

## Art Katz:

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Some reflections on the controversial Tent of Shem message and Israel's final destiny. A transcription of a spoken message by the same title.

These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb (Revelation 14:4 KJV).

The Lord is looking for a virginal first-fruits company that will follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes, and in these last days, this 'withersoever' is going to bring us to places we never could have imagined and where we ourselves would balk, like Peter when he said, "Let this be far from You, Lord." This is a statement of such remarkable generosity and breadth of the spirit of compassion for his Master that it would have obtained for Peter the 'Man of the Year' award; yet, it would have impeded the Cross. John the Baptist, of whom Jesus said, "There is no greater," and, "I have need to be baptized of You," had to be persuaded to demonstrate the "withersoever" of Jesus, by baptizing the One who patently had no need of repentance, that they might fulfill all righteousness.

This "withersoever" is so remarkable that it requires of that virginal company an abandoning to the uttermost in order to follow Him. Today's selection in Oswald Chambers' 'My Utmost for His Highest' considers that very question, "Have I ever yielded in absolute submission to Jesus Christ?" We would instantly answer "Of course. We have always been yielded." However, there is an absolute and an ultimate abandonment that is total, which few of us know, but to which the Lord is calling all of us in such an hour as this.

When you look up the word 'abandon' in a dictionary, you find surprising dimensions of meaning such as, to give up the objective of ever again claiming one's right or interest, or to give over and surrender completely to any attempt at self-control, to quit, relinquish, renounce, vacate, resign, discard, forswear, forsake; 'to abandon' denotes the absolute giving up of an object, surrendering it to the mercy of something or someone else greater.

Would it not be remarkable if the object that we need to give up were not some carnal thing but a spiritual thing, even a correct thing, and a thing pertaining to the Lord Himself, something so spiritual and cherished that we would not relinquish it even for the Lord Himself? That is the ultimate irony of the last impediment that stands between ourselves and Him, the last thing that keeps us from being that bridal company that follows Him 'withersoever He goeth.' It is not the carnal, the wrong thing; it is the correct thing, and a cherished thing, and because it is correct and spiritual, it is the most difficult thing to forsake or to abandon. To give up or to abandon carnal or material things is no sacrifice at all, but the abandonment for which the Lord waits is clearly a sacrifice.

Strangely and ironically, the desire for, the interest in, or the protection of that which is correct - even the desire to be right, the enjoyment of rectitude, the wonderful feeling of being really lined up with God - any or all of these could be the impediment that itself needs to be forsaken. It is remarkable how few will do it. Maybe it is for that reason Jesus' murder was inevitable, and carried out not by those who were apparently wicked or evil, but by the best of Jewish society and religious life, because He seemed to constitute a threat to what they held to be as correct. They must defend their correctness in such a way as to crucify the Lord who Himself gave the truths which they cherish and defend!

Saul is the perfect example of that. In his zeal to protect the faith of inviolate Israel from what appeared to be a dangerous heretical sect, he found himself persecuting the Lord Himself in the name of his own zeal. Maybe the candidate for apostolicity must come to recognize that in the last analysis, the very zeal to protect and to defend truth, as one sees it, is the very thing that will ultimately persecute and crucify the Lord afresh.

We must have no vested interest, even in our correctness, because the Lord must always be allowed the privilege of leading us where He will and contradicting our categories. He will test us in precisely those areas. Is the Lord really our Lord, unless we allow Him the right to set aside His own categories, to alter His own truths as we understand them, so that He can bring to us a new dimension which seems to threaten those things which were previously established and given by Him? Is He really the Lord unless He has that prerogative, and that right to establish anything of His own choosing that seems to us a contradiction of even Himself? We are not fully abandoned to Him until we have abandoned ourselves to that. There is no category so sacrosanct that the Lord cannot alter it if He is to be Lord, and the Lamb whom we follow, whithersoever He goeth.

The last and most deadly hiding place of self is not in our carnality but, as I so often say, in our spirituality. Until we recognize that, and are open to God's dealings with us in that place, we will oppose God even in defending Him. What killed Him at the first, the zealous intent of defenders of the faith, purporting to protect the faith from seeming danger or the prospect of heresy, will kill Him again. The paradox is that in these last days, the potential for heresy is never more evident than now. How do we abandon ourselves to God and yet remain watchmen on the walls? It is a remarkable quandary of an ultimate kind. It is these ultimate, brain-breaking quandaries that can potentially open us into a dimension of God that we would not be required to find or to enter under any other circumstances.

