

CRAZY- *Wise*

The Mindset of a “Peculiar” People

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CRAZYWise

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CHAPTER 1

MENTAL JOURNEY TO INNER PEACE

The Journey Begins

My initial journey as a believer began at the age of fourteen. My eldest sister, who had attended a recent revival meeting at a nearby church, had become a Christian or gotten “saved,” as they called it. True to kind, she started going to church often, reading her Bible and praying a lot. She even “spoke in tongues.” She was different, and in my opinion, she had certainly changed! She adopted some better habits, and she started hanging out with other individuals who also professed to be Christians. I was fascinated by what she was doing, and I wanted to be just like her. Hence, whenever I had free time, I started to spend more time at home instead of going to the neighbor’s or hanging out at my friend’s house.

It was mid-morning on a Saturday. I had just finished my chores, and everyone else had gone to my grandmother’s house to visit. I decided to sit in solitude and just mull over some things that were on my mind. The Christmas season was drawing near, but instead of thinking about presents or decorating, I was thinking about the end of the year and resolutions for the year ahead. Without deliberate intent, I started to talk out loud to God and tell him about my dreams, my hopes, and my desires. I talked about everything and anything that came to my mind. At first, it didn’t feel like anything special at all. If anyone had walked into the room, they would have seen me sitting there all alone and would have assumed that I was having the biggest conversation with myself.

Nonetheless, I kept talking, and suddenly, I was overwhelmed

with feelings of love, warmth, and gratitude, because I felt as if I was being embraced by God Himself. For the first time, I felt accepted, truly understood, and genuinely loved, without having to be politically correct or sophisticated. I had found a positive outlet and the greatest of all confidants. The One who didn't think I was weird or crazy, and The One who didn't try to talk me into downsizing my dreams to match my reality. The next step was so natural and so sincere; I don't think that I could ever duplicate it again. I asked God to forgive me for all my sins, and I asked Jesus to come into my heart. This made me feel extra good inside. As a matter of fact, I felt as if I could do anything. I was at peace with the world, and I felt as though I could genuinely love everyone. I truly believe that God was in that room with me, and I know that Jesus came into my heart that day. Since that time, I have been physically baptized or immersed in water twice. I was baptized at the age of fifteen because I was told I had to do so as a symbol of my faith. However, when I got baptized again years later as a mature believer, it was a conscious decision to signify the change in the season of my life as it relates to my faith walk and my renewed commitment to being a follower of Christ.

Reflections

The relationship I had with God and my Savior Jesus Christ during my early years as a Christian is a far cry from the relationship that I have with my Creator and my Savior today. During those years, I got to know God through the preachers or pastors of the churches that I attended or from watching and listening to the professing Christians in my immediate surroundings and the wider community. The truth is, I was not brought up in a Christian home. I was not taken to Sunday school, and I was not taught any biblical principles as a strict or specific way of living. However, I do recall that my mother was always admonishing my siblings and me with phrases like, "manners takes you through the world," "cleanliness is next to godliness," and "have respect for your elders." Furthermore, cheating, stealing, lying, and disobedience were never tolerated and always led to a spanking or some other form of punish-

ment. In retrospect, I realize that my mother, even though not a Christian, was reinforcing some watered-down biblical principles for living that had been handed down through generations of individuals who had heard about or believed but had never sought God for themselves.

Even though my mother did her best to instill some values that would cause her children to grow up to be decent citizens, it was all a toss-up, because at the end of the day, no matter how ‘normal’ or ‘good’ we may or may not have turned out, we all needed a Savior. Many people do not like to talk about the things they do not understand, and they most certainly do not want to talk about what happens after a person dies. As an enlightened believer, however, I now know that a person can live all of his or her life in denial of the existence of the Almighty God, but there is absolutely no human being who can guarantee that death is the end of all things or that the ‘soul’ of a person has a finite expiration date. Therefore, when an individual acknowledges the fact that there is life after death and that Almighty God is the judge who has ultimate control over what happens to the never-dying soul of a person, even a fool would realize that he needs a Savior.

Almighty God, in His amazing redemption plan for His creation, has orchestrated the great escape from eternal damnation for all humankind, by sending His only begotten Son to die for the sins of the world. As human beings, we believe we understand and know enough to question or criticize the character of Almighty God, who is so full of love and beauty; yet, He has created a place so utterly horrible and indescribable as Hell. First, our human minds cannot even begin to fathom and understand the ways of Almighty God. He is perfect and does all things well! Second, Hell was not created for humankind! Hell was specially designed as the ultimate, truly horrifying, and eternal punishment for Satan and other fallen angels or unclean spirits—the ones who have been wreaking havoc on humankind and the world for ages.

Finally, Jesus said that He went to prepare a place for those who believe in Him (John 14:3); so, whether that be the new heaven or the new earth (Revelation 21:1-7), the promise is that Christ’s followers will spend eternity in His presence. Unfortunately, any-

one who rejects Jesus as Lord and Savior has chosen to make Hell their destiny for eternity (Revelation 21: 8). Hell is a spiritual place of unfathomable torment and eternal separation from God. If we choose to live lives that lead us to this place, we cannot blame God. How can you rightly accuse someone of causing you to get wet or catch a cold in the rain after you were provided with an umbrella, a raincoat, a hat, and boots to use for your protection and you did not use them?

