



Into the Light

All things are possible with God
March-April 2023

Don't Be Afraid, Just Believe!

Revisited – March 2005
By Bob Van Domelen

2005

³⁵While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher anymore?”

³⁶Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, “Don't be afraid; just believe.”

³⁷He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James. ³⁸When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. ³⁹He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” ⁴⁰But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him and went in where the child was. ⁴¹He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha koum!” which means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!” ⁴²Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. (Mark 5:35-42 NIV)

Sometimes we read or listen to the Gospel with too much familiarity because the text has a “been there, heard that” feel to it. Yet Jesus said, ¹⁸“Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember?” (Mark 8:18) When we gloss over the Word or listen with a wandering mind, we have neither eyes nor ears.

As I washed up early that morning during news time, I listened to three reports involving child molestation cases. I immediately thought, “How is any registrant going to stand a chance of getting help once out of prison? The odds seem to be completely against anyone with sex-related charges because of all that was happening, all the anger that was building.”

Looking at the gospel verses for that day, I knew I was going to be in something of a “been there, know that” frame of mind. I skimmed rather than really read the story of Jairus and his dying daughter from start to finish. Somehow the words “Don't be afraid; just believe” caught my attention and called me back for a second look.

They were simple words yet powerful words. “Don't be afraid; just believe.” Jesus heard what the men were saying to Jairus about his daughter. He knew the despair Jairus must have been feeling. After all, this was a father who loved his daughter so much that he sought out Jesus

to come and heal her. At that moment, Jesus didn't focus on the men bearing their message. He merely told Jairus not to be afraid. He told him to believe.

Jon (just a name I've chosen to use) wrote me the other week. He was nearing the end of his sentence and currently completing a sex offender treatment program. Jon wasn't sure where he would be living, who was going to hire him, or where he would be able to attend worship services. Near the end of his letter, Jon shared how each day he prayed to God asking for help and healing. He knows that he has changed in many ways, yet “out there” is the unknown, a place that is more than a little frightening for Jon.

In a way, Jon represents both Jairus and his daughter. As Jairus, he daily approaches the altar of God with his plea for healing. In the thinking of most who knew him, Jon's prayers for healing were considered a waste of time. They loudly proclaimed, “Once a child molester, always a child molester. Why bother God with your prayers?”

Yet Jon had faith—the kind of faith that prompted Jairus to search Jesus out. And in response to Jon's prayers, I believe that Jesus said the same thing to Jon that He did to Jairus: “Don't be afraid; just believe.” Jon believes but he is still afraid. Why? Perhaps some other elements of the story of Jairus and his daughter might provide some thoughts to consider.

“Your daughter is dead,” they said.

From the first day until the last day of Jon's time in prison, he felt completely separated from those on the outside. His wife divorced him; his brothers and sisters refused any communication with him; and his pastor had “cast him out” of the congregation. Completely cut off from the outside world, Jon felt as though he were dead.

Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly.

As Jon imagined what it would be like to leave prison and start life over, he envisioned the news broadcasts he had seen where townspeople protested at a city council meeting. They were protesting a registrant moving into one of their neighborhoods, and he saw himself as that man.

The concerns people offered the elected officials were not shared in calm voices. Their words surfaced as angry shouts punctuated by raised fists. Jon did not know that what he saw on TV was the exception rather than the rule—only a very small percentage of released offenders find themselves the object of such a meeting. But because

Jon didn't know this, the fear he had was very real.

The child is not dead but asleep.

In Jon's quiet moments, his prayer time, and in his communion with God, he saw a glimmer of hope and the possibility of reentering the world as a new man. In those quiet moments, he understood that his homecoming would not be a parade down Main Street. It would be an obstacle course.

How everything would fall in place once on the streets was beyond his vision because that vision was one of housing, job opportunities, and church membership. But the bottom line was that the vision he came to rely on was really a vision built on faith and trust. It was the belief that God had purpose for his life.

But they laughed at him.

Bible scholars say that when the friends of Jairus heard Jesus say the girl was merely sleeping, they laughed, but it was laughter meant to show scorn. They had seen the dead girl. Jesus had not. How could He say she was only asleep?

The accounts in the newspapers had declared Jon a child molester and pedophile. The conviction and the sentencing had confirmed this identity as Jon's, and in the mind of the public there was nothing more to add. It was an identity that could not be changed. "Bleeding heart liberals" would say that it might be possible for a registrant to be rehabilitated, but what did they know? For every such person who stood on Jon's side, there were hundreds who stood opposed and who were more than willing to scorn him.

