set our minds on what the Spirit desires. (Romans 8:5)

When we are not convinced that everything God asks of us is for our good we will compromise with the "world" and we will always get two messages. The loud one will be the devil and the soft one will be the Holy Spirit. But Jesus says that "my sheep listen to my voice". (John 10:27) One of the disadvantages of being deaf is that you only hear the loud voices. You need to focus on the one speaking to actually hear clearly what they are saying otherwise you have to

guess some of the message and not always get it right. When God spoke to the Israelites from Mount Sinai the voice was like thunder and the Israelites were so terrified that they told Moses to be their representative before God. (Exodus 20:18&19) The trouble was that they did not really want to trust Moses either.

The Bible is full of stories about hearing or not hearing.

Adam heard the Lord in the Garden and hid. (Genesis 3:10) Hearing for him convicted him of sin, but instead of saying sorry he bleated and blamed. This showed that he did not know God's loving heart at all even though he had fellowshiped with God in the evenings.

Abraham heard God and obeyed. (Genesis 12) God began to pour out all His blessings and love on Abraham and his family. Abraham made mistakes but it is recorded that he became a confidant of God and God listened to Abraham. (Genesis 18:17) Since we have become children of Abraham ("he is our father in the sight of God" Romans 4:17) this story alone should encourage us to listen to God and trust Him. In Abraham's biggest test it was really important that Abraham heard God speak. (Genesis 22:1-14) This is one of the great mysteries that God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, yet important prophetically. Abraham hears God ask him to sacrifice his son and then at the last moment to use a ram provided instead. Sometimes we might wonder if Jesus thought about this story when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, even though He knew why He had come into the world in human form. Would God send a ram at the last moment?

Muslims have made much of this story, as the Qur'an teaches that there was a substitution at the last moment so Jesus did not go on the Cross. This lie that they have propagated demolishes the

glorious fact that Jesus is our Saviour and God was satisfied that the penalty for sin had been paid so that people could connect to Him again without being destroyed. The old Adam lost the Kingdom of God but Jesus took it back again from the usurper. Only Christianity asserts that God Himself dealt with the problem of sin. Every other religion makes you earn God's favour by doing "good".

It was not just "special" people who heard God. When the angel of the Lord came to Hagar she was told her son would be named Ishmael – God hears. Her testimony was, "you are the God who sees me...I have now seen the One who sees me". (Genesis 16:13) For Hagar, hearing God's voice enabled her to know God as a personal God and not just a belief system and this is just as true for people today

When God specifically answers a prayer such as He did for Abraham's servant (Genesis 26), this man could not mistake that God had heard him and that he had prayed what was in the heart of God to do – that he had heard God. His response was to bow down and worship the Lord. (verses 26 & 52) Although he was conscious that he was representing Abraham as he went, he realised that God also loved and cared for him too, even though he was a servant, and had actually honoured him as a man, apart from being a servant. In God's sight he was an individual person before God.

Genesis is a book of beginnings so it is reasonable to expect that these patterns of relationship with God would continue and it is interesting to study the many stories throughout the Bible – those who heard God and obeyed, those who heard and did not, and those who did not hear at all, but everyone who heard and obeyed were blessed

by God because this is His ideal. We change from going our own ways and adopt His plan for our lives.

Jesus said "those who have ears to hear, let them hear" often. It sounds strange because what else do we have them for?

When He was speaking about John the Baptist and connecting him to prophecy about the Kingdom of God (Matthew 11:11-15) He wanted His listeners to understand the significance of the coming changes, so that God's Kingdom would grow in a new and greater way. Even the least in the Kingdom of Heaven would have the potential to fulfil the work that Jesus had begun. Yet even in these days the average "Christian" seems to have no concept of the latent power that Jesus earned from the Father by His death and resurrection and freely imparts to believers by the Holy Spirit. The Bible goes on in this context to record that "this generation" are like children, just playing around. Does the Church demonstrate the violent passion for extending the Kingdom of God or are they too playing around like children?

Another time (Matthew 13:9) Jesus was also talking about the kingdom in parables, telling the story of the farmer who sowed seed. He could not control where the seed fell and some was wasted but...some fell on good soil and produced a harvest. The disciples had to ask Jesus to explain parables but because they did Jesus told them they were blessed because they could see and hear (understand). The Holy Spirit opened their "inside" ears. They could receive insights about God's secrets, His intentions and plans, especially with regard to His Kingdom. In the same series of stories He uses the expression again. (verse 43) This time He is talking about the end-times when the

"growing time" is over and there will be division of those who have chosen the Kingdom and those who have rejected it. There is a beautiful assurance of those who have been accounted righteous – that they will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. This echoes Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 12:3) which he heard but did not understand because the time was not right. This means that God does reveal secrets to His Prophets and they speak it out but God is the One who gives understanding.