Muddling Through and Mucking Along

Over the years, I have gotten ‘drenched’ quite a few times, and I have certainly had my share of proverbial colds, all because I chose not to use what was given to me to use for my own protection or because I misused what was given to me for my own benefit. In those moments, I was always looking for someone or something to blame for the heartache or hardships that were ultimately self-inflicted.

It is very critical to note that ever since I became a Christian at the age of fourteen, my life has been a series of trial-and-error situations and quite a few questionable decisions. There were periods of days, months, and even a few years where my actions were very uncharacteristic of a true Christian. However, even though I did not fully understand what I was professing or what it meant to be a true Christian at the time, I know for sure that Almighty God Himself had and has saved me! I shudder to think what my life may have been or would be like today if God had not intervened when He did. Despite being a defeated Christian, living an unnecessary extended season as a victim, God never left me! All along, I was the one not paying attention to His boundless forgiveness and His amazing love for me. Therefore, I give God, the Holy Spirit, and my Savior Jesus Christ all the credit for every wonderful opportunity I have had and for every good, useful, and selfless thing that I have ever done. I also give God thanks for turning around all the things that were meant to destroy me and for creating beauty out of the ashes that could have been my life.

Fourteen was an age where I was still too young to grasp a full

understanding of the magnitude of who God is and what believing in Him meant for me. However, I was old enough to realize that my life without Christ would be a total waste and that I was headed to a place called Hell if I did not accept the Lord Jesus as my personal Savior and try to live for Him the best I could for the rest of my life. My past experiences have taught me that living for Christ is much easier said than done. However, the Holy Spirit has helped me to certainly realize that living for Christ is a reality that must be practiced and only gets better when we make a deliberate effort to live by faith. It is also imperative to realize that if or when we do not use the “gift of Jesus” as prescribed, we do so at the risk of damning our very souls.

As I alluded to earlier, the God and the Jesus that I got to know during my early years are certainly not the God and the Jesus that I know today. In retrospect, I must admit that during my early years as a Christian, I was in definite training to become a first-rate scribe or Pharisee. Jesus Himself would not have recognized me as a follower. It was as if I had forgotten that God had shown me mercy and rescued me from a definite path of self-destruction. I was an ignorant, hypocritical, judgmental and self-serving fool in so many ways, for far too long.

In John 10:27, Jesus states, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me.” As an immature believer, I had assumed that this was an automatic reality since being a Christian meant “follower of or believer in Christ.” I had yet to realize that recognizing and following God’s voice was not a “one-time” event but necessitates a deliberate relationship with the Holy Spirit, which would lead to a state of mind that would make me more susceptible to the voice and the call of God. It finally dawned on me that if a Christian does not make a conscious effort to immerse him or herself in God’s word and spend time seeking God, the voice of God will continue to go unheeded in that individual’s life. Therefore, that Christian would find him or herself being more in tune with humankind’s wisdom and traditions rather than the life-transforming power that comes from *really* hearing and following God’s voice. The impact of this realization was like scales falling away from my eyes to make visible all the truths that were already in plain sight.

Restless

During my early years as a Christian, I had become increasingly aware that there was more to me and my life than what I was doing and experiencing, but I seemed unable to tap into the Higher Power that would get me out of the rut that I was stuck in. Nonetheless, I thought that since I believed in Jesus and accepted Him into my heart as my Lord and Savior and tried my best to do what was right from that point onward, this meant that I had heard God's voice and was doing His will. However, the truth is, I was spiritually hard of hearing. Fortunately, God's voice began to infiltrate this impenetrable wall of oppression one fateful Sunday while I sat in church. Ever since then, I have begun to fully appreciate my place and purpose in this world as a follower of Christ.

Here's what happened. I was dutifully listening to the sermon when the following words suddenly invaded my thoughts: "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me for such a time as this." These words were so audible that it took a minute for me to realize that the pastor had not said them and that the sermon was not directly related to what I had just heard. Apparently, my mind had strayed. I had started to think about what I could and should be doing as a Christian in a society that seemed so determined to destroy itself. However, in my "lukewarm" or oppressed state, I was unable to appreciate the significance and the direct connection between these words and my thoughts. Instead, I became preoccupied and more concerned about where I had heard or read similar words before.

I felt compelled to locate this text in my Bible, and before the service ended that day, I had found the passage that I was looking for in the gospel of Luke. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the recovery of sight to the blind; to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19). I realized that Isaiah had prophesied these words about my Lord and Savior and that at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus declared that this prophecy was fulfilled in Him.

Locating the Scripture did not satisfy me as I thought it would. Instead, I began to feel haunted because I kept hearing the words that Jesus spoke at the beginning of His ministry, and I could not help feeling that these words meant something special and specific to me. At first, I prayed and asked for forgiveness because I thought that I was being blasphemous or presumptuous for identifying with a Scripture that was directly fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the words kept invading my thoughts, and I became so frustrