

Christ is the Mystery no 135

Christian Life no 16

The Role of a Shepherd pt 1

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This morning we are going to go back and review something we missed in our study of Christ is the Mystery and read from paragraph 43 where brother Branham said, "Love one another above everything. Love one another. Don't... No matter what the devil tries to say... Now, you're all one great, big, sweet group now, but remember my warning. See? Satan won't let that stay that way. No, sir. He'll shoot everything, if he has to bring somebody in to make his target. He'll bring some critic or unbeliever in, set him down, and cause him to fellowship with you under the quietness and things. Then he will shoot that guy with some kind of poison stuff, and he'll start through the church with it. Don't you take sides with it. Don't you have nothing to do with anything else. You stay right loving and sweet and kind to one another. Pray for that man that he'll be saved too, or that woman, ever who it is. Just pray for them and stick one with another and **stay with your pastor**. See? He's the shepherd and you give him respects. He'll lead you through, cause, he's ordained of God to do so.

44 Now, do you remember that? **The enemy will come**. And when he does, **just cling that much closer together**. And the one that the Devil is using for an enemy will either get out or come in and be one of you. That's all. **Don't never clan among one another or talk, make yourself clannish;** we are one. I couldn't say, "**Left hand, I'm mad at you; I'm going to take you away 'cause you're not a right hand.**" He's my left hand. I want him to stay there. Even the little tip of my finger, **I want it to stay right there**, every little part of my body stay right there. And **God wants us as a Body of believers to stay right exactly with one another, right it with one another**.

Oh, those words are so prophetic, and so beautiful to hear this morning. and being that he is speaking of the pastor as a **shepherd**, I thought this morning we should look at the role of what a Good Shepherd really is, because I think some might have a misunderstanding concerning what a true Shepherd has been defined and how he is to act according to the role that God calls him to do. And I hope by the end of this sermon, we all might realign our own expectations with the expectations that God set forth when he assigned the role model for what a True **shepherd** should be. So His Son Jesus gave us that example to follow. And He is the Great shepherd of our souls.

As a shepherd we need to look only to Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd for our role model. We need to see the pattern in Jesus for what a Good Shepherd is.

So for our first reading from God's Word let's turn to **John 10:11** and we read, "**I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep in His care**".

That means his life is not his own. He sacrifices his own welfare and the welfare of his family to lovingly care for the flock that God has placed him over. As our Good Shepherd Jesus said in **John 17:19** **And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth**.

And we see where brother Branham explained this as a laying aside of things in his own life that he would have loved to do for himself, so that he could care for the needs of those He was mentoring.

Brother Branham told us that this meant that Jesus wanted a family but laid it aside for the sake of the twelve to spend all his available time to teach and instruct them. He wanted children, he wanted a wife, he wanted all that life afforded but laid it aside for the sake of the brethren. That is our role model for a Good shepherd.

God's wrapped gift 60-1225 P:55 56 *I think one of the most pathetic Words that Jesus ever said, was when He said, "**Father, I sanctify Myself, that they might be sanctified.**" In other words, **He had a right; He was a man. He had a right to a home; He had a right to a family.** He was man, as much man as you are or I am, as much human in His manhood as we were. He had a right to it. **But He was training twelve men that was going to take the Gospel to all the world, so He sanctified Himself for their sake. "I sanctify Myself for their sake": a Gift of God, keeping Himself sanctified. Oh, gifts of God, you people who claim that you've received His Spirit, keep yourself sanctified (Yes, sir.); keep away from the things of the world; be sanctified.***

Isn't that beautiful? Jesus as the great Shepherd led the example for all shepherds that we might also sanctify ourselves for the benefit of the sheepfold.

That is what I chose to do 32 years ago when I came to Cincinnati to Shepherd this little flock. I've chosen to sanctify my life for you for the past 32 years that you might benefit. I know that some of you were not here back then, but there are two families that were and still are here, right Br. Steve? And there are some other families that have known me and have watched my life for all that time, and they know it's been consistent not wavering.