9. An Open Mind

When we have heard God speak to us we have another choice. Even though this voice might tell us to go against our established practices, are we willing to obey, to try the new revelation? A long time ago we used to say as a response in the church, "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be". This is God Himself who does not change who He is or how He relates to His children. He is however very current in what Satan's latest deception is and the revelations in the world that might lead people astray. He is always one step ahead because He knows the end from the beginning. He has strategies ready to keep the believer on track and to win the lost, because this is His greatest desire. He is always ready to impart His newest strategy to those who want to hear and try it out.

There is a very interesting story concerning Moses who is recorded as being a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth. (Numbers 12:3) Moses brought together the 70 elders

at the Tent of Meeting and the Lord came in the cloud and "anointed" them with His Holy Spirit so that they prophesied. There were two who had not come, Eldad and Medad, but they also received the Spirit with the 68 who had been at the Tent and they also began prophesying. A young man informed on them to Moses, and Joshua asked Moses to order them to stop. Moses reply was, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit on them". (Numbers 11:24-29) Moses knew God's heart and mind so well that he could see God was doing something new and wonderful. If everyone embraced this new thing they would be more conscious of God's presence and power there would be no complaining and grumbling which was making God angry.

An interesting question to explore is these 70 elders that God called to be anointed with His Holy Spirit. This eldership came about because the load of leadership was too heavy for Moses (Exodus 18:17-26) and the seventy (Numbers 11:16) were chosen as respected leaders, but it was God who consecrated them and empowered them with His wisdom, one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The number, 70, is associated with God's administration of the world (Bible Dictionary page 898) so this becomes a pattern to be followed. Thus Jesus sent 70 to do His work in His power and authority. (Luke 10:1ff)

An open mind is really an inquiring and curious mind that loves to learn. We sometimes use this expression to talk about "tolerance" but this idea is not biblical. This open-mindedness is learning more of God's ways but tolerance is quite neutral to God's standards and echoes the complaint in Judges. "In those days every man did what

was right in his own eyes". (Judges 21:25) Jesus loved the little children as they clustered around Him with childlike eagerness for His smile, His touch and His love. (Luke 18:15-17) They were so open to Him that He could not help but compare with the critical and self-righteous attitude of the Pharisees. Luke had just written Jesus' story about the Pharisee and the tax collector, one having a self-righteous complacency and the other so conscious of his lack of righteousness that he prays for mercy.

An open mind, in this sense, longing for fresh revelation from God, trying to understand His ways, is really a renewing of the mind. (Romans 12:2) We have been so conditioned to thinking the world's way, not necessarily bad, but seriously limited by human logic. God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts. (Isaiah 55:9) With God nothing is impossible and everything from His heart and His word is possible. If He says He is the Healer then He is; if He says He is the Provider then He is; if He says He is our Shepherd then He is. It is as simple as that. We should not stay sick, we should not lack all we need and we should know exactly what our next step is. Are you laughing? So is Satan when we do not decide to believe God and therefore give the devil access to our minds. It is true that the devil will attack us with any of these situations but then we have a choice. We can submit to God and resist the devil (James 4:7); we can cast our anxiety on God because He cares for us...resist the devil who is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour and stand firm in our faith (1 Peter 5:7-9) or we can see the "facts" and follow our human logic and the proffered opinion

of everyone else. Our main difficulty is going with God because all those so freely proffering their opinions often mock us for our naivety.

Paul makes our correct choice plain. "Those who live according to the sinful (without God) nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit (who lives in us if we are born again) have their minds set on what the Spirit desires...life and peace." (Romans 8:5&6) "I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him..." (2 Timothy 1:12) David's testimony was, "Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust...your love and your truth always protect me". (Psalm 40:4&11) "No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame". (Psalm 25:2) Solomon's testimony was, "he who trusts in the Lord will prosper". (Proverbs 28:25) ...is kept safe". (Proverbs 29:25)

"Since we are surrounded by such...witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders...and so easily entangles, and run with perseverance...let us fix our eyes (and minds) on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." (Hebrews 12:1&2)

10. An Open Heart

The old and familiar ways are our comfort-zone. Change is challenging and uncomfortable but it is very necessary in a changing world. When God speaks to us personally He has a plan. Because relating to God is by faith He does not often tell us the end from the beginning; He just expects that because we love Him we will trust

Him and get started on the first step. This faith adventure is actually one of the most exciting things about being a Christian.

