

Stay in the River

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In 2003, Pastor Schaller came to Baltimore to serve with Greater Grace and teach at Maryland Bible College and Seminary. He is now the Presiding Elder and Pastor of the Greater Grace church in Baltimore, working with Dr. Carl H. Stevens, the founder and senior pastor of GGWO.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

In Romans 16:19 we read, “For your obedience is come abroad unto all men....” Your obedience here in Baltimore, in this particular assembly, has gone abroad to all men. You do not know this, but people around the world think of the assembly here in a very, very awesome way because that is what we have told them. That is what they have heard on the tapes and the videos from our pastor, Dr. Stevens. That is our communication, and that is the reality. This is an amazing assembly.

We have gone through some things, and we have seen Christ manifested in His people. It is, therefore, important to know that your life of obedience in God has a ripple effect and a beautiful consequence.

In this message, we will see that though there is evil in this world, we ought to be simple-minded about it, having no apparent cleverness to deal with it. Rather, we can show

ourselves to be very wise as we simply draw near to God. There is a river for us, “the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God...” (Psalm 46:4). Get in the river! He will carry us through in the purity and beauty of His holiness, and we will not be ashamed.

Chapter One

OUR PLACE IS IN THE RIVER

“For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil” (Romans 16:19).

I want to speak about drawing near. In this verse, the apostle Paul said (to paraphrase it very simply), “I want you to be focused and concentrating on that which is good. And concerning the evil, pay it no mind. Don’t get occupied with it. It is there, and we know that, but it is not our occupation. We are to be wise and discerning concerning good. What is “good”? Here, we are not speaking of the relative goodness on the good side of the Tree of Knowledge (Genesis 2:9). Rather, it is absolute goodness. It is godliness. It is the ministry. It is the Word. It is the people of God. It is the faith. It is the sincerity. It is the direction. It is the future. It is the hope. It is the encouragement. It is every word that comes

out of the mouth of God.

Our pastor, Dr. Stevens, has had such a keen gift and a very amazing capacity as a personal pastor and as a teacher—a person who has always seemed to understand things from a purely spiritual orientation. The Spirit of God has covered our assembly, and he has spoken with such godly authority, clarity, and edification.

We are to be wise concerning *those* things. We are to be sensitive to those things that are godly and edifying. Yet, we are to be very simple about the things that are evil—very simple.

Over there is the evil—and you know it's there. We are simple regarding that. We are occupied with the good, the truth, the wisdom, the edification, the vision, and the encouragement in the place where God has put us, in the work of God.

It does not mean that we are blind, and it does not mean we are naïve. Nor does it mean that we should not deal responsibly in the affairs of life. It simply means that those things cannot be our orientation. I cannot fix every wrong. I cannot deal with or handle evil without it contaminating me. I cannot put fire in my bosom and not get burned. I cannot handle poison without it somehow poisoning me.

This is why I must draw near. This is why I must stay in the river.

Draw Near Instead of Withdrawing

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).

“Take heed.” This is a very good warning. “You be careful. We warn you, unless there be in *any* of us an evil heart....” Evil heart? “...of unbelief.”

It may be that I am aware that I’m in the desert and that there is no water. God has brought us out to the desert.

Remember when the Israelites said, “Moses, did you bring us out here because there were not enough graves in Egypt? Did you bring us out here so we would die out here? There is no water and there is no food out here!”

And the Lord said, “I brought you this way to prove you and to *humble* you (notice that), and to teach you that you should not live by bread only. You must live by the words—*every* word that proceeds from My mouth” (see Deuteronomy 8:3).

We are in a battle in this world. We really are. It is a battle for souls. It is a battle for our

own souls. It's a battle for our potential that may never be realized. The devil does not want you or me to become who we should be, and the evil over there has the potential of taking away from us what we were called to. Evil has a potential to take root in me so that I would become occupied with the evil. But the Word says we should be simple with the evil and wise concerning that which is divinely good—that which is inspired, that which is anointed, that which is enlightening, that which is encouraging, and that which is true. So take heed that there would not be an evil heart of unbelief.

What happens when we give place to unbelief? According to Hebrews 3:12, we are departing from the living God. Just think about that. God is over here, and I'm over there. The Greek word for departing means "to stand aloof." In one of his translations on that portion, Kenneth Wuest said that to depart from the living God is to stand aloof from Him. I step back, and I take another look. I step back, and I reconsider everything. I step back, and I try to find objectivity.

But as I look, as I step back, I have a problem, because I don't know what happens to me when I step back. Couldn't I be changing as I am stepping back? I may think I am the same, and I

may think I am being objective. But isn't it possible that an evil heart of unbelief is the motivation for my standing aloof? Actually, it is unbelief that has caused me to stand aloof. Something about my heart has departed from what God has said, what God wants from me, what God is saying to me, and what God will do for me.

