

“Conversations with Harry Reeder and Bruce Stallings”

Part Nine

May 17, 2020 • Sunday Evening

We have decided to open up this Q & A to all questions and not just questions about this present distress so that is the reason for our title change. Even though we have been able to gather on the Lord’s Day morning with strict health and social distancing we are waiting for the right time to gather on the Lord’s Day evening when we have figured out the best way to do that due to the current pandemic. So in the meantime we will continue with the Q & A time, at least for the near future.

The devotional thought today is that in the Christian life due to living in a broken world we have to deal with challenges, sorrows, adversity, pestilence, crisis, failures and all of that, yet it is a life of joy. Why is it that our joy overrides and informs the experiences of all these things we have to deal with in a broken world? I love that the Bible says in Luke 10:20 that we are to rejoice that our names are written in heaven (the Book of Life). That is our greatest joy to know that we have life in Christ so that we can live this life for Christ and Christ will guide us and go with us in this life as we offer our lives to Christ, in anticipation with eternal life with Christ. Our joy is even multiplied because we realize it’s all because of the sovereign grace of God that saved us when we were sinners – when we were yet helpless and enemies of God, Christ redeemed us. Now we have the joy of serving Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and lives.

We have had a little taste of that joy today as we were able to assemble back together in gathered worship at the church.

Bruce: Yes it was a joy and I’d like to get your candid thoughts on what it was like for you to finally have people in our church, even though it was still limited?

Harry: People have asked me how it felt after a couple of months to finally get to preach in front of a bigger group of people, but preaching in front of my wife Cindy is quite a challenge to begin with. She is gracious but she does give me my critique.

On the one hand it has created anticipation when we can, without any modifications, be able to assemble, but on the other hand I was very encouraged the way our people exhibited the desire to be together. Of course there were still some that due to health reasons in all this could not be there and are grateful for the live streaming of the services yet rejoicing in the journey back to a Biblical full orbbed, full throated, robust embracing of our mission to worship God to reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ.

We have to step forward now to be able to return to the fullness of that. We haven’t stopped doing that but we have attempted to honor the Lord by appropriately responding to the guidelines of the government during these last two to three months. I had a lot of joy not only seeing people making wise decisions of whether or not to come but also the people who came and the way they responded. This is certainly a work in progress.

To see people walk in and see the six foot markers which we are doing to help them, but elders are not going to go and measure if you’re all on the marker. Yes we are telling the health impaired and the older people to be careful, make wise decisions but we’re not going to ask for your birth certificate or something like that. We trust God’s wisdom with God’s people to make the right decisions, but on the other hand we feel it’s absolutely important that we pay attention

to the people who have exhibited, not only their expertise but their trustworthiness as they have given us these guidelines.

In some cases we have attempted to go beyond that. For instance, when it was said to mark off every other pew it wasn't really the six feet distance so we went to every third pew. That actually comes to six feet nine inches so we're covered. It was so encouraging to see how the staff helped everyone and how those coming in were doing what they knew was right, abiding by the health guidelines that were in place, as a step in the journey back to gathering together on the Lord's Day, while still learning from this experience and expanding our ministry in this experience at the same time.

Bruce: The congregation really did a wonderful job in serving each other while maintaining the social distancing. I so appreciate all the behind the scenes that went on to help make this happen but just watching people worship was incredible especially since for the last eight weeks or so we would have eight on the platform and two out in the congregation – your wife and Jason. Just like Cindy and Jason represented the 4300 members, this smaller congregational gather still represents all those people at home and the heart for worship.

Harry: In the last eight weeks the ones who were leading in worship would go and sit in the pews so they also represented the 4300, but now we are moving forward in measured steps. As we continue to move forward we will update our website, send out mailings and through podcasts will keep people informed how things with be. We are not going to lead in a way where you become dependent on every thought about us. We're going to try and lead trusting God's Spirit to lead you. Here is your motivation – We want to love the Lord well, love one another well and love our neighbor well. If we are doing that then we'll do it in a particular way. We are not going to resort to shaming people who don't quite do it the way we should nor are we going to use our moments to make some political statement. We are here to worship the Lord, honor the Lord, honor our principles of being submissive to the government and assembling together to the best of our abilities to the praise of God and the carrying out of the mission of Briarwood. That mission is for God's glory we are committed to worshipping God, reaching Birmingham to reach the world for Christ.