God has told us (the authors of this book) to find and anoint every Rural Fire shed in NSW. He did not tell us aloud but He gave us a conviction to continue what we had started when we travelled with our friend, Paul, who taught us a lot about faith. It was as we travelled that we began to discover God's intentions and understand the desires of His heart more clearly. When we stepped out in faith He began to give us revelatory knowledge. It was not even always relevant to what we were doing, but it was most certainly about His heart for the lost. There are many good people who have no understanding of the Gospel, and they have not liked or have been let down by "religion". We have absolute confidence that God is happy with our obedience because He has supplied all the finance we need to do this travel. Walking in His Light is a truly amazing experience. We are not "special" people who have the patronage of the high and mighty of the world. Actually the high and mighty of the world do not even want to acknowledge us. Like the Pharisees, they want to promote themselves. But God says, "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at My word". (Isaiah 66:2)

When God puts into a Christian's heart to do a good work and we obey this without arguing, even though we might not understand, God does explain Himself when He sees that we love Him and want to do His will. This is where His revelation comes in. We begin to KNOW His heart in a way that we could not have known just by reading His word. It is as if obedience and faith that what He has asked us to do

give us special favour – ears to hear and eyes to see. It is such a privilege and joy to sense this favour and to know we are friends with One whose favour we cannot deserve. This is when our relationship with God becomes so real that nothing can sway us from Him even though it may cost us our reputation in the world or even our life. In our hearts we are convinced that Eternal Life is just that, whether here on the earth or in Heaven. Opening our hearts to trust God in everything brings peace that the world can never give.

The word 'heart' in the Bible is used as the seat of life and strength; hence it means mind, soul, spirit, or one's entire emotional nature and understanding. (Cruden's Concordance) After the people saw the radiance on Moses' face when he came from talking to God on the mountain the fear of God came upon them. (Exodus 34:30) However, when Moses called for offerings for the Tabernacle the hearts of many people were moved to contribute generously. (Exodus 35:21) God is most interested in the attitude of the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7) God was delighted with Solomon because he asked God for a wise and discerning heart. (1 Kings 3:12) God talks about giving us a new heart and a new spirit because our hearts become hardened by sin. (Ezekiel 36:26) Jesus often warns about the state of our hearts. "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks". (Matthew 12:34) Paul encourages us to do the will of God, because of what Jesus has done for us, from our hearts, wholeheartedly. (Ephesians 6:6)

An open heart also reaches out to others in the same way as God does. There is no room for elitism, consciousness of position and status in the worldly sense. There is no racism, them and us. God is calling all tribes, languages, peoples and nations, to be a Kingdom

and priests to serve our God and to reign (together) on the earth. (Revelation 4:9&10) "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26&27) Some are not yet "in Christ", but are waiting to hear the gospel so that they can come into the family of God. Paul had the revelation that "from one man God made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live". (Acts 17:26) This means that some are born into a family with another religion, another tribe, another language. They are born with a different skin colour and a different culture. Paul goes on, "God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being". When people feel you love them, they are always open to the Good News that we Christians have experienced and demonstrate in our lives.

11. Continuous Revelation

When John was on the island of Patmos he heard a loud voice. (Revelation 1:10) It was a terrible place to be, a place of suffering, needing God's strength and patient endurance. He was an old man, and because he was a political prisoner rather than a criminal, he had to even supply his own food and shelter. Yet it is obvious that he maintained his close relationship with God as Jesus recommended in

his teaching. "Seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by perseverance produce a crop". (Luke 8:15) He goes on, "No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light". It is on full display. In another place Jesus said, "If anyone is ashamed of Me...the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His Father's glory". (Mark 8:38) Jesus' promise to those who show their light is, "There is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out in the open. Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more..." (Luke 8:16-18)

So John turned around where he was and saw the glorified Jesus, who placed His right hand on John and assured him who He was. "I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." (Revelation 1:18) In the Hebrew text of the Torah (Genesis 1:1) the letters A and T (aleph and taw) are included after the word God (Elohim) which connects the first book with the last.

John wrote this revelation because it is important to understand how the beginning and the end fit together. He writes at the beginning of the book, "Blessed is the one who reads the words...and blessed are those who hear it and take it to heart". (Revelation 1:3) Jesus instructs him to write down what the messengers (the stars in Jesus' right hand) have to say as they move among the churches, which are called lampstands. They are the places where the lights shine from. Each of these churches has been appointed to carry bright lights to

shine in a dark world. Isaiah wrote, "Arise, shine, for your Light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness has covered the earth and thick darkness the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and His glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light..." (Isaiah 60:1-3)

God places people in nations to inhabit the whole earth. (Acts 17:26) People have developed different characteristics; skin colour and customs, languages and food; in fact a great variety of differences. Over the centuries these ways which are not always based on God's revelation have given opportunity for the devil to get a good hold and introduce his own "powers", which are what God's own people must fight. Those who are not empowered by God have become the devil's puppets. God's own people (whom Jesus called the church) are to overcome the devil's powers because this is the work that Jesus did and we are to continue to the close of the age.

