

~Other Speakers A-F: Richard E. Bieber:

Every once-in-a-while you meet someone who seems to have figured it out. They don't make a production out of it. They're not in your face with it. But by the way they live, and the way they manage their mouth, they really do seem to be walking close to God.

They're reliable, patient, there for you when you need help. And when they get around to talking about Jesus, you get the feeling that they really know him. And you say to yourself, "If I could have that kind of faith, I'd gladly pay the price."

Who of us doesn't long for a closer walk with God? A simple, clear faith, like a mighty rock that survives all storms. Who of us does not long to know Jesus, not as a "doctrine" or a "creed" but as a living Friend, walking at our side, giving us his strength, his peace, his unspeakable love?

Many years ago, when Jean and I and our first little baby, Rachel, were living in an apartment close to the building site of our new church building in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, every morning at 6:45 I would listen to a fifteen minute radio program coming from California. A Jewish man would talk about Jesus. His name was Dr. Michaelson, and between selling maps of Palestine and appealing for funds to help the Jewish orphans in Algeria, he would give a five-minute message that was pure gold.

His voice was not easy to listen to; he spoke with a heavy German accent. But when Michaelson interpreted the words of Jesus, he spoke with the power of one who had been to the Source. No stale bread. No platitudes. No second-hand message. It was the real thing. I drank it in like a thirsty man in the desert, because I knew that I was lacking something, and this man was giving me hope.

One morning Dr. Michaelson described how it had happened to him. He was a devout Jew. He knew what the so-called Christians had done to the Jews for centuries: pogroms, burning their synagogues, calling them "Christ-killers." How Good Friday was the most frightening day of the year for Jews in eastern Europe. The "Christians" would emerge from their churches and start beating on Jews as an act of "righteousness."

But Michaelson also knew that Jesus was a Jew. And he was baffled. How could Jesus, a Jew, be the source of so much suffering and grief for the Jewish people at the hands of the "Christians"?

One night, Michaelson was awakened from sleep by a vision. He saw the Lord Jesus. Jesus spoke to him. That night Michaelson abandoned his life, his future, his everything, to his Messiah.

After Jean and I and our little ones moved to Detroit, we had a chance to meet this man. We heard that Dr. Michaelson was visiting from California and would be speaking on a Sunday afternoon at a church on the east side of the city. The lady across the street watched our children while Jean and I went to hear this man.

There he was an old man in a threadbare suit, crippled feet, sitting on a stool to give his talk. But when he spoke, his word was alive. At the end of his talk, Dr. Michaelson mentioned that he needed a ride to his (cheap) downtown hotel. I volunteered.

It was like having the Apostle Paul riding shotgun in the Volkswagen. He peppered me with questions. "Do you know Jesus? Do you love him? What kind of church do you go to? What are you doing in the Lutheran church??"

This man had received a vision, and had not disobeyed it. He had had an encounter with the Lord, and the rest of his life was a walk with God---a close walk. That brief encounter with Dr. Michaelson in the flesh was a confirmation that those words I used to listen to every morning at 6:45 in Nova Scotia were the real thing. They were the first words of hope that I, too, could have a close walk with God.

I've never had a vision like Dr. Michaelson had. But like most of you who are reading these words, I have had a few close encounters with the Lord Jesus---a word coming straight out of heaven, pointing me in the right direction at the right time. So I know---as you know---that a closer walk with God is within the reach of each of us---especially at this hour.

For something is going on across the earth these days that makes the promise of a closer walk with God very, very compelling. Along with all the wars, acts of terrorism, earthquakes, volcanoes, political corruption and

crazy weather, there is a stirring of the Spirit, a spiritual awakening taking place in millions of lives, all over the earthâ€”now.

In the Israel of Jesus' day, there were three major festivals: Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus always managed to get to Jerusalem for these feasts.

Passover. When they remembered how the Angel of Death passed over the Jewish homes in Egypt, because the blood of the Pascal Lamb had been smeared on the lintel of the entrance door. That night there was a cry of anguish in Egypt as death visited the Egyptian households, and the Jewish people were at last allowed to go free.