Psalm 73 is my text for this morning. It is one of the great psalms that touches this ultimate quandary. Although it may not be David who wrote this particular psalm, the others who have contributed to the Psalms all share the Davidic mindset, the Davidic heart and spirit, the Davidic intensity for God. If they were more casual about their faith, they would not have to deal with these ultimate perplexities and tensions; their very devotion brings it to them. The fact that something had to happen to the psalmist to break him into a dimension he had not known before shows that however exceptional a saint, and however great his devotion, there was a realm not yet in his experience that he could only enter by virtue of the quandary, the perplexity, the confusion and the vexation that came to him and brought him to that frontier.

If you read the whole Psalm, you will find a man who describes God as upright to those who are pure in heart. We believe and assume that the psalmist has that heart, and yet:

But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious of the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a necklace; violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes bulge with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily (Psalms 73:2-8 KJV).

They hold a complete disregard for harming God or injuring His name or His reputation as if He were non-existent. And they prosper in that. Their hearts overflow with follies; they scoff and speak with malice. There is no reticence to express themselves, and they are prospering in all of that which is in apparent contradiction to God, and this vexes the psalmist beyond all speaking. Where is the righteous God, who does not cut these men down right on the spot and allows them to profane and bandy His name about in filthy jesting, disrespect and disregard?

"They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongues range over the Earth" (Psalms 73:9). Imagine the audacity of that; and God does not shut them up. How then can He be righteous? How can He be God? Where is His power? Where is His jealousy for His name? Where is His honor? Does He not know that He has been discredited and defamed, and therefore, deprecated and diminished in the eyes of the entire world? The poor psalmist is beside himself in ultimate exasperation with the failure of God to be God as he sees Him. His every category of understanding is being stretched agonizingly to the breaking point.

The people praise these characters and find no fault in them, in verse 10; they are celebrated and given places of distinction. They are called the 'Man of the Year' and they win all kinds of awards. Sometimes, they are even regarded as religious and successful. If a holy man would be galled, he would be galled by that. These phony apostles, taking to themselves such labels and such titles, merchandizing and franchising the world as if they have a mandate from God, when, in themselves, they are so apparently contradictory to the very heart of what 'apostolic' is. The flocks run in great mobs to see and hear these men, these 'prophets,' to hear a word from the great oracle. It makes you want to tear your hair out. Is the whole world deceived? Where is the church? Where is the discernment? Where is God?

"And they say, How doth God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High" (Ps 73:11 KJV)? They dismiss even the prospect that God can see, know, and understand what they are getting away with.

Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning (Psalms 73:12-14 KJV).

What kind of universe is this? Where is the righteousness of God in his creation, that the evil, the wicked and malicious, the foul mouths and the self-aggrandizing prosper, and the righteous look forward to a program of being plagued and punished every morning? We are the ones who struggle.

"If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children" (Psalms 73:15 KJV). I am always tempted to join them. They are running away with the show. They have all the marbles; they have all the cards. The world is running after their autographs, and I will get into this act also. Why not? If it was not for Your children. The thing that keeps me is my obligation to Your people; otherwise, I would be tempted to be an actor and a performer also, and I would make a better show of it than they.

"When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end" (Psalms 73:16 -18 KJV). Can I take the liberty again of suggesting that the sanctuary of God, the house of God, the Zion of God and the tent of Shem are all the same thing? It is a place, note this, that the psalmist had not yet come to. Who of us has shared his vexation? Who of us is so aligned with his

righteousness and has so great a love for God and a jealousy for His name and honor that he has been stretched to breaking over evils much greater than he knew in his generation, and that are everywhere about us, and are called Christian, called charismatic, called apostolic, called prophetic. Where is our vexation? Have we come to the righteousness, love and identification with God as the psalmist possesses? And yet, for all that, however much he exceeds us in authentic spirituality, he had not yet entered the sanctuary of God. It is only his vexation that brings him to it. But we who are more ordered and poised, and have a handle on things, it is we are not in any sense anguished by the seeming contradictions about God in the church, in reality and in life; we are never brought to that place.

There is a place, saints, that this psalm indicates, and for which God waits. However, it is not an easily accessible place, or a place of convenience. You have to be practically driven to it by your vexation in seeking for answers that not all your correct categories will give you. Unless you see from that place, you will not see to the depths that you need to see. You misconstrue, you misunderstand, you will be offended, and you will take offence at the very things of God. There is a true place of seeing that God waits for you to enter. And would it not be the ultimate irony that there is no understanding of the tent of Shem except in the tent of Shem? You cannot obtain it from outside of it. You understand it at the point of entry, but coming to the point of entry requires great provocation.

It is the same thing with Jesus. "Come unto Me," He said to his kinsmen, "because I Myself am the key to the understanding of Me. I am the interpretive key. I am the hermeneutic key to the faith, in Myself. Unless you come unto Me, and into Me, you will not understand it. You will not understand it from outside the sanctuary. I am the sanctuary. I am the Zion of God. I am the tent of Shem. Unless you come in, you cannot see, nor understand who I Myself am. I am the key of My own interpretation and understanding. You will never get it from the outside looking in."

Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end (Psalm 73:17 KJV). Then he saw that though they were enjoying the moment now, it was only a moment in time, and their ultimate destiny in eternity is horrible beyond description. God is just; God is righteous. This life is not all that there is. It is only a fragmentary, initial episode in which the issues of eternity are being decided. However, he had to see the end, and the end of the thing is the truth of the thing, and it is only to be found in the sanctuary of God. It is not only "I saw their end", but, "I saw the end," the end of everything and the meaning of it. The understanding of the thing that disturbs us, the thing that we cannot quite reconcile, we find it in that place, the sanctuary of God. Surely You set them in slippery places: You make them fall to ruin. They are destroyed in a moment. They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when You arise, You shall despise them as phantoms (Ps 73:18-20).

The psalmist goes back to himself: "Thus my heart was grieved and I was pricked in my heart, so foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee" (Psalms 73:21-22). What a confession! Now that I see their end, there is more, I am seeing all end. In the light of the end, looking back on myself, I realize I was as a beast toward you. I was so thick, so dull, so insensate, and so incapable of understanding that I was opposing you in seeming defense of your faith. If we are like that toward Him in our blindness, what are we like toward others, even others in the most holy faith? If we are capable of this kind of attitude toward the Lord in our best well-meaning intention, of what are we not capable?

I am taking this very literally, that there is a place in God of ultimate seeing. We ought to stop our mouths and hold ourselves in reservation about any judgment, any temptation to quickly dismiss or conclude about something being from God or not, or any of the kinds of things that seem to be in conflict with what we understand, even the understanding which we are sure is given of God. There is always a dimension more. There is always a further understanding. There is always an ultimate light that one will not find outside the sanctuary, but within it, and if this psalmist/prophet had to be driven to that place, what shall we say for ourselves?

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Jews will face this kind of dilemma in the last days. Because of their long history of persecution 'in the name of Jesus,' everything that attends that Name is anathema for them, and yet, it is the only name given whereby they may be saved. Therefore, they have got to pass through something that completely reconfigures and contradicts what they have been given to understand, which they are absolutely assured is so correct that they will die for it. They have got to be brought to a place of perplexity, such that will force them through the categories which they have established, understood and confirmed, and into a place of new seeing, in the sanctuary of God. There they will recognize that the name that they can hardly pronounce is the name of the Holy One of Israel Himself, and that what they have learned to reject is the key to their own salvation.

This Psalm 73 is remarkable in what it represents, and it expresses the benefit that comes to the psalmist for having entered that sanctuary. Once you have seen something by that light, you will never again see it the same or go back to where you were. Something transcendent has happened that has left an indelible mark, and an acquisition of a kind that changes everything has taken place, an ultimate seeing, not only of the issue that once brought only vexation, but all seeing is affected thereafter. You have seen now from the light of the sanctuary, and you will never again be satisfied with the nearly correct; you are spoiled for anything less. You

will be suspicious of your own correctness; as well you should, because there is a dimension beyond that which is God.

The last testing of our fidelity to Him and our abandonment to Him is our willingness to pass through the veil of our correctness and into the realm where He is. He, who alone is Lord, will seem to contradict Himself, testing us to see where our real devotion ultimately lies. Does it lie in Him or in our convictions about Him? Does it lie in Him who is Truth or in the truth about the Truth? See how subtle this is. Israel missed it right at that point, in the very defense of what they thought was right. They persecuted and killed the Lord of glory. We can be guilty of the same, and maybe we have to come full circle and find ourselves performing the same thing in order to come to a place of brokenness and repentance by which we learn to distrust our own humanity and our own correctness.

The man coming through this remarkable experience saw himself as he was - as a beast. You cannot find language more graphic than that! "In view of the way I now see, and I now understand, looking back to what I was before that crisis, I was as a dumb beast. I thought that I knew, but I say now, I did not know, as I ought to know. It required a crisis that You have precipitated by allowing such seeming paradox and contradiction in life and in the world, or I would not have been brought by that vexation into the sanctuary of God. You allowed Yourself to be dishonored; You allowed Yourself to be mocked by these guys whose eyes are swollen with fat, and are having a field day in their complete disregard of You. You were willing that Your reputation should suffer enormously, that by it, and only by it, I would be brought to such a place of seeming contradiction and vexation that even my mind and my sanity were at stake. You allowed Yourself to be defamed, and me to be stretched almost to the place of ultimate breaking, almost to the temptation of forsaking the faith and becoming like them, in order that I should come into 'this place'."