The 7 churches in Revelation were actual churches but the advice, commendations and warnings are for the whole church down through the ages, and **hearing** (and understanding) and then **obeying** are how the blessing happens. At the end of each message the angel says, "**He who has an ear, let him hear**".

What do the angels (messengers) say **Jesus approves of**?

- In Ephesus they are commended for deeds, hard work and perseverance and not growing weary. They have not tolerated (given assent, publicised and glorified the deeds of) wicked men and have used discernment to test the claims of false apostles.
- In Smyrna they are encouraged because even though they

have afflictions and poverty, they are rich (in faith that God loves them and is with them).

- In Pergamum they have remained true to the name of Jesus, and not renounced their faith in God, even under severe testing.
- In Thyatira they are commended for their deeds, their love and their faith, their service and perseverance. They are doing more than they did at first. Perhaps this means taking more opportunities to do good and to believe more promises of God.
- In Sardis the angel commends a few who have not soiled their clothes and have been judged worthy. God always sees even when we seem to be the "only ones" doing right.
- In Philadelphia they are commended because, although they have little strength, they have kept the word of God and have not denied His name, even though they are surrounded by messengers of Satan. The messenger encourages them that Jesus will cause these Jews that are not true Jews to acknowledge that God has loved them and shown them favour and will protect them from the tribulation to come.
Insignificance in the sight of the "world" can be used by Him to change the attitude of others, even our enemies.
- In Laodicea there is no commendation for them, but in His mercy and because He loves them so much He rebukes them and gives advice. This begs the question: have we earned the "well done, good and faithful servant"?

What do the angels say **Jesus warns of?**

- In Ephesus they have forsaken their first love and if they do not repent Jesus will come and remove their lampstand from its place. They will no longer be able to shed the Light of Christ and they will just become a "club" for the benefit of themselves, because Jesus reminds us that the first commandment is to love God, and this is demonstrated by doing what He commands.
- In Smyrna the devil will put some of them in prison and they will suffer persecution, but do not be afraid. Faith knows that God is always in control and that "in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose". (Romans 8:28) "Have faith in God". (Mark 11:22)
- In Pergamum some people hold to the teaching of Balaam (probably greedy, especially for money) or of the Nicolaitans (who worked out a compromise with paganism) and must repent. This warning is so relevant for our times when many people who have links with the church have abandoned the pure gospel and are looking for financial gain through propagating other ideas from their own imaginations.
- In Thyatira they have tolerated Jezebel, sexual immorality and eating of food sacrificed to idols. Only repentance will save from suffering and death. This warning also is for the church today when the leaders are wrestling with the sanctioning of homosexual unions; dealing with rampant sexual abuses and sweeping "under the mat", turning a blind eye and not

speaking up about superstitions and the evils and illnesses that are blatantly demonic.

- In Sardis they have a reputation of being alive but they are dead. They ought to remember what they have received and heard, and obey and repent before it is too late. It is easy for the church to be busy with activities that are humanly inspired but are actually to promote themselves rather than the kingdom of God. These are dead works.
- In Philadelphia they are warned to hold on to what they have so that no one will take their crown. When we are doing it right we meet the mockers, the advisers who think they know better, and those who want to criticise our work because they have not sought revelation from God themselves. We obey God because we trust that He knows, even if we do not fully understand.
- In Laodicea they are warned that they are lukewarm, which the Lord hates and will not countenance. They are advised to buy from Jesus gold refined in the fire, white clothes to cover their shameful nakedness, and salve for their eyes so they can see. This is the most solemn warning of all because what might be "good" is nowhere near "the best", which indicates that we are falling short of God's will for us and this is actually disobedience.

These warnings are given so that Jesus' church will be overcomers, a kingdom and priests to serve our God and reign on the earth.

(Revelation 4:10)

12. The Heart of God

God's own children, born by the Spirit of God, are chosen before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. (Ephesians 1:4) This is possible because the sin problem has been dealt with when Jesus went to the Cross. When we have **ears to hear** we will know what we have been chosen for. Jesus said we are to continue the work He began, in His power. The Apostle John learnt through being with Jesus for three years and listening very carefully.