Pentecost. When they celebrated the arrival of the early harvest.

Feast of Tabernacles. The festival of the last harvest, when they also remembered how for forty years the Jewish people had no permanent homes, but lived in tents, booths, tabernacles, as they wandered the Sinai Wilderness.

It was at the Feast of the Passover that our Lord Jesus was crucified, since he is the fulfillment of twelve hundred years of Passover sacrifices, looking forward to the offering up of the true Passover Lamb, whose blood sets us free from the Angel of Death and all the powers of darkness.

It was at the Feast of Pentecost that the Lord Jesus, from the Headquarters of the Universe, poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit upon the gathered believers, ushering in the Early Harvest. Three thousand people were baptized that day, as the gospel began its rapid spread across the empire.

And now in the 21st Century we are beginning to see evidence that the Lord Jesus is pouring out his Spirit with fresh power as a prelude to what may turn out to be the Feast of Tabernacles, the Final Harvest.

The entire 7th Chapter of the gospel of John is devoted to Jesus' visit to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. This account of Jesus' visit for the Feast of Tabernacles is John's vision of the End of the Age. In John's gospel we do not hear Jesus talking about wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, signs in the sky---as he describes the final days in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

In John, Chapter 7, Jesus focuses on one thing: the outpouring of the Spirit, beginning with Pentecost and culminating in the final outpouring at the Feast of Tabernacles, preparing the way for the Final Harvest and his return.

"I will soon be gone from here," Jesus says. "You will seek me, and you will not find me. Where I am, you cannot come."

"What's he talking about? What does he mean?" --- say the religious authorities.

Then, on the last day of the last feast, Jesus stands up and makes his last offer.

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

John 7:37-39

That invitation of Jesus began its fulfillment on Pentecost and has traveled down through the centuries, waiting for its ultimate fulfillment at the Feast of Tabernacles, beginning the Final Harvest.

When will the Final Harvest begin? How long will it go on? Is the spiritual awakening taking place worldwide at this hour, the beginning of the final outpouring of the Spirit?

Maybe, maybe not. Only God knows. But this much we do know: the professing Christian Church worldwide is going through a sifting and a shaking that's tearing it apart. Ugly secrets are being revealed. Dark things are coming to light. Masks are coming off. Not just in the Catholic Church or the Lutheran Church or the Anglican Church, or the Baptist Church. All the churches. As Peter has said, "Judgment begins at the household of God."

And while the fleshly foundations are crumbling in all the churches, God is pouring out his Spirit with more abundance and power than at any time since the first outpouring at Pentecost. And it may be that the fellowship where you worship is beginning to taste it.

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

You want a closer walk with God? Come to the fountain and drink. Come and receive for yourself a fresh outpouring of God's Spirit. It has never been easier to receive this gift than now. What's happening over the earth is doubtless reaching you as you read these words. Don't miss out.

Who of us does not want a closer walk with God? A closer walk with God is not something you earn or develop like a skill. To be able to play the piano it takes time and faithful practice. It doesn't happen instantly.

But a closer walk with God is something that you simply enter. It's like walking through a door into the waiting arms of God. That's who Jesus is: Jesus is God with his arms open, standing in the doorway, saying, "Come."

You walk through the door and you put yourself at his disposal.

"Here I am, Lord. You call the shots, and I will obey."

Once you do this----and mean it---you discover that the words of Jesus are no longer words on a printed page. They are aliveâ€¦speaking to youâ€¦speaking in youâ€¦speaking through you.

As you act on those words which Jesus is speaking in you, you find that he's walking at your side, he's dwelling in your soul. He's alive in you!

The Feast of Tabernacles. The last feast, foreshadowing the last outpouring of the Spirit before the last harvestâ€¦

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

There it is. The open door to a closer walk with God. All you have to do is step through. Tomorrow, when you get up, you step through it again.

Do this every day, and your close walk with God will be sustained every day until the Final Day.

"If any one thirst, let them come to me and drink."

So come!