Is 'this place' that important? Yes. It is the ultimate place, and few of us there be that are in it. There are few of us that desire it, and few of us really have so great a love and jealousy that we are vexed enough to be brought to that place.

"Nevertheless, I am continually with You (verse 23)." And I am with You in a new way. "You hold my right hand. You guide me with Your counsel." There is almost a sense of limpness. This man has been so broken at the foundations of his own conceit and religious rectitude that now he is like a child having to be led by the hand. He is saying, "I will no longer presume to come in and bring correction, and think I am going to show you. . . I am led by the hand, and I dare not open my mouth, for even when I mean well, I bring injury."

Unless we are this to Israel, how shall they see their Messiah and God? So long as we are hotshots, strident and full of rivalry, we continue to alienate them. They need to see a limp people, broken, looking to the Lord, who have the correct view about themselves; a people who see that enjoyment of being correct is earthly, even when it is spiritual.

Whom has God searched out to the depth where he is willing to forsake even the enjoyment of being correct about God? Where "I have nothing in the Earth that I desire, other than You; not the doctrines about You, the truth about You, but You Yourself as is now being revealed. I had never seen how far You will go - that You will allow Yourself to be defamed and Your name demeaned and dishonored, and Your psalmist to be stretched to the point of breaking and insanity because of the light of the sanctuary, and what alone is to be found there? It makes me understand You in a way that I never understood You before, to appreciate You in a way that I never appreciated You before, to love You in a way that I never have loved You before. It took this crisis, and the fact that You were willing to allow me to be stretched to the breaking of it shows me how great Your love is toward me, or else I would have died as a dumb beast. I would have gone on into eternity applauding myself and congratulating myself for being the great defender of Your faith, only to find out in the day of eternity that I was a dumb beast, that my very rightness was the very thing that threatened and disallowed Your lordship. I thank You that You loved me so much that You allowed me to be vexed to breaking while I yet had breath."

My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works (Psalm 73:26 - 28 KJV).

Where is that place? In the tent, the tent of Shem - it is not a Jewish tent - it is Shem's tent - the tent of the God of Shem. "It is good to be near You," and in that place, I am spoiled. I have seen something from that place that is not available from any other. It has affected all my seeing. I no longer will trust in my own perception, analysis or critique. I will always hold myself in reserve, knowing there is an ultimate place of seeing, where You are, for there we see as You see. We find out the great irony, that the thing that offended us, and that we were so alert to defend against, was You Yourself calling us to a deeper place. Therefore, we resisted You, in Your name, so great is our lack of seeing.

"I have made the Lord God my refuge" - and here is the point - "to tell of all Your works." Now I can represent You. Now I can speak of You. Now I can proclaim the things that I myself did not understand before, and proclaim them in the light of this seeing.

How far will God go? The things we see now as tension and difficulty are preliminary to the kinds of things that we are likely to experience increasingly as we come into the last days. My definition of a saint is, "one who can bear the tensions of the faith." What we see today are only preliminary vibrations, not tensions of the kind

that bring us to the point of intolerability, where our very sanity is at risk. In this affliction, the sufferer took refuge with Yahweh. He came to the place of proximity to God - the sanctuary.

This place is holy, holy, holy. It is the Zion of God. It is Shem's tent. There is a light in there of an uncommon kind. It is not for the curious. It is not for the transient. It is for those who enter in order to dwell, recognizing that dwelling there is alone the place of safety, and anything outside of that place is less.

Here is the end, not only of the wicked, but of all things. We must see in view of the end. We must have an eschatological comprehension of things toward which we are moving, not because we have it nailed down as doctrine, but because we have apprehended, and have been apprehended, by the God who is both the beginning and the end. And He will give us a glimpse of it, and the glory of it, only in the place where that light is to be seen. Otherwise, we have an understanding that we can tick off - merely doctrinal, merely correct - but not sufficient if we are to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes. Seeing the end beyond our issues of doctrine is what sustains us now.

I do not want to demean doctrine; doctrine is truth. But there is something to which doctrine points - He who is the truth, the reality, the ineffable, unspeakable and ultimate reality of God Himself. God forbid that we should fall short of that glory, of that reality, and of that truth because we are satisfied with the truths about the truth. Is there anything more brittle and doctrinaire than someone who is equipped with a knowledge of the last days, who condemns the church as Babylon and celebrates an elitist type of sonship? These evils issue from merely being correct in our brain box. We have not really seen because we have not really entered.

Do not fall short of the glory. That entering is so dear to God, that He will not think it too extravagant to bring us to the place of intolerable suffering so we can experience and fully see the joy of the light of God. This is the fellowship of His suffering. The quest for truth is a suffering to those who have to proclaim it without themselves having a full comprehension of it, yet are unable to withhold the proclamation. And it is a suffering for those who have to live with such people and respond and bear up under what seems to them points of remarkable collision and threatening heresy.