First Jesus said to him, "Follow me". (Matthew 4:26&27) Then John wrote down another important statement of Jesus, "You must be born again". (John 3:7) He had already explained that this birth is not of natural descent, nor of human decision. (John 1:13) This means you cannot be born by the Spirit into a "Christian" family or become a member of God's own family because you go to church and decide you are a Christian. It is a supernatural new life that you are given when God changes you from the inside. You are made a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17) The old person is crucified with Christ (the Anointed One and His anointing) and is raised with Him to be like Him. God's plan is "in this world we are like Him". (1 John 4:17) Jesus said something that caused many to turn away because it is so hard to understand. "I tell you the truth, unless you can eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life within you". (John 6:53) Unless we take on the very life – body, mind and spirit – of Jesus, we are not in God's supernatural family. We therefore cannot do His work either, yet this is what God planned.

The Servant of the Lord is called in righteousness. God takes hold of his hand and makes him to be a covenant for the people and a light for those not in covenant relationship, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release those who sit in darkness. (Isaiah 42:6-8) God's original chosen people, the Israelites, are accused of being blind and deaf because they paid no attention; their ears were open, (it was possible for them to understand) but they heard nothing. (Isaiah 42:19&20) It was also prophesied that it was God's will to crush the Servant but that after His suffering He would see the "light" and be satisfied. (Isaiah 53:11) The vision of the Light of glory that Jesus earned for us would be visible to unsaved people. They would be drawn to this Light and be saved, and be lights themselves for others through the generations. This encouraged and strengthened Jesus to complete the work that God sent Him to do. So much depends on our "hearing". The Servant's example was, "He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back". (Isaiah 50:4&5)

"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God...should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are the same family. Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers". (Hebrews 2:10&11) God had conceived a truly wonderful plan. As children we can remember when our parents planned something good for us but we preferred to go our own way and the plan was thwarted. Maybe it was because there were some strings attached (like being good) and it was all too hard. Going our own way when there is a wonderful

plan prepared brings great disappointments and it is equally true when we do not choose to follow God's way.

Yet God announces in advance all the rewards of following His plan.

- He who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. (Revelation 2:7) This tree is the elusive 'fount of youth' which, when eaten, makes one live for ever. (Genesis 3:22)
- He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death and will receive a crown of life. (Revelation 3:10&11) The lake of fire is the second death. (Revelation 20:14) The crown gives us the honour to come before the throne of God, lay it down and worship Him. (Revelation 4:10&11)
- He who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna, I will also give a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it. (Revelation 2:17) This would be like a memorial plaque with a personal tribute written on it; something special that God wants to commend us for. There might be many things that we have done to bring glory to God but this will be God's choice and so awesome.
- He who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations. I will also give him the morning star. (Revelation 2:26-29) This promise, this reward, refers back to a decree made long before. "I will proclaim the decree of the Lord: He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of Me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession'". (Psalm 2:6-8) This morning

star is not the Bright Morning Star (Revelation 22:16) but authority over Satan. (Isaiah 14:12) The devil must submit to one who overcomes because Jesus has already disarmed the devil's powers and authorities, triumphing over them by the Cross. (Colossians 2:15) This promise and reward is amazing because eternal life begins the moment we become born again. Overcoming is in the present, not just in the future. We have authority over the nations and the devil now, by faith.

- He who overcomes will be dressed in white. I will never blot his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before My Father and His angels. (Revelation 3:5) We will look like Jesus when He was glorified. This light, this brightness will be visible to those who look at us. These will see Jesus in us and we will fulfil the promise of Jesus – you are in Me and I am in you. (John 14:20) We will be known by Him and we have confidence that we will never hear, "I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!" (Matthew 7:23)
- Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of My God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of My God...and I will write on him My new name. (Revelation 3:12) God is looking for supporters in His temple. "As you come to Him, the Living Stone...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood". (1 Peter 2:5) He who has begun a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus". (Philippians 1:6)
- To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His

throne. (Revelation 3:21) John said earlier in his book that God has made us to be a Kingdom and priests...to Him be the glory and power for ever. Jesus is the head of the body, the church, He is the beginning and the first-born, but we have been given fullness in Christ. Everything that is His is also ours and we reign and rule with Him. We are no longer weak and powerless because He has given us power, love and the mind of Christ.

**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit
says.**

**Whoever has My commands and obeys them, he
is the one who loves Me.**

We can choose no other way because these are the words of eternal life and of overcoming to the last. The man who does the will of God lives for ever. (1 John 2:17) Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. (1 John 5:4)

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