**2. THE FLIGHT**

Last week I promised to tell you about one of the most amazing miracles I’ve ever experienced. It happened July 12, 1963 when I worked reservations for a major airline in San Francisco. I boarded one of our Boeing 720 jets for Chicago in good weather at around 6:45 pm. About half way into the flight, the seat belt sign went on as we approached heavy turbulence surrounding a thunderstorm over O’Neil, Nebraska. The pilot climbed from 35,000 to 41,000 feet to get over the storm, when suddenly we encountered severe high altitude wind sheer, called “CAT” or Clear Air Turbulence, not discernable on radar. Due to the turbulent flight, we were all thankfully belted in. The plane shuddered and then dove nose down a mile and a half as everything loose in the cabin flew forward – shoes, handbags, dinners and pillows. When we hit the bottom of that downdraft, the plane stalled a few seconds and then caught an extreme updraft. The plane turned on it’s tail as we were sucked nose straight up with such terrific speed that the force of gravity almost hurt, at which point everything in the nose of the plane began crashing to the rear. What a mess, with food and all kinds of personal belongings flying through the air. The force of that updraft caused the plane to slowly arc over, upside down where we hung by our seat belts for about 5 seconds before plummeting, nose down, in a free fall. The elevators locked, meaning the pilot had lost control of the plane. At that point everything seemed almost slow motion, and I felt like an observer watching from a distance, but not a sound from the passengers, My funeral went through my mind, and I thought about my parents and realized how much easier it was to be dying than it would be for them to loose a daughter in such a terrible accident. We fell and kept falling 4½ miles at 900 miles per hour for about 50 seconds; the pilot notified the nearest airport that we were crashing. And then, at 12,000 feet, almost as if in a dream, the plane slowly nosed up, and we were flying again. I honestly wondered if I’d died and gone to somewhere on the other side!

Then out of the shocked stillness inside that plane, we heard the pilot’s southern accent over the intercom, “Ladies and gentlemen. I’m sorry for the choppy weather. I hope you’re all having a pleasant trip.” At that point everyone began crying and applauding and cheering. For the remainder of the flight, the pilot tested the plane, lowering and raising the wheels and moving flaps to be sure we wouldn’t disintegrate as we flew in to land. When we finally landed an hour and ½ later, doctors with their black bags and newspaper reporters greeted us, and 3 crew and 3 passengers went to the hospital in shock, but there were no major injuries. When the plane was X-rayed the only problem found was some wrinkling of the plane’s skin, but no structural damage at all. The technicians said it was a miracle, because at that time no commercial airliner had ever been tested at speeds that high or dives that steep. Back at work in San Francisco, one technician told me that the wings should have snapped off as we fell. When the plane was cleaned up, workers found Bibles, prayer books, rosaries and crosses all over the floor. The Chicago Tribune featured a photo of our terrific pilot with the headline “He Flew With Death!” Not long ago I showed the articles to a retired Norwest Airlines pilot, and he said “there’s no way you survived this; it’s impossible. You experienced a miracle.” And do I still fly? As little as possible.

Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do some live and some die in such a gruesome accident? No one but God Himself can give all the answers, but some things are clear. God is God and He’s in charge; we’re not. We live in a fallen and imperfect world that’s full of grief, due mostly to sin, and that isn’t Gods fault or His will. He loves us, and He knows we’re only here on this earth for a moment in time, compared to eternity. We’re born so we can know him and love and serve Him. Believe me, that’s ALL that matters when you’re hurtling to the ground in an out-of-control airplane. It’s humbling. It straightens out your priorities; it makes you grateful. And for those who do die and go on to Heaven, they’re even more grateful. And so, when we know and love Him we can’t loose. Jesus said in John 16:27 “for the Father Himself loveth you because ye have loved Me and have believed that I came out from God.” And in verse 33 “These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” I pray He will be your peace and your hiding place in the storm. Remember He loves you and wants to be your best friend. I’ll spend time with you again next week, when I’ll tell you about a close encounter with the Charles Manson family. Thanks for calling.