Bruce: Our first question kind of goes along with this. As soon as the governor opened up the meeting of large gatherings, restaurants and businesses, I think highway 280 began to resemble the old 280 with all the cars out and about. As we see people starting to get our more they are beginning to make all kinds of decisions so the question is, how do we as Christians process and make decisions for ourselves and how do we respond when others make different decisions? We have all been given the same advice yet we make different decisions than others.

Harry: Love the Lord with your decisions. Live under the eye of God. Answer to the Lord for the way that you respond to this. Love your neighbor well for we want to be instruments of encouragement and assets, not liabilities in one another's lives. Love one another well and doing this we have to learn to give the judgment of charity. There are certain people that have certain convictions about if, when and how that wear a mask and there are certain people that don't. If others are making decisions where you might make a stricter than or not as strict as they do, it's not time for you to judge their heart. I'm hearing how in some of the secular communication people are belittling others because they don't do it the way the elite tell us to do it and that's just

unbecoming. If you are uncomfortable with some others decisions then don't be around them physically and then perhaps you can call them to work through whatever it is you need to work through with them. Just make wise decisions but there is no need to shame others. Model for people how to love the Lord, their neighbor and one another. Do things sensibly, rightly and Godly in this present age. Be prudent but don't panic. Be fearless but faithful. Trust God but don't tempt God. These are the things that ought to guide us in the process. It's not that you're trusting the mechanisms or the data or this or that but trust the Lord and use all of those things to make the right decisions.

Bruce: I love to live a simple life but one restaurant may not operate the way another would. There have been times I will go to a restaurant to pick up a take-out order but as I look at the way they handle things I'm not comfortable with it so I will go to another one where I like the way they handle things. We can't be too simplistic with it, where we'll have to make constant decisions and that was one of our objectives for this Sunday morning gathered worship. We wanted to give a model that was handled well and help people feel safe. If there was something we might have done that made you feel uncomfortable we'd like to know about it.

Harry: I have loved seeing how our staff are working together in all this and not against each other. We are not shaming or bullying people. In moments like this, it can you unite if everyone is moving toward the same objective, but if your objective is you then it tears it up. In 99.9 percent of it all it has been a blessing to walk through this in our congregation and with the leadership of this church.

Bruce: We have several questions now that are so encouraging the way the question is set up before it's asked. Like one question starts, *we've been studying the Bible together as a family* and those are great habits to be formulating in families so please keep this up.

Harry: A number of the questions also reveal that a number of people are also going through the one year Bible during these times of quarantine, because a number of questions came from the book of Judges and that would happen in the reading of that Bible around this time.

Bruce: This question comes from a family Bible study and it has to do with the second coming of Jesus in the book of Revelation. When Jesus returns what will Jesus look like and how will everyone see Him?

Harry: So the question from what they read is really, will it be literally or metaphorical. Please read the passage this is from.

Bruce: The passage being referred to is Revelation 1:4-7 which says [4] *John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, [5] and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.*

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood [6] and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. [7] Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

Harry: My answer to whether it is metaphorical or literal is yes. Jesus is literally coming in His glorified body and His return is assured at the right time in God's plan. That is a literal reality physically accomplished.

The language in the book of Revelation is apocalyptic and by definition that means it's symbolic, metaphorical and allegories. Things are in this book that are giving pictures. Numbers are used symbolically in this book like 7, 10, 12 and 144,000. It also gives pictures of Jesus throughout this book. It is like when you read the Proverbs 31 woman for when you begin to think about the description of her neck, face etc. and draw it out it won't be a very pretty woman but it gives a picture of a beautiful woman metaphorically that awakens an understanding in our mind of her.

Note the plural in the Revelation passage, *He is coming in the clouds*, and then go back in other places of the Bible where cloud is mentioned. First of all, He is coming with the Shekinah glory of the Holy Spirit just as He was received up into the cloud which I believe is referring to the Holy Spirit's glory that He then sends forth to dwell within you, but notice the plural of clouds. The Bible tells us that with Jesus now is a cloud of witnesses and I Thessalonian says they are coming with Him when He returns. The Bible also tells us that the angels are referred to as a cloud of the presence before the Lord. So I believe this passage is referring to angelic affirmation, the shout of the trumpet, the arch angel, He will be surrounded with the cloud of Shekinah glory and the cloud of witnesses but that word cloud is a metaphor to give you a picture as you work your way through the Scriptures.