And over the years, I've turned down many 6 figure income opportunities to remain here with you as your shepherd. I've also made a commitment to God for the past 32 years to be alone with Him from 7:30 pm on Saturday night until the sermon He wants you to hear is ready and complete. Sometimes that means not leaving my office until 2 or 3 am Sunday morning.

I haven't failed God in this commitment, and even if my family has to travel home from a fellowship of great distance away, I study in the car while my wife drives. Like last week, where we did not get home until 3 am from a wedding in Tennessee. Other ministers stayed over that night and traveled home on Sunday. I can't do that, I would feel that I failed you not being at my post of duty. When I have gone overseas to hold minister meetings, I have tried never to be gone more than one Sunday service.

As Jesus said to the Pharisees who denied His role of Messiah, "*where have I failed to do one thing that God spoke of me to do?* So too, I ask as your shepherd, *Where have I failed in sanctifying my life for your sake? Where have I not set my life aside for you?*

In studying further our great role model Jesus as the Great Shepherd, we can turn to **John 21.**

John 21:15-17 *When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you really love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep".*

Notice there were two major focuses Jesus gives Peter in this example of what a shepherd should do.

First Jesus says first "**feed my lambs.**" and lambs need to eat the right food in the right kind of field, and the food must be fresh, and healthy. Old grass can turn sour in their stomachs, so they need to be led to where the food grows fresh and clean, and where they can eat in safety. Because you all know when you eat on a nervous stomach the food even though good can make you sick to your stomach. They need Spiritual food in due season if they are to fully mature from lambs to sheep. *"And man does not live by bread alone but by every Word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."*

And so we read in **2 Timothy 3:16** *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

You know when we look at what vitamins, herbs and minerals do for you, usually there is a compliment of things that each nutrient produces for the body. And we see that the Scripture will produce, (1) Doctrine, (2) Reproof, (3) Correction, (4) Instruction in right wise-ness, and right living, that we may become mature and thoroughly equipped and ready to do the works of Christ. Good works.

The next thing Jesus told Peter that he must do as a good shepherd is to "**take care of my sheep**". That means the Shepherd is to do everything he can think of to make sure the sheep are healthy and safe. As the Scripture tells us in Ephesians 4:

In **Ephesians 4:11** Paul lays out for us the duties of the five fold ministry where he says, *"And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, that means for the equipping and maturing of the saints, which are the sanctified ones. And also "for the work of the ministry, That is the same word work that is used of John 14:12 which simply means labor. for the labor of the ministry. For the actions or acting out the role of the ministry. "for the edifying or the building up of the body of Christ: For how Long? 13 Till we all come in the unity of The faith, And remember in verse 8 he already told us their is only one faith and one Lord, so the one faith is of the One Lord, and faith is a revelation, so we are talking about until we all come in the unity of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect or fully mature man, unto the measure of the stature (character) of the fulness (or fulfilling) of Christ:*

What it takes to overcome all unbelief 60-0729 P:15 *First is apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, pastors, those five God-given gifts in the church. So each of you people, who has a godly pastor, has a gift from God in your church, a shepherd. "Pastor" means "a shepherd," to watch over the flock, to teach them the Word of God. Then these other nine different spiritual gifts should be operating in the church to keep the church clean. Like the Ananias and Sapphiras and so forth, the Spirit of God rise up and call somebody out and tell them they're living wrong, and rebuke that sin openly, and that's what the Holy Spirit is in the church for, to keep the church clean and ready for the coming of the Lord. We believe that.*

Now, remember, brother Branham taught us in his sermon, **Greater than Solomon is here 62-0628 P:24** *Sin is unbelief. They do these things. They commit adultery; they tell lies, and they do these things. It's the attributes of unbelief. If they were believers, they wouldn't do those things. That's... They're unbelievers. That's the reason they do it. It's just the attributes proving that they are unbelievers. For Jesus... The Scripture plainly teaches us that "He that believeth not is condemned already." See? You can't even get started. So the most horrible thing there is, is unbelief.*

Therefore when Paul commanded the elders in **1 Timothy 5:20** *Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.* Paul wasn't saying those who just commit secret sexual sins rebuke before all, but as we just read from brother Branham, those who lie as well, because he told us to lie is an attribute of unbelief. And the Greek word used here for **sin** in this verse means to miss the mark (and so not share in the prize), and the purpose of the rebuke before all is to stir the people so they will not be so callous as to lie to one another and thus to the Holy Ghost.