In the end, the psalmist is able to proclaim and tell of 'all Your works.' Nothing is withheld, because now he has glimpsed the totality and utterness of God, and 'the end of all things' and can proclaim them in that light.

"It is gained from the experience of suffering", and it is "asserted", Kraus\* writes, "for all [of] life, and therefore . . . for [all] future generations." The great danger to the psalmist, the thing that vexed him almost to insanity was the fear of the loss of the knowledge of God as God. The thing that brought him to the brink of disaster was that God Himself was being contradicted in his own understanding.

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Moses waited in the cloud for six days before the Lord called him to Himself on the seventh day. The burning glory on Mount Sinai was a stark terror for the people viewing it at a distance - but here is the man of God called into the midst of that fire, having waited for six days in the smoke. Six is the number of man, and what happened in that smoke, only God knows.

Moses, the prince of Egypt and Levitical son of God who would be the apostolic deliverer of Israel, with all of his knowledge and all of his categories obtained in wilderness dwelling, and all other things that were constituent in the formation of his life, dissolved in that smoke. When he was called on the seventh day - which is the number of perfection and completion - there was nothing left of Moses in his understanding, in his correctness, and in his doctrines about God. In His presence, God had imparted to Moses something from Himself.

Sinai was the dwelling place of God, the tent of Shem, the sanctuary of Zion, the place of union with Him. Moses came down from the mountain, not just with tablets, but also with knowledge of the God who gave the tablets. Something had to be communicated to Israel beyond legality, beyond the requirement of the Law, namely, the nature of the Lawgiver Himself, which few of us know, or we would be speaking about the Law differently. The way we speak of the Law, as though it represents some mean and cheap legalism that is god-denying and life-denying, is the indication that we have never been up to that mountain.

There is a place of union, whether you call it the sanctuary of Zion, the dwelling, the tent; you cannot bow and come into it and bring your categories with you. You have got to leave them behind - not the vile things, but the 'good' things as well - because the good is ever and always the enemy of the perfect. Have we the confidence in God to know that if we can gather the courage to lay aside what has constituted our spiritual security and understanding, He will give us on that seventh day a priceless measure of the knowledge of Him? That knowledge communicates not only the essence of His law but the essence of Him as law-giver. That is what an apostle is. He does not just bring correct doctrines; he brings the sense of God as God Himself is. God gives the sense of Himself in His sanctuary, but our own correctness will keep us from entering.

Hans-Joachim Kraus, the German theologian, writes: "The turning point is reached, in the sanctuary of God, the place of the nearness of God...God's sacred mysteries are in the area of the sanctuary. Into them the psalmist has [finally] entered in order to receive an explanation in the abode of God's [own] presence. . . the final event that explains everything," because it sees the end of the things that were previously veiled. "In the light of the reality of God [something ultimate,] 'something final' in the most profound sense of the word, is revealed - a truth that breaks through all disguises and [seeming] contradictions of life and history" comes

in this revelation. The seeming contradictions, the things that seemingly offend and make us to recoil and draw back are seen in a new light, in the light of the sanctuary.

It is the place of ultimate revelation. "Now the knowledge which the sufferer has gained is full assurance, the [wicked], no matter how self-assured and haughty they appear, are on slippery ground. Before the brightness of God's reality, the assured life-conditions of the wicked enjoying prosperity suddenly disappear, for the psalmist has received a revelation of God's final dispositions. Moreover, it seems that it is already accomplished; he does not have to wait for that to be experienced. If he sees it in God, it is as good as performed. Therefore, he is relieved; he can come back again into the world, still seeing the apparent contradictions, but abide them. He has glimpsed the end and the ultimate thing in that revelation. What in this world can no longer be demonstrated empirically is cleared up prophetically."

What a statement! What could not be seen in the world empirically [practically], can only be seen in the sanctuary prophetically. Prophetic is the communication of the seeing of ultimate things that have not yet been made visible, attested and approved empirically in the world of religion. There is a place for proof, a place for the testing of the faith, and there is a place for the testing even of the prophet, but ultimate revelation abides only in the sanctuary.

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Ironically, the question of whether my recent speaking on the tent of Shem is of God or not, is to be answered and found only within the tent itself. Is that not remarkable? We will never nail it down doctrinally. It is an intuition, a sense, a prophetic sense that perhaps was given in that place, but you only have it confirmed and revealed in that same place - never empirically in the religious world. There is seeing and seeing, knowing and knowing, not only of God, but even the categories of God. Maybe that is the difference between the true and false apostle and prophet. One has it as nomenclature and correct technical vocabulary, and the other has it as the revelation that comes from the sanctuary itself.