In apocalyptic literature you can know when it's symbolic and metaphorical but it doesn't mean it's not literal. It is literal that there is a second coming of Christ and then there is the picturesque communication of what that will look like, feel like and what the experience will be. Also it says *every eye will see Him* and that is literal. *The nations will wail and lament* is also literal. We are told at the Judgment Seat that everyone will have to bow. Some have bowed in salvation before the Judgment Seat but all will bow in that Day and will lament their sins even though their rebellion will continue. So this passage is giving a literal experience with a metaphorical picturesque language that takes us deeper into the text as well as giving us the experience of that Day when it occurs.

Bruce: This same family, after you preached on the four in the fiery furnace from Daniel, asked in Revelation 1 it describes Jesus having feet like burnished bronze refined in the furnace, so does this relate to Jesus in King Nebuchadnezzar's furnace?

Harry: I don't think so although I can understand why it may be thought of from this. When it says 'burnished bronze in the furnace' that is referring to the fact that Jesus as the Son of Man learned obedience in His suffering. God sovereignly uses adversity to refine us, burnish us, polish us and to develop us, which was also true of Jesus in His humanity (Hebrews 5:8). So when the Son of Man (not Jesus in His Deity) is lifted up you will see that in His feet His experiences in the Incarnation, He matured as He grew in wisdom, stature, favor with God and favor with man (Luke 2:52). So that is referring to the glory and majesty of the Messiah, this coming King, as Son of God and Son of Man, all that He is and all that He has experienced.

In the fiery furnace where Jesus went to be with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego where they weren't singed, had no odor of smoke or anything, I believe is referring to the complete deliverance that Jesus gives to His people when He descended into hell on the cross. I

will be starting a series of sermons on the Apostles' Creed and I will address further what the phrase 'He descended into hell on the cross' means.

Bruce: Earlier was the reference that people were going through the one year Bible at this time and were in the book of Judges so the question is several times it says in Judges that God spoke to Israel, so does the Lord speak directly to the congregation of Israel or is He speaking through a Prophet or priest?

Harry: I'm going to give this answer in two ways. One, the Bible says in Romans 10:17 that faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ. Jesus says in John 10:27 that 'My sheep know My voice and they follow Me' and this is not new revelation for God's revelation has ceased with the Bible. Genesis to Revelation – don't add or subtract – but Jesus speaks to the hearts of His people through a human mechanism of either reading, preaching, and/or hearing of the Word of God in illumination

So what about divine revelation? It's the same thing where God speaks through means – He has a medium of communication. The book of Hebrews gives a good understanding of this where God has finally spoken in His Son. Hebrews 1:1–2 says *[1] Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.*

God used visions, dreams, angels and sometimes directly i.e. Moses on Mount Sinai. It is God speaking to people through means. That is what we have the doctrine through inspiration where the Holy Spirit works through Apostles and Prophets, fully human means, but God is the Author of all authors, because God can't err and if He did then we would get an errant Word. The Word given through the Old Testament was given through means as God communicated through the Prophets. Remember the Scripture is its authoritative interpreter. The other texts tell us God did this by Prophets. His means were things such as dreams, visions or angels but He spoke to His people through Prophets.

Now that revelation is finished He now speaks to people through the preaching of His Word so that faith comes by hearing and hearing the Word of Christ. It is not new revelation but revelation now given with the Holy Spirit blessing the preaching of His Word through illumination so we can see and understand who our Savior is, what our Savior has done and what He calls us to do with sound doctrine as the foundation of our life.

Bruce: I remember years ago you said to me, Harry, that you were never more accurate than your preaching, teaching or sharing than when you're reading the Word of God as He is speaking through you to His people.

Harry: In the prayer of illumination I give during Lord's Day worship I say something like "Lord, please overwhelm the inadequacies of the preacher and overwhelm and encourage the reception of hearer. Holy Spirit, You do something in illumination that makes what You did in revelation through Prophets and Apostles profitable for Your people."

Bruce: Another question is, where does the book of Ruth fall in the timeline of Judges?

Harry: That is a great question. Ruth has been written to let us know as a reminder and instruction that the work of salvation is going to go to the Gentiles, to all the nations, as this Gentile woman, Ruth, is brought to saving faith in the promises of God that are fulfilled in the Promised One, Jesus Christ. This book also talks to us about the Christian life. It gives us a picture of the difference between the land of Moab and the field of Boaz. One of the primary things is it not only points to the redeeming work of Christ as pictured through the kinsman redeemer, Boaz, but it also gives us the line of redemption.