And So the Five fold ministry is for one purpose as Paul says in Ephesians 4:14 *14 That we henceforth be no more children who are tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine,*

Look at the beautiful poetic words Paul uses here. *every wind of doctrine, like a reed being shaken in the wind.* And Jesus told us, *The wind blows and no one knows where it comes from or where it's going.* So the use of wind here in winds of doctrine suggests an invisible force moving objects around at its will. Almost like demonic or spirit possession. You can't see when a person has been possessed by a spirit, but Jesus also told us by their fruits you can know them.

After Paul uses that illustration of the people being driven like the wind by false doctrine, he becomes more descriptive and says, *by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;*

And notice he tells us how these winds of doctrines come in. They don't come in like a bull dozer, they come in by "*The sleight of men*". Now, we use this word "*sleight*" when we use the phrase "*sleight of hand*", which speaks of a person that is so crafty and deceitful in the way they deal out cards. Now, brother John Shaw used to do a bit of magic before he got born again, and before he understood the source of it, so he knows what I'm talking about. There are very deceptive maneuvers with the hand that can deal

you out exactly what card they want you to have. And so Paul is using this beautiful poetic language here to paint a picture for us of how sly these men are who bring in these winds of doctrine that are meant to deceive. Notice, *by the sleight of men, and **cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;***

So deception is not a mistake, its a willful thing. Their deceptive doctrine are not an accidental thing. They are willful and malicious for the purpose of deception. They are not to draw you to Christ, they are designed to draw you away from Christ and to them.

The seducer doesn't need to use force to seduce, they use cunning and pleasant words to lure with. They buy gifts and use flirtatious words to lure young girls. But Paul tells us here that the role of the five fold ministry is to bring the people to a condition of maturity in the Word so that no slicker could come in and take them off the word.

Now, keep in mind we are speaking of the role of a Shepherd, of which the five fold ministry are shepherds. Then Paul says, *15 **But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things,*** (notice we are to grow up into him.) *which is the head, even Christ:*

Have you ever seen a body where the head didn't fit the body? Well, Paul is telling us we have to grow up in order for the head which is Christ is to fit perfectly with His body.

*16 **From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted*** (which means driven together) *by that which **every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.***

This is so beautiful here. He speaks of the whole body joined together, driven together, not split apart and every joint doing its own thing. But with one purpose, one goal, working together for the benefit of the body. Not each member walking after their own desires, and doing what each individual member thinks is best for itself, but he's talking about the body working in unison with one purpose and one motion, and one effort.

Finally He said, "*feed my sheep*". Remember, these are the sheep of the Lord, not the sheep of any minister. We are caretakers of sheep that belong to the Master. The point is that we are to move beyond feeding the lambs milk to feeding the sheep solid food. He says, *according to the effectual working.* According to the desired result, *in the measure of every part,* not just the pastor, but every part working together for the body. And then in doing this it will "*make increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love*". In other words it's all about building up the Body to work together.

In foot ball, the running back doesn't stand a chance if he has no one blocking for him. And the quarter back can not drop back to pass the ball to a receiver unless he has men blocking for him. And the problem is that you have nothing but chaos when everyone wants to strip the ball away from the pastor and run with it when they were not called to run with it. The quarterback chooses before the play begins who will do the running and who will run the pass plays. And he alone has that option. And yet why do the church not understand that the body of Christ must function as a body functions where all direction comes from the head, the quarterback of the team.

Now, isn't that the way it is meant to be? It takes the entire body of Christ working together to bring the reflection of Jesus Christ to the world.

I would like to read to you now, from **1 Thessalonians** chapter **One** for a few minutes to show you the beautiful wording that the apostle Paul uses to express how he so longed to see the Life of Christ manifesting itself in the body of Christ.