"Come unto Me", Jesus said, and provided His own generation with the key to the interpretation of Himself. "Unless you come unto Me, you can not see. You can argue through the scriptures: 'how can anything good thing come out of Nazareth,' but you will be defied in every category, unless you come unto Me, because I Myself am the interpretive key of Myself. So long as you balk and want to cleave to your correctness you will miss Me." The same issue that was Israel's undoing is also a prospect for ourselves.

"In the sanctuary, the place of the presence of God (vv.17a, 28a), the psalmist becomes aware of an unchangeable fact (cf.v.1): I belong to you. 'You have taken hold of my right hand.' . . . Yahweh has palpably drawn near to him who considered himself lost and forsaken; He has let him recognize the certainty of belonging to God and the saving way of clutching him just before his slipping away (v. 2)", even from his own sanity. How far would we allow ourselves to go to obtain a reality and knowledge of God beyond our categories? How far would we allow ourselves to come close to slipping away, say, at the seeming prospect of heresy? How far will we allow God to draw us out into a place where the ultimate revelation of Himself and His truth awaits? If we cling to our correctness and to our security in it, we will always fall short of that place.

Therefore, Psalm 73 is a statement of the experience of a man, but it is a declaration of God for all generations. This is the very crisis through which the remnant of Israel must necessarily pass. Israel itself has to pass through this ordeal with regards to their categories they have concerning Jesus. Their history of persecution by so-called Christians confirms that this Jesus is an error of the most malicious kind, that this 'presumer' was a deceiver. Remember what they said, "Guard that tomb, for this deceiver said that on the third day, He would rise again." That is how they saw Him, and that is how they continue to see Him and will remain seeing Him unless they are brought by a vexation of such a kind that cannot be reconciled with their categories and with their history. It will be a breakthrough into an existential dimension of the appropriation of the truth.

Israel's suffering is for this revelation; it will not come in any other way. They are not going to be persuaded by 'four spiritual laws' or even five; they are going to have to come to an ultimate vexation of soul, so ultimate that it seems to contradict what they know about God. "God would never do this, God would never say this, or come in the form of flesh as an infant. God would never be crucified between criminals in a dung heap outside the holy city, or offend against the Sabbath - He would never, He would never, He would never.

Don't you know what our categories say: 'We are impeccable [in our own sight]; our rabbis and our experiences through the centuries have confirmed that, but now, in the last days, we are brought into such a contradiction, such vexation. What are we to do with these Christians, and their willingness to die for us and even at our hand? And the kind of love that they are demonstrating, and they speak of it as coming from our God...?' " They will be forced to an ultimate contradiction that will break through their near insanity, and they will see. However, we, as the church, have to precede them in that seeing, or we will not produce the crisis for them by which they will see. If we are only correct, we do not present to them a crisis.

Coming from the sanctuary of God, from the dwelling of God, from the place of union with God, the way that we deport and express ourselves will contradict all their categories. Our very willingness to come to where they are, giving of ourselves, is outside their categories, and that is where God is, ultimately. Categories are not wrong, they are just insufficient. It is a suffering to go from the one to the other, but the sufferer goes on to meet his glorious destiny - both ours and theirs - and the fulfillment that awaits this seeing.

In the light of His appearance in glory, a miracle without equal that changes all visible conditions of life for the psalmist, the new ultimate dispensation of God is disclosed. A union with Jehovah is awaited which even physical death cannot set aside or interrupt. Clearly the Psalm wants to emphasize that life cannot be judged by the appearance of the moment. Praise God for that! We have to look to the end. What we call reality stands in need of a new final review. If the Church is anything, it is the statement of ultimate reality, for the lack of which the world is dying. It will not be saved by correct categories, but by the communication of a reality that lies too deep for words, and from which our categories have kept us.

Do we love God enough that we are willing to suffer that kind of anguish of soul where it seems like our very faith is at threat and at risk? It is scandalously close to being violated or dismissed or made heretical. Are we willing to be stretched to the ultimate place of breaking, in a deepest kind of anguish, that exceeds mere physical suffering - because it is a moral anguish in the prospect that God may not be God as we know Him, understand Him and desire Him to be?

There is a knowledge of Him beyond our knowledge. The world cannot define this reality that it so lacks, the reality that is its salvation. And who can communicate it but those who have been brought to that place by their willingness to bear these remarkable tensions? We have to look at the end - the end is the future, the revealing of the emergence of God's final activity, Yahweh's final intervention and operation.

The futility, the seeming collapse of the faith, is replaced by the fullness of communion with God, which breaks up every final trace of worldliness. I would go further and say, not only of worldliness or carnality, but also of nationality and ethnic distinction. It breaks up every last indefinable thing that we could never have identified if we had stood on our heads. Yet the elements of it are with us, and will only be met in that ultimate and final place. There alone is it broken up, there alone is it dispelled.