Rahab, a Gentile harlot who was converted was married to Salmon. They would have a son Boaz who was given the faithful Gentile woman Ruth. From that lineage will come David and from David's lineage will come Jesus. The book of Ruth did take place in the day of the judges but it is not known during which judge this book took place. I can certainly guess but I really don't know. I'm hesitant to even guess.

I do know it took place after a famine in the land that was sovereignly used of God to show the inadequacies of Ruth's father in law, who then takes his family from where he was appointed to be in that area of Bethlehem, to the land of Moab. He and his sons do not make the trip back as they are disciplined out but Naomi and Ruth come back. When they come back we get that great statement of faithfulness from Ruth to Naomi in Ruth 1:16–18 which says *[16] But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. [17] Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you."* *[18] And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.* Ruth is then brought into the line of redemption with Boaz as the kinsman redeemer who takes her in and cares for her, from which we ultimately get Christ.

I want to take this answer one step further. I do not think this book was written in the days of the judges. I believe it was written in the days of the divided kingdom where there were ten tribes/kingdoms that had begun to move into apostasy and the two tribes – Benjamin and Judah – at that time were seeking to be faithful. These two would later go into apostasy as well. I believe Ruth was written in the that divided time as a Biblical, historical event that is going to be used as a call to repentance and to reunite the kingdom but the kingdom was not reunited yet we are given the story behind the story that will lead to the first king of the kingdom, Saul. Then the king Samuel establishes is David by the appointment of God, then Solomon and then the divided kingdom as the book is written somewhere in there.

Bruce: The last question for this time is, what are a few of your favorite passages that you give that give hope, encouragement and comfort during times like this?

Harry: These are the verses I go to in our Word of pardon on the Lord's Day. I'm such a sinner saved by grace that the Gospel words of pardon are so important to me. Secondly, the promises of victory over sin in this life mean much to me. I'm not saying you become sinless but God's grace does enable you to sin less. I am not where I want to be but praise God I'm not where I used to be. Here are some of those verses.

Titus 2:11–14 says *[11] For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to*

redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

I love this passage. It shows the past grace – I’m saved. It shows the present grace – I’m being saved from the practice of sin. The future grace is I’m looking for Christ where I’ll be saved from the presence of sin.

I love all of Romans 8 which says [1] *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* [2] *For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.* [3] *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,* [4] *in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* [5] *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.* [6] *For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.* [7] *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.* [8] *Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

[9] *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.* [10] *But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.* [11] *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

[12] *So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.* [13] *For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.* [14] *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.* [15] *For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”* [16] *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,* [17] *and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

[18] *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* [19] *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.* [20] *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope* [21] *that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.* [22] *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.* [23] *And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* [24] *For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?* [25] *But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

[26] *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.* [27] *And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.* [28] *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* [29] *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might*

be the firstborn among many brothers. [30] And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

[31] What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? [32] He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? [33] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. [35] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [36] As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” [37] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [38] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I also love Psalm 1 which I think is the beatitudes of the Old Testament that undergirds the beatitudes of the New Testament. Psalm 1:1–6 says [1] *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [2] but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

[3] *He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. [4] The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.*

[5] *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; [6] for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.* This is a glorious blessing of a tree bearing fruit in its season and whatever he does for the Lord in the world he prospers.

I have many more favorite passages of Scripture but these are to name but a few. Revelation 1:5 is another favorite which says, [5b] *To Him who loves us (present tense) and has freed us from our sins by his blood,* where sin has no dominion over us. I still have sin living in me but because of Christ I don't live under the dominion of sin.

I'd like to remind you that I'm currently doing a series on the Apostles' Creed and remember every true Christian believes more than the Apostles' Creed but never believes less. This creed is a good foundation.

This first Sunday we were able to gather together on Lord's Day worship with social distancing since the start of the COVID quarantine and it gave me the opportunity to look all my elders and friends in the eye and realize we can do a one hour service together, praise the Lord! I don't think it felt chopped up or chopped off and God really blessed it and for that we are really grateful. It was a wonderful joy to get to see God's people worship the Lord. Those who couldn't be with us were with us through the live streaming with the next best possible connection that we could.

Bruce: We do appreciate all who came to worship and abided by the parameters that were set. Please continue to submit your questions to askthepastor@briarwood.org.