Notice how Paul begins in verse *1. Paul, Silvanus,^[a] and Timothy to the church gathering in Thessalonica, those living in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus the Anointed.*

Isn't that beautiful. Not I Paul, but the three of us who are working together in the working of the ministry, to you who are living in God the Father and who are reflecting the Lord Jesus Christ's Anointing.

So Who is the anointed? You are the anointed ones living in the Anointed One.

He says, "*May grace and peace be yours from God our Father and the Lord Jesus the Anointed.*"

You see where Paul is coming from. It wasn't about Him. It wasn't about what He was doing for God. It wasn't about His ministry. It was about them. It's not about me, it's about you. A shepherd is not about him, it's all about his love for the sheep. He feeds them because he cares for them. he cares for them because he loves them. Eternal life is living for others. It's the expression of God-Life. It's the Expression of God-Love.

Then after Paul's intro from his missionary team, he says, ² *We* (not I, but we, this is a shared thanksgiving here. *We always thank God for all of you in our prayers.*

Notice here, *we always thank God for you.* Not just when you scratch my back and I scratch yours. But this is a constant. Always. Not just when the preacher is patting you on the back, but when he's tearing off your hide as well. We always thank God for you in our prayers.

Hmmm, in our prayers...plural. You know that is something the early church did that is almost unseen in our homes any more, and yet we are at the cross roads where time is blending into eternity. And how much more we should be in constant prayer even as we see the end approaching.

Now, I would like to read verse 3 from the Wuest translation. Here Paul says, *Remember unceasingly, your works which are produced and characterized by the faith which is yours, And your toils which have been motivated and characterized by your Divine and self sacrificial Love, and your patient endurance under trials which finds its source in your hope which rests in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of God, even our Father. Since we know brethren that you have always been loved by God and at the present time are the objects of His Affection, and are the subjects of His Divine Selection in which God in Sovereign Grace selected you out for Salvation.*

In other words, he is saying, *Your Faith, Your Revelation shapes the character of work you do, and your expression of faith comes forth from you as a mature fully decveloped Self Sacrificial Love which is Divinely inspired.*

Your actions on behalf of the true faith, The Revelation of Jesus Christ, and your tireless toil of love, and your unfailing, unwavering, unending hope in our Lord Jesus the Anointed in the presence of God our Father have **put you consistently at the forefront of our thoughts.**

Look at how Paul is extolling this group of believers for what they are doing. It seems in this hour, everyone wants to lay their religion on the lap of the Apostle or pastor or evangelist or teacher. Let him do our religion for us. Let him listen to the tapes for us, let him search the word for us, let him do the praying for us, But not this little group that Paul is addressing. He says, (1) *Your actions*, (2) *your tireless toil of love*, and (3) *your unfailing, unwavering, unending hope in our Lord Jesus the Anointed before God our Father* (those works of Christ living and expressing itself out from you) **have put you consistently at the forefront of our thoughts.**

Oh, my wouldn't you love to see this little church here in this Omega time, reflect the glory that the little group that Paul is speaking of here in Thessalonica in the Alpha?

Listen to verse ⁴ *O brothers and sisters, loved by God, we know He has chosen you.* ⁵ *And here is why: what you experienced in the good news we brought you, was more than words channeling down your ears; it came to you as a life-empowering, Spirit-infused message that offers complete hope and assurance!*

Oh, my, how I long to see this in all of you here in this little church. Notice the words he uses here. He says this Word I brought to you, it didn't run off your back like water off a duck. You didn't come to church and go home empty. You came expecting, and you were injected with Life, and that life empowers you to reflect the very Holy Spirit Life that lays within this Message.