When people came forward at the invitation to "bow and enter the Tent of Shem," I found myself praying that something would be removed from them in that bowing, because you cannot take your baggage in. You meet God in a new union. The baggage of a sentimental affection for Israel stands in the way of the authentic love of God for Israel, and it has to go. Sentiment will go up in a puff as Israel increasingly disappoints us. Many will fall away from their shallow Christian Zionist identification. Paul speaks of the great falling away of the last days which will come from a disappointment in Israel and in God, both of which are born out of shallow knowledge both of God and of the purposes of God for Israel. Unless we are willing to forfeit that shallower thing, which we enjoy possessing and continuing in, we cannot receive the authentic thing that issues out of the communion with Shem himself in his tent.

So I prayed over them, "Lord, take out and divest those counterfeit things which we clutch and so enjoy, planting trees and going to Feast of Tabernacles outings, and giggling and titillating and pinching the cheeks of Jews." Our gentile souls love it. However, we need a much deeper impartation from God, or we will never be able to bear with them when they come to us in their flight and desperate exile, broken and shattered, stinking and in their rags, unkind and mean-spirited and full of filthy epithets against us and against the faith. How shall we bear them, except by the invincible and unconditional love of God that knows no conditions? Sentiment will never stand.

You lose something when you bow to enter, but you gain something salvational for the entire world. It is obtained only in the sanctuary - a miracle without equal that changes all the conditions of life.

What we call reality stands in need of review. We have to look at the end, because here the final truth of God that overturns everything is revealed to the psalmist who has entered. Everything that had been relative is now replaced by the fullness of communion with God. Nothing on Earth stands in the way. He is intimately joined to God and looks forward to glory. He has glimpsed the end, and this produces a turn and a change in the aspects of reality itself. Beholding the end determines the way in which one sees the present and understands the past. They are indivisible, but the end was not available to the psalmist until he entered the sanctuary of God.

It may have been available to him as categories, as correct doctrine, but it was not available to him as revelation - the revelation not only of the end, but also of the God of the end. Once you see that, and see Him, it affects the present, the past and the future. It is the reality; it is ultimate reality. This change in the aspects of reality will be effective for Israel when they come into the depths of their despair. We will be able to communicate something to them that is visible only from that place.

Someone asked what makes this coming expulsion different from previous expulsions in God's dealings with Israel as judgment. Who is to say that even when they return as the "redeemed of the Lord" they will not again be cast out? When will they learn the lesson of expulsion? When it shall be told them. When it shall be prophetically explained to them, with a view and a light that the church has never before been able to communicate to the Jew. It is not only that they are going to receive physical sustenance in the wilderness, but explanation of a prophetic kind that makes all of their suffering and exile worthwhile. Ultimate reality must come to us first before we can communicate to them. God is going to uproot them, and put them in collision with all of their trusted categories. He is going to bring them to a place of such utter desperation that when we speak the word of life to them, they will understand and return as "the redeemed of the Lord to Zion with everlasting joy upon their heads."

They are brought into a completely different realm of life beyond this one, with no barrier to God's power, because, as the psalmist says, "I will ever be with you." He had seen the eternality of God, which is the greatest security, and seeing that, we can bear anything. Insecurity and fear of the loss of our trusted categories bring us to a collapse, but seeing the end and the eternality of God, you come back into this life with a remarkable framework of the deepest kind of security that can bear anything. It is a completely different realm of life beyond this one.

The church of the new covenant reads and understands this psalm in view of the fact that the Lord Himself is that place, the place of God's presence in whom the reality of divine grace and divine judgment is obtained and made known. He Himself is the final One, the ultimate One in whom all possible opinions about the faith and life are overturned. In Him, the Christian experiences the miracle of communion with God, which overcomes all affliction and suffering in this present age.

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So what is the last days' peril? It is running the risk of standing for God in such a way that we oppose the perfect by standing for the good, defending what we think was given against that which is being given by God, by so cherishing the wave that we are in, that we feel threatened by the wave that is coming. These are the perils of our generation. We face the danger of limiting the Holy One of Israel by defending Him, and if that is not paradox, I do not know what is. It was Israel's great sin, and it was done out of the best and well-meant intentions, and out of correct categories.

We need to ask the Lord to save us from the defenders of the faith, but save us also from the heretical innovators of the faith - a double danger, and to keep me from being a heretical innovator and from coining something from my own mind. What does God say about the false prophets? "I never sent them. The vision that they have, the dream out of which they speak was their own. I never gave it." What keeps me safe, as a man who travels and speaks a prophetic word? I live in community, in relationship on a continual basis with a sending body, people who know that a true prophet can become false and move from the revelation of things that are given to things that he coins out of his own imagining, and become dear to him, as doctrines tend to become to those who hold them.