Little girl, I say to you, get up!

This is the bottom line for Jon. This is the command from God that he hears in his heart, a command that flies in the face of all the opposition that might and will come against him. It is a command that says, "I know your struggle, Jon, but I do know that your identity is fixed in me, not in your offenses. Get up!"

It is also a command that acknowledges the condition that still exists within Jon, a condition that he must monitor daily to avoid hurting another child. God's command is one of healing and not condemnation, encouragement and not ridicule.

The journey Jon is making is far from easy, but God has already arranged for him to meet help along the way. He has promised Jon that He would always be with him, helping him deal with the difficult times, and showing him how to rejoice in the good times. And in the end, Jon will have stood up, a man clothed in both the love and presence of the Lord. Those who look on Jon will be astonished because the man they considered dead had come to life! □

2023

Usually, when I use an article written years ago, I find things I have written on or about that have changed over the years. This section, then, is a little like saying "This is what I believed then because it's how things were. Here's what I believe today."

Covid has changed life profoundly and we have been forced to change. One example, keeping up with the new prison postal requirements is a process forcing many ministries to adapt – not always successfully. But the

message in 2005 still strikes me as important. While I can only speak for myself, the words "Don't be afraid; Just believe" are a daily act of faith as much today as they were in 1988 when I was released from prison.

Tucked inside the story of Jairus and Jon, are two important words – get up! Nothing changes if we don't act. Nothing changes if we hide in a corner hoping no one notices us. And nothing changes if we say "I believe, Lord" yet allowing fear to dictate our lives.

Some people I once called friends might never be so again. I can't force them to be. My participation at church still has restrictions. The restrictions make others feel more comfortable and, I suppose, feeling more protected though that confuses me and saddens me. How they respond to me, however, is a direct consequence of the choices I made that hurt so many.

I am still a little afraid, but I am not paralyzed by my fears. I believe with all my being because God has done so much for me: *He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.* (Psalm 40:2 NIV)

You might not 'feel' the same at this very moment, but if you ask God to show you, He will open your eyes to all the many miracles He has already worked in your life, and He'll remind you that He is not done with you!

All things are possible with God!

To change from what we were to what we hope to be requires us to recognize the 'what' in us that needs to be changed.

Our Prayer Corner



Prayer is an incredible gift we can give one another, for there is no better thing than to lift our lives, hopes, and dreams to the altar of the Lord.

Let us pray . . .

- First and foremost, for our and all victims, that each day for them is a new day, a day without fear, and a day of healing.
- For those who are afraid, that they can place their fears in the hands of God, knowing that all will be well.
- For those who struggle believing, that whatever blocks their way, whatever has hurt them will find the healing love of Jesus.
- For those who don't believe they have it in them to get up, that they will learn the Holy Spirit will make it possible.
- For chaplains, that their message of God's love is one that is evident in their own lives as witness.
- For those we have harmed or sinned against, that

our desire for their healing will bring them out of the rooms of inner pain, anger, and confusion.

- For Bob's health, that the ministry God has for him will continue to be an encouragement and hope for others.
- For this ministry, that Broken Yoke Ministries continues to be blessed with the financial support needed to meet basic expenses like this newsletter.
- (As Always) For those who are still abusing, that they will come to understand the devastation they bring on their victims and that they seek help for themselves.

Bits & Pieces

The following are taken from letters I have received. Some are meant to offer hope and encouragement to you while others call out for us to be in prayer.

Newly released believers really need to find acceptance from like-minded believers and a worship family. Without it, I believe it makes it too likely for one to fall into their old lifestyle. Support is important along with encouragement.

Some have said that coming to faith and trust in Christ is 10%, the other 90% getting disciplined, getting grounded in the Word, and maturing in the faith.

"I'm here. I love you." I heard him in my soul. My heart melted. I had to let him in. It's as if the Spirit opened me up for his words and his love.

The church services are up and down. I have to scratch my head when I see the way some act in the service and then how they shift the minute they enter the unit. But I have to reflect on how I behave. So I ponder this and pray my testimony matches what they see.

I have been able to live a better life, think differently, and look forward to a better future, which I'll do by surrounding myself with positive brothers who influence me by leading productive lives. That's my job. If I don't do it for myself, nobody will do it for me.

Too often salvation is seen as the finishing line, but I like the teaching/philosophy that says, "I have been saved, I am being saved, and I will be saved."