Isn't that what we've been talking about. Didn't we read where brother Branham talked about this in Christ is the Mystery of God where he said,

Christ is the mystery 63-0728 P:226 His Presence in the individual (that's each one of you) *with a personal a-vindication of Himself expressing Himself--the living Word that's promised for the day, expressing Itself through you, a vindication of the great revelation of God... Look, only in an individual, never in a group: an individual, not in a group, His identification is with an individual. You get that? Not with the Methodists, not with the Baptists, not the Presbyterian, not the Lutheran, not the Pentecostal, but as an individual. "I'll take one and leave one. I'll separate them." That's right. "There'll be two in the field; I'll take one and leave one. There'll be two in bed, and I'll take one and leave one." It's not a group. It is a personal vindication of a preganated child of God filled with the Holy Ghost, so surrendered to God that he don't care about anything else, and the Holy Spirit living Its Life, (not your life, *you are dead and your life is hid with God in Christ*. But it's His life he is speaking of) **pulsating through him**, showing the personal--personal vindication of the Word Itself expressing Itself to the people and to the world.*

Notice he says there will be two in the bed and God will separate them and take one and leave the other. Two in the field and God will take one and separate away the other. We're don't have a promise that you will come to church and go home empty? Oh, my how can we come to church and go home empty. This is not mechanics, brothers and sisters, the mechanics is the doctrine. This is the life in the seed. The seed can't do you any good until the Life in it is released. The grain must be ate to do you any good. You've got to take it inside in order for it to grow inside of you. Jesus promised us, "**he that hungers and thirst for righteousness shall be filled.**" Not might be, not if you go to church on Sunday and the sermon is up to your standard. He said you get what you come for. So if you are not getting filled, "**you are not hungering and thirsting for righteousness**". And righteousness is right-wise-ness.

Sheep can not blame the Shepherd if they go away empty, sheep can only blame yourself. There are brothers in here and all over the world who are feasting on what spiritual food we have here in due season. So my advice to you is to listen to brother Branham's tapes day and night, and you will get energized to this word, and you will come here to service and you will hear a confirmation of what you have been listening to all week.

Now, I believe All things work together for the good of them that Love God and are Thee called according to His purpose. I will take one and leave one. That's not our doing that is God's doing. The fan is in his hand and He's threshing out the wheat.

Christ is the mystery 63-0728 P:204 *And see, God Himself making Hisself known and pulsating Himself* (look at brother Branham's words here.) *pulsating Himself through the Life* (whose Life, God Himself pulsating His Life through your Life) *that you're a prisoner to Him now. You are His love prisoner. The world can laugh, make fun them, say, "Come on out." You could go, but you're a prisoner. The other women can act Hollywood, but not you; you're a prisoner. Amen. See, you're a prisoner to Christ. Other men can smoke and drink and carry on if they want to and call themselves Christians, deacons, and even preachers, but not you; you're a prisoner, a prisoner to the Word. Yes, sir. Yes, sir.*

Oh, brother a Love prisoner because it is His life pulsating out through your life and expression of God Life so the world can see Jesus. The appearing before the coming. he appeared so we can appear. Hallelujah.

Now, in getting back to **1 Thessalonians 1:5** *We lived transparently before you so that you would know what sort of people we truly are. we lived transparently before you* he says. We have phanerood ourselves before you. We manifested ourselves in our true identity in your presence for only one purpose, that you might know with a truth what sort of people we are.

And didn't Jesus tell us that is one attribute of a Shepherd? To live transparently before the people. Look, what you see in me is what you get. I do not do things in secret that I would not do in your presence. That would be hypocritical. When I do in secret I am fully aware that God sees me openly.

And if the Judge is here, the Bible says, "***The love of God constraineth us.***" Some people think this is preaching works or legalism. But this is preaching Love. The Love of God constrains us from living for self. The Love of God constrains us from the filthy habits of the world. The love of God constrains us from lying, and stealing, and cheating in business, and living a lie. This Love of God is the dynamics of God that is living Its life, His Life through you.

And Paul said the reason we live transparently in your presence and not in your presence is not for our sakes so you can say we are fine Christians, in order for you to lift us up and make a little kingdom for ourselves. Anyone who has kingdom building on their minds in this hour has a spirit not from God. He lives only for self. But we live for Christ and for your sake. Jesus said, I sanctify myself for their sake. Br. Branham said, I live so much like Jesus Christ that the ones having trouble believing me, might see enough of Christ in me that they will want what I've have. And isn't that your motive to sanctify yourselves as well.