Don't Leave Your Place

We have a place. Do not leave your place. In the local assembly where you were called—that is your place. It is a place for *you*. It is the place where God has put you and me—a place where we are not departing from the living God. It is here where we become wise concerning that which is good and simple concerning evil.

We do not hear messages that tear us down or words that would trash us and discourage us. We do not hear about introspection and self-analysis, about our failure and self-improvement. Rather, we hear a divine message of personal edification where the Spirit of God says to us, "This is the place. God is here." And there is a river that makes glad the city of God (Psalm 46:4). We sense that.

When we get into the river of God's pres-

ence, there is a big difference as to how we are thinking and how our adversaries are thinking. Those who are on the outside looking in evaluate what is going on from far away. They could even be sitting inside in the room and be analyzing, but their analysis may be entirely outside of the divine revelation, the presence of God's grace, and the Person of Jesus Christ.

We are in our place. We are in the river.

Chapter Two

OUR PURPOSE IS DEFINED IN THE RIVER

Hebrews 3:13 says, “But exhort one another daily....” Exhort is another word for edify. It is to lovingly encourage and teach and instruct one another. How often? Daily.

Do you remember our pastor saying to us that we should get one hour of doctrine every day? What is the point? Hebrews 3:13, “Exhort one another daily, while it is called To day....”

There is nothing wrong with getting humble and getting on our knees and listening to a message and having our hearts stir us up. There is nothing wrong with staying in our place, abiding and being built up by the Holy Spirit in our particular place in God’s work.

Verse 13, read it once again: “Exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

Now read Proverbs 27:8: "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place."

I have not seen many lost birds around as I go out the door and look around. Sometimes I do notice the sea gulls come into our parking lot. But when the tornados or hurricanes come, where are the birds? Many things we can say about birds tonight. But one thing is for sure. When a bird wanders from his place, that is not good. Likewise, it is not good when a man loses his place.

Oh, he may have a huge house. He may have a beautiful house, but does he have a place for his soul? Oh, he may have a big bank account over in Switzerland, but does he have a place for his soul? Yes, he has a cottage out in the countryside. He has a big house. But does he have a place for his soul?

He goes to the doctor for his body. He goes to the dentist for his teeth. He goes to an accountant for his taxes. But does he have a place for his soul? Does he have a place? You know what? People get all confused about this. They watch late night news about the latest murder. They go to sleep, and they have a shotgun under the bed. They lock the door, maybe seven locks.

I'm not so interested in those things.

We pray for the city. We build up ourselves. We love people. We go out and have outreach. We are wise concerning good, about God's perspective, and we are not focused on something that is simply not very profitable for our soul.

Into the River

"There is a river...." There is a river—really. It is the river of God, in Psalm 46:4. There is a river in this place. Ezekiel 47 speaks of this river, coming out from under the house. John 7:38 speaks of the river that comes out of the belly of a believer. There is a river, and this river is very wide. It is a thousand cubits (Ezekiel 47:5). The man went out, up to his ankles. Then he went out, up to his knees. He went out, up to his hips. And then he went into the river, swimming.

And the Lord said, "Do you see this river?" and Ezekiel said, "Yes. This is the river, and it came out from under the door of the house, and this is the house of God. This is the tabernacle of God." This scene is actually happening in the Millennium, in the future temple that shall be in Jerusalem. And this river is like the river we read about in the book of Revelation. Pure as crystal, it is the river of life that comes from God

down to us.

Question: Is that river *our* river? Is this the river of God? Is it the river of truth? Is this the river of God's mind? Is this the river of godly conviction? Is this the river of Jesus Christ Himself that flows to us and has anointed us and built us up in the Kingdom? Is this the river that is in the Body where we are all members one of another and fitly joined together? The answer is yes, in typology.

Literally, this river is coming in the Millennium, as far as I understand, and there are trees on the side. And it says here that wherever it goes, everything shall live and be healed:

"And it shall come to pass, that everything that liveth, which moveth whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh" (Ezekiel 47:9).

There is a river flowing. It is here with us. It is in us. It is our fellowship. It is Jesus Christ in our midst. But now, watch. There is an evil heart of unbelief. What am I doing? I am departing. I have a problem. I'm telling you, I've got a problem. I can talk all day about it. There it is, and

I'm occupied with it. Where is the living God? My place is over here, but like a bird that is wandering off, so a man can wander from his place. This is a strategy of Satan that is in this world, and its purpose is to take away from us our health, our privileges, our blessings, and our promises.

Do not be distracted by negativity. Stay in the river. You will be glad.

Chapter Three

HEALING COMES IN THE RIVER

God has given divine increase in the multiplication of our people, raising up men and women of God by an amazing work of God. We don't even know how it happens. We just become who we are. And though some negative things may happen, and they have their place, that is not our occupation. The reality of the river that makes glad the city of God—this is our occupation. This is our place. Our place is extremely important because God has health for us, and we shall be healed. That is amazing!