When good people suffer, does that mean they’ve somehow missed the Grand Plan (sometimes, yes) or does God intend for us to journey through turbulence? (yes) From Genesis to Revelation, the scriptures declare God’s absolute sovereignty, His love and justice, mercy and power and His desire to have a people blessed and whole. Certainly there are other ways to suffer than to die, and that’s often more difficult to understand. Sometimes God permits it; I don’t believe He ordains it, but He permits it to teach us compassion for others who suffer, so that we will better be able to comfort them (II Corinthians 1:4); permits it to teach us faith principals, to drive us pell-mell into His Word and His Church for answers, to purify us and make us holy, to test our faith and to humble us.**1** These struggles are an honor if we can just learn to see as He sees – for if we suffer with Him, we will be glorified with.Him.**2**

In addition to the struggles that come our way which He permits, there is much suffering that I believe is not His will and unnecessary and is sometimes our own fault. Some examples: Sickness is often caused by unwise eating habits, simple gluttony, smoking and drug use and our own lazy refusal to research the vast array of available information on these subjects. Books on nutrition are a gift from God and so, not to study ways to care for ourselves and our families, is a form of rebellion. We reap what we sow. Accidents are often the result of carelessness. When my children were toddlers, I used to rush around closing the toilet lids, because I was afraid they’d drown! A little obsessive-compulsive, but it’s a good thing to listen to little inner warnings, as they often come from the Holy Spirit.

Then there is the area of abuse – verbal, emotional, physical and sexual. Study the life of Joseph in the Old Testament and see the kind of abuse he endured. This was a mega-dysfunctional family! His brothers tried to kill him. There was jealousy, rejection, selfishness, plotting, cover-ups and lies, enslavement, attempted murder and then he was unjustly imprisoned. And yet he wasn’t bitter. He didn’t blame others or blame God or try to get even. He prayed and trusted the Lord; he forgave, and God not only delivered him, but raised Joseph up to be a godly and mighty leader, and the family was reconciled. God’s Amazing Grace! Because of sin, others will hurt us, and that can bring sin into our lives as we react. I don’t know a single person who hasn’t been abused in some way. God will show you when it’s wise to flee, when to confront, when to keep quiet, how to deal with your particular situation, but there are some important keys: We are to pray with thanksgiving for the answer (Philippians 4:6). We’re told to lean on Him and trust Him to direct our paths (Proverbs 3:5-6). We are not to allow ourselves the luxury of becoming bitter (Hebrews 12::15), because bitterness is a root of many other problems and sins. Jesus commands us “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father who is in Heaven.”**3** That’s a tall order. We are not to take revenge; that’s God’s job. “Vengeance is Mine. I will repay saith the Lord”.**4** What happens when God follows through, and the one who has hurt us get his due? What’s our attitude to be? We all know how the natural mind wants to react – yesssss! He got what he deserved! But look at the Lord’s directive in Proverbs 24:17-18: “Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth, lest the Lord see it and it displease Him and He turn away His wrath from him.” In other words, if we celebrate when our enemy is punished, the Lord will not continue to act on our behalf in that situation; He’ll withdraw His hand of correction. We are to forgive as God has forgiven us. We aren’t asked to *feel* like forgiving, but we are commanded to forgive as an act of our will. Simple – just do it – that’s faith, and that will open the supernatural floodgates for God to act. God may eventually supply us with the feeling of forgiveness, but maybe not. It doesn’t matter; obedience matters. If a person in your life is extremely toxic, the command is to forgive, but it’s then often wise to avoid further contact for your own protection. Jesus didn’t let people abuse Him until it was time to be crucified – which was God-ordained.

Do you know that when our plane landed, several passengers booed the pilots, and maybe now 50 years later they’re still carrying a grudge. A. It wasn’t the pilot’s fault; they saved our lives, and B. why take a life that’s been miraculously plucked from the brink and fill it with ugly things like resentment and blame? The mind is the womb of the heart. If our mind is pure, our heart will be also. Satan attacks us in the soulish realm of the mind. “Therefore….whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”**5**

1 Deuteronomy 8:2

2 Romans 8:17

3 Matthew 5:44-45

4 Romans 12:19

5 Philippians 4:8