We do not live like Christ and talk like Christ and act like Christ and do the works of Christ out of fear that if we don't we are not going to make it. We do and act and speak because we love our Father so much that all we want to do is please him.

Notice Paul's words. "***We did it for your sake,***" And because of this, what result did Paul see? What reward did Paul receive for his efforts? He tells us in verse ⁶***and you have modeled your lives after ours just as we are modeling ours after the Lord.***

Oh, how I want to just weep when I think of seeing Christ living so much in me that you see only Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and because of my life, it so affects your life that when people see you, they will only see ***Jesus Christ, the same yesterday today and forever*** living in you as Paul saw Christ living in that the little group and reflecting Christ to the world.

Notice he said, "***and you have modeled your lives after ours just as we are modeling ours after the Lord.***"

You know, brother Branham said people are not won to Christ by you preaching them a sermon, they are won to Christ by you living a sermon.

Hidden life with Christ 56-0213 P:52 *You know the best thing is to live a sermon instead of preach one, you know that. You're written epistles. And you can't do it in yourself; you can impersonate it for a little while, but your sins will find you out. You better just consecrate yourself to God and get on the inside, shut the doors behind you and burn every barrier there is behind you, and every bridge, and launch out. Amen. I know it's the truth; I know it'll work. If it hadn't been for that, I don't know what would become of me. That's right. But it ain't the people you are looking at then, it's Christ.*

Brother, that's not mechanics, that's dynamics! The very Life of Christ in you reflecting himself out from you. That's the spark that ignites the fuel any day of the week.

Then Paul says in verse 6. *You took to heart the word we taught with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, even in the face of trouble.*

He says, you took it to heart. You mediated upon what was being said. It wasn't just a sounding brass and tingling symbols. You came expecting and you went home filled. And you get what you come looking for. And if you are not getting fed, it is because of one of two things. Either it is not for you, or you let other things get in the way of your hearing.

Like brother Branham said, *Christ is the mystery 63-0728 P:233 Notice, All right. But all this mystery is revealed only as He promised to His Bride. Hell is against this truth of the revelation of this mystery. But the Bride is standing on it. That's Her stand. Why do you hunger, Church? Why do you thirst? It's the Father trying to reveal this hidden secret to you, but you let so many things get it out of you. You let your job, you let your wife, you let your husband, you let your children, you let the cares of the world, you let the--some pastor, you let somebody else get that out of you, when you know that way down in your heart you're a-thirsting, hungry. It's God trying to reveal it to you (See?), the revelation. The last day is here.*

If you are not getting fed, please don't blame the shepherd, he's brought you to the right field to eat. So don't let anything get between you and eating little sheep.

Now, remember, Paul was talking about how the people from their hearts longed to hear what Paul brought them, and as a result they saw Christ in Him so much they wanted what he had and they got what he had, because you get what you come for. If you come to be fed you will be fed. If you come to scrutinize God will give you plenty of that.

Now, notice the next verse what Paul says to them.

⁷As a result, (as a result of what? As a result of your longing, your hungering, your thirsting, your expecting and your seeing Christ. As a result of your taking your eyes off the vessel and focusing on the God who is using the vessel,) you have turned into a model of faith yourselves for all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸In fact, not only has the message of our Lord thundered from your gathering into Macedonia and Achaia, but everywhere we go, your faith in God is talked about so we don't even have to say a thing!

Oh, how tears ran down my eyes uncontrollably when I read this passage here. That is all I want for this little group here and those whom I've drawn my strength from around the world. Those of like precious faith in England, and Ireland, and Norway and Sweden, and Poland, and Australia, and New Zealand, and many countries all across Africa. To hear the testimony everywhere I go that *your faith in God is talked about so we don't even have to say a thing!*

⁹You see, they go on and on telling us the story of how you welcomed us when we were introduced to you; how you turned toward God and realigned your life to serve the one true living God—leaving your idols to crumble in the dust—¹⁰ and how you now await

*the return from heaven of His Son, whom He raised from the dead—namely, Jesus—**our rescuer from the wrath to come.***

When I think these thoughts, my heart wants to weep for joy to see Christ forming in you. May God bless you as we bow our heads in prayer.