I have to stay on this path, although it's hard, difficult, and painful at times. I have come too far to give up. I give God all the glory for leading me to prison to set me free from my spiritual prison and to remove the life sentence that the enemy tried to sentence me to – a sentence of sexual addiction.

*Remember,
God smiled when you were born,
And I think he danced a bit, too!*

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All donations to this ministry are tax deductible and will be recognized. If you cannot support us financially, pray for us.

The bottom line is that we need YOU to help make these newsletters possible. So, pray about becoming a partner with this ministry.



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You
Something?

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CMCA Correctional Ministries Summit

**May 18-20, 2023
Wheaton, IL**

Registration is now open for this annual event and I hope that you or someone you know will look into attending. Wheaton College Campus is beautiful, the food offered to attendees is of highest quality, and the Billy Graham Center Museum covers 500 years of history - culminating in the evangelistic work of Rev. Dr. Billy Graham.

My workshop, *The Church and Registrants*, is scheduled for Saturday, May 20, at 10:15-11:45 AM. Please keep the workshop and me in your prayers.

CMCA Correctional Ministries Summit | May 19-20, 2023 | Wheaton College, IL



"May the God of HOPE fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." - Romans 15:13



**Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.**

I recently came across a small piece by NyRee Ausler that opened with the question, "How do you know you are pure of heart?" The author offered the following traits:

*You smile a lot. No one has a perfect life
Your generosity has no strings attached
You are respectful
You forgive easily
You can't stay mad
Their happiness is your happiness
You are helpful
You are an optimist
You are trustworthy
You show humility
You are honest
You aren't judgmental
You are accountable
You have emotional intelligence*

After reminding myself that purity is not always about sexual purity, I began to consider how each of the traits listed above might bring about sexual purity.

When I abused, the very last thing I wanted was for my actions to become known, because those choices were my dark secrets. With time, I learned that there was truth in "there is *nothing* concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known." (John 10:26 NIV)

Though I could make others believe that all was right in my world, that sense of darkness I felt because of my actions was constantly with me. The more secrets I had, the more focused on me I became and the less able I was to truly connect with the world God created for me. And, I should point out, the more aware I became of what I had done, the lives I changed/harmed, the more I wanted to walk free of the kind of damaging choices I made.

In the beginning, I believed that my focus needed to be on my addictions, my inappropriate choices, and that approach brought me face to face with those dark places I didn't want to visit. This is an important focus, I believe, but not one that should be all-consuming. I came to understand that I could not live solely in the world of what I had done. What I had done was not a piece of clothing to be worn every day without change. There were new clothes to be worn, a new image to grow into – one of integrity and purity.

I suppose the list I shared here reminded me of the need to connect and grow into positive self-images. Instead of smiling to make people think I was happy, I needed to smile because I was happy.

I needed to be generous simply because others had needs that I could meet. Being respectful because someone deserved respect, although sometimes I might need to look beyond the person standing in front of me.

Forgiving easily is a work in process for me just as, I suppose, it is for you. One must get beyond self to provide those needing a request for forgiveness, truly a gift we can bestow on one another.

Be angry in the moment when wronged, but remember that the sooner anger is set aside, the sooner healing and reconnection can begin.

Being happy feels good. Being happy for someone else is an unselfish gift that speaks of how God loves us.

Helping someone else might not always result in being recognized as a helpful person, but the goal is not recognition – it's service to others.

It really doesn't cost more to think in positive terms than in negative ones, so choose positive.

Having destroyed the trust of those I abused reminds me how important trust is and should be. But my goal should not be to earn their trust again, but to live in such a way that they and others can choose to trust me if they desire.

Being humble sometimes means saying nothing when others want to define me by my past sins. God knows my heart and that matters most to me.

Being honest allows me to see who I am, what choices I make, and how I can be judgmental of others. Being healthy is finding balance in both.

I can never deny what I have done but I can be transparent in ways that matter, ways that support the new man I seek to become.

Emotional intelligence is having the ability to recognize not only feelings, but how we feel about them when they surface.

In the end, a focus on any of these is a step in the right direction, a step that makes us better. Hang in there.

A Little Humor . . .

Two factory workers were talking during break. "I know how to get some time off from work," said the first man. "How do you think you will do that?" asked the other one. The first man proceeded to demonstrate by climbing up to the rafters and hanging upside down. The boss walked in, saw the worker hanging from the ceiling, and ask what on earth he was doing. "I'm a light bulb," answered the man. "I think you need some time off," said the boss. So the man jumped down and walked out of the factory. The second man began walking out, too. The boss asked, "Where do you think you're going?" "Home. I can't work in the dark."

