

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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SEEK THE LORD AND LIVE

Blake Stanley

For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: "Seek Me and live." (Amos 5:4) When Amos spoke those words to the children of Israel, they were far from the Lord. The people of the northern kingdom had long ago given their hearts to idols. They had abandoned the law. Their leaders ignored the poor. They were steeped in sin. God's call to them was to seek Him and live.

This call harkens to the promises of God given with the Old Law. In the book of Deuteronomy, among other places, God establishes a link between following His word and the children of Israel maintaining their blessed life in the promised land.

Deuteronomy 4:1 – *"Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you."*

Deuteronomy 5:33 – *"You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess."*

There are more examples, but these make the point: the children of Israel's life in the promised land was tied to their following God's commandments. This was the covenant that He made with them.

Ultimately, God knew that later generations would fall away. He spoke of this in **Deuteronomy 4**, and in that passage, He gives the same remedy that He would speak 100's of years later through Amos. In **verses 28–29 of Deuteronomy 4**, it reads:

And there you will serve other gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Here is the same call: "Seek Me and live."

Life comes from the Lord. This is true in several ways. Life is granted through His creation. He breathed life into the nostrils of Adam, and each of us is a descendant of that breath. For Israel, life in the promised land was tied to their obedience.

Sin weighs on its perpetrator. It may feel good for a moment, but it leaves a person unfulfilled, empty, damaged, and anxious. God steered His people away from those sins, for their good.

And beyond that, when the Lord is followed, the result is a life richly and meaningfully lived. That was one of the great lessons of the wandering in the wilderness. In **Deuteronomy 8:3**, Moses said:

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So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

God's word—His commandments, His statutes, His laws—gives life. The laws and statutes that God gave the children of Israel were not random or arbitrary. They ordered their society and their lives in such a way as to give them safety, prosperity, health, and purpose. The Law was for their good. Again, Moses speaks in **Deuteronomy 10:12–13**: *“And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good.”*

For their good—that is what the law was for. And its provisions make that clear. Within this law, you have provisions for property rights, protection of life, instruction for an impartial judicial system, laws governing commerce, and social safety nets for the poor or the disabled. This ordered society so that people could live their lives freely. It was good for them.

Through the law, God also gave them purpose. He created a community that connected them through a shared heritage and brought them closer together through shared experiences in remembrance of where they had come from and what God had given them. He taught them love, mercy, and grace. His law brought them to good works toward their neighbor, the poor, the destitute, and even the foreigner.

It also outlawed sins that are destructive to society but also to the soul: stealing, adultery, covetousness, hatred, murder, taking advantage of the poor and the weak. Participating in those activities—and other sins—is suffocating to life. Sin weighs on its perpetrator. It may feel good for a moment, but it leaves a person unfulfilled, empty, damaged, and anxious.

God steered His people away from those sins, for their good.

While the law has changed, those facts remain. Just as the children of Israel were given a beautiful life in following the law, a Christian has a beautiful life following the Lord. A life of peace. A life with community. A life knowing they are loved and valued. A life with purpose. This doesn't mean a life without troubles. Bad things will happen. Everyone stumbles; everyone struggles. That is true regardless of the path people choose. But with the Lord, with what He has given, with the family He has provided, life is also enriched with all that is valuable and good for us. And beyond this life, we have something so much greater to look forward to. Seek the Lord and live.

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MEN AS TREES WALKING

Louis Garbi

There are stages of understanding. The mind must go through these for the sake of comprehension. Jesus performed a miracle that demonstrates this. There was a blind man brought to Jesus at Bethsaida, recorded in **Mark 8:22-26**. Jesus led the man out of town, spat on his eyes, and put His hands on him. Then He asked the man if he saw anything. The response – *“I see men as trees walking.”* Here we have sight, but with confused comprehension. Again, Jesus put His hands on the eyes of the blind man. The result was coherent vision. This gives us insight into the power of our Lord. Often, it has been pointed out that when Peter healed the lame man at the temple, the man was not only healed of his atrophied legs, but coordination was also restored. He leapt for joy. So too, we see the Lord gave sight to the blind, but also comprehension of what he saw. Unlike the atrophied man at the Beautiful Gate, Jesus broke it down with two demonstrations. There is a similar pattern for all as we learn about Jesus.

The very next event recorded in Mark demonstrates this pattern of development. Jesus asked the disciples what people were saying about Him. The people said He was John the

Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the prophets. So, Jesus asked, “*But who do you say that I am?*” Peter answered, “*You are the Christ.*” They were “*strictly warned*” not to tell anyone about Him. The reason becomes apparent. His disciples saw Jesus like the blind man who was coming to sight. They had sight, but confused comprehension. The disciples were persuaded that Jesus was the Christ, but did not yet understand what He would accomplish. It was as if they were saying “... men as trees walking” when they saw Jesus as the Christ.

This in no way diminishes the disciples. They were men of faith. Jesus was their teacher. As such He guided them through a process of examples and verbal tutelage. No one could have been more right than Peter when he said, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*” (**John 6:68**). All who loved and followed Jesus shared in the same rightness. They were not deterred by things they did not understand. Because they needed instruction, they sometimes had to learn the hard way about a hard-to-comprehend truth.

Let us continue with the eighth chapter of Mark. Right after Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about Himself, He told them a difficult thing. Jesus spoke of His coming death at the hands of men and His resurrection. “*He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.’*” (**Mk.8:32-33**) This was a little like Jesus putting His hands on the blind man’s eyes. Jesus’ harsh rebuke was to stimulate comprehension. This type of vision is much more profound than the sight of the eye. The process of understanding the Christ took more time and work. Thus, He repeated many times things about His death. Peter and the disciples had an impediment (remember, He was looking at His disciples when He rebuked Peter). It appears they saw Jesus as some kind of super David, a prophet who could bring fire down on the opposition, and who would raise Israel to the height of power as a conquering hero. And so He was, but not in the sense they had supposed.

It begs the question – Do we see men as trees walking? Is our

comprehension of the Christ confused? It is blessed to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. However, it is fleshly nature to superimpose our values on Him. This is an easy thing to do. The remedy is to love Him more than ourselves. “. . . *If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.*” (**John 14:23**) By so doing, the Father and Jesus become our teachers. Their word gives soundness to our understanding. Just as the disciples were corrected by Jesus, we too must be corrected. Our development depends on this, otherwise we fail. “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*” (**2Tim.3:16-17**)

The impediments to understanding are similar in our day as they were for the disciples. The big difference is that we are on the other side of the day of Pentecost. The gospel of Jesus Christ has been made known, and repentance has been commanded to “all people everywhere”. However, the biases we have are similar to those of the past. They tend to reflect our expectations of Christ toward people and the governing of people. We must empty ourselves of our cherished values in favor of God’s values. The problem in Jesus’ day is the same as today’s problem – the desire to subsume Jesus to our own point of view. True values will prevail. They can only come from what God has revealed. He knows how to correct and shape us.

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Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him. So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything. And he looked up and said, “I see men like trees, walking.” Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly. Then He sent him away to his house, saying, “Neither go into the town, nor tell anyone in the town.”

Mark 8:22-26



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2026

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