The faith is dangerous. It is charged with landmines. It is full of paradox. But it is our calling. The Church as the Church is our safety, and I am so blessed in my soul when I hear from different ones who observe our tensions and conflicts, and they say, "We see that you love one another." I was not aware of it myself. Is it that visible? Praise God for it; it is our saving grace that we can hold steady. We have not been this way heretofore and every element in this charged situation is given by God. I am acting out of the calling that I am given, but they are acting out of the calling that they are given. Out of the givenness of God comes the contradiction and the tension, but also the ultimate resolution of them that transcends all of our callings and bring us into that precious and ultimate place by which we shall follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. In that place, we will not balk at anything that is uncertain and unfamiliar, or seems at the moment to be in contradiction with what we know of God. We will know the Lamb; we will know His voice and He will lead us into green pastures and we will lie down by still waters.

The issue before us now is not so much the word I have had on the Tent of Shem, but what the consideration of it is revealing of our secret heart. I will tell you how far it can go - maybe I am amiss on the tent of Shem, but maybe the Lord has allowed me to play with something fanciful that I particularly enjoy, not so much because it is necessarily true, but because it is calculated to produce a necessary conflict and tension among us here. Through that conflict and tension, we have been brought into the place of the sanctuary in order to see. We have been vexed unbearably, even to the point of the dissolution of the faith and of the community. How far would God go to bring us to a place of transcendence, to the majesty of the glory of what the Church is? Are we going to come to that in some cheap and costless way, or will it be through a suffering?

Am I just defending and justifying myself? I am willing to allow that that might be true - I am not conscious of it but that does not mean it is not a possibility; it might be the truth. Moreover, part of the suffering is to bear that prospect, that the indictment might be true.

Church is a suffering, and we embrace it as privilege, because all Israel waits in the background for a people who can explain to Israel its own predicament. In addition, in fact, what we are in God will produce the predicament. It will vex them unbearably. They have us all categorized - "The Church is right-wing, fundamentalist; they want to convert us. They only want to see Israel succeed because they believe that through Israel's success their Lord will come. We are only an expedient element in their doctrinal theology that has to do with their Jesus returning. They have no interest in us for our own sake. What are they going to do with us?"

But what are they going to do with a virginal people who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes and who display and exhibit His nature, character and life? It will force them into a new perplexity of anguish because they want so easily to be able to dismiss us, but they will not be able to. They will kick against the pricks as Saul did with Stephen, until finally, the Lord in His own appearing will bring them through to their own apostolate. We must be that factor. We have to see the heavens opened. We have to see from within the sanctuary of God, and so thank the Lord for the crisis that He has given us in His own wisdom. The important

thing is not so much whether the accusation against us is true or not, but how it compels us to break loose and to abandon the things that keep us from the ultimate place of God, both as prophets, apostles, teachers, or whatever our calling.

The test of Abraham shattered all his categories about God; it seemed so much to be an echo of the pagan practise of the immolation of children - "Take thine only son whom thou lovest and make of him a sacrifice on the mountain." He had every reason to ignore that requirement, and believe that it came from the evil one. But he rose early in the morning, saddled his ass, cut his wood, and took his son. The ultimate test of an Abrahamic people is to follow the Lord whithersoever He goes - even where He seems to contradict Himself. What do we read in Proverbs? "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him (Pr 26:4)." The very next verse says, "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit (Pr 26:5 KJV)." The same God who says the one, says the other. What do we read in Amos chapter nine? "Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the Earth; Nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob," declares the Lord (Amos 9:8)." I will destroy it all - except, I will not utterly destroy it. Come on Lord - be clear, like us. No. God is God. The Lord is the Lord.

Therefore, we need to ask the Lord to expand our hearts and forgive us for putting Him in a box. We have limited the Holy One of Israel, and tried to confine God by our correct understanding of Him. There is no limit to the Holy One of Israel. His truths are inviolable, sacred and holy. We have been exposed and summoned to crisis of a particular kind and we thank the Lord for it. To whom much is given, much is required, and we thank Him for the privilege. It is worth all the suffering, the misunderstanding, the confusion, the dirty looks, the apprehension - more painful when they come not from strangers, but from those with whom you are intimately joined on a daily basis.

Wherever we are wanting, wherever we have limited God, we ask forgiveness. Lord, bring us into that dimension, my God, that virginal company that has no category, no conviction however dear that will in any way impede or limit Yourself. We will follow You whithersoever - as Abraham did - because we know the voice of our Shepherd and we thank You my God - You are good altogether and precious.

\* Quotes from Hans-Joachim Kraus are from his book, *Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary*, translated by Hilton C. Oswald, Augsburg Fortress Publishers (August 1993).