He renews our youth as the eagle's (Isaiah 40:31). He stirs us up, and some of the other things—the distractions—just drop off. Our ears are precious. Remember that, please, as you hear so many voices. Please be very careful in these times, and be very gentle, very gracious, and very loving toward each other and toward all of our brothers and sisters in this country and

throughout the world, because we have to be occupied with the important things.

That river is flowing. This is a challenging time for all of us, but let us be simple concerning evil, and let us be very wise concerning good. Let's be very edifying in our speech. We are to draw near in our local assemblies, wherever they are, and there shall be a healing river of water. It shall be characterized by love, and that love has an authority to bring healing. Broken relationships can be restored, bad words can be forgiven, and what looks like malicious intention may be only a bit of confusion (though actually it can be evil). Distraction can happen to any of us. It can happen. Beware, therefore, lest an evil heart of unbelief would call us to depart from the living God to be occupied with something that will steal from us and take away from us what the river gives us. That river is a real river.

I'll tell you, you can take two brothers who have problems, and they can sit down, and the river is flowing, and there is healing. Take Syntyche and Euodias, in Philippians 4:2. Paul exhorted them, and in so many words he said, "Be of the same mind. Knock it off! Stop your complaining, and draw near to God. Get in the

river.”

Get in the river. You’ll be okay. Get in the river. You’ve got a future. Get in the river. You’ll love your brother. Get in the river. You will forgive and forgive and forgive. That’s what we do.

I really do not have any real problem in my soul or in my heart because this river is the river of God that forgives and forgives and forgives and gives and lives and loves and serves, and you cannot stop it. And wherever it goes, it brings healing—and many fish.

Learn to Draw Near

Let us read one more part, in Ezekiel 47:11. This is the sad news. It speaks here about the marshes—”...the miry places thereof and the marishes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt.”

When I start to listen to “He said this to me” and “She said that,” the same becomes my life. I’m over here in a marsh, in the dirty mud. It stinks. I have walked in a marsh before and I was thankful I got out of it. I went into the mud real deep. It was organic smelling, about a couple of thousand years old probably, and it smelled very bad.

Do you know that some people live in that?

They do. Some people live in the marshes and the miry places, and they just think, "That's life." They are very hurt people, and they talk. Maybe you have been there. Maybe you have gotten stuck. Maybe something bothered you, and you could not forgive. Maybe something disturbed you, and you could not get over it. Maybe something happened to you, and it just really hurt you very much. It is a marsh. But look: There is a river over here. Draw near. Get over here.

"But," you say, "you don't understand me." It's all we understand. You, get over here. Here, we'll throw you a line. We'll pull you out. We'll help you. We're looking for you. Put up a red flag. We'll come and get you. Give us a call. We are for you. Jesus looks. He seeks to save. He's looking for you.

But once you get all straightened out, we should sooner or later learn that *that* is not the place for us to be. Take that stuff and put it away, and just know that it may be part of life for us, but it is not our occupation. Some of it, by the way, is simply unnecessary. So, I just go to the Cross, and I will be healed. I will be okay. We have been called to have fellowship that is actually extremely, awesomely, beautifully healthy.

The Other Side of the Picture

But let's put it on the other side too. Let's draw the whole picture, and recognize that this can happen to any of us, and those parties are part of the 'marsh party.' That type of thinking, that type of confession, and that kind of fellowship is not in the river. Do we understand it? Yes. Do we have sympathy? Yes. Do we care? Yes. Do they have a future? Absolutely. Are we any different? No, we are not.

But we are strong in grace. We are strong in faith. We are living by every word that comes out of God's mouth. We are praying without ceasing. We are rejoicing always. We are building up one another. We are laying down our lives for the brethren, and we are drawing near. In our heart is the fire, the life, the love, and the patience. And in our future is a glorious picture, because of this river. Though the mountains be cast into the sea, there is a river that makes glad the city of God, and that is our fellowship.

Wherever you are, take time to receive Bible doctrine every day. We have opportunities here to gather daily for at least an hour of doctrine from the Word of God. We have raps. We have the Bible college. We have meetings and prayer

times and soul winning. And you know what? Everything is all right in our Father's house. We will get in the river and stay in the river, and we will be okay.

CONCLUSION

If you get out of the river, you have a problem. But if you are in the river, everything is going to be okay. The Lord will deliver you from your sin and heal you with His Spirit. He will lead you and guide you beyond your self because that is the nature of God—the same yesterday, today, and forever. Amen!

Lord, I will be careful with my ears, with what I hear and what I am thinking about. I will be simple concerning evil, wise concerning good, and I will walk in the purity of faith in godly edification and truth and faith-vision. Thank You, Lord. We pray this in Your name.

Heal us if we have been in the marshes. Heal us by the river, and bring us into awesome, divine healing and restoration in our soul. This is purity. This is power. This is life. This is faith. This is Jesus Christ. Bless everything we do. Everything is important—every message and every part that we receive in Your name. Thank You, in Jesus' name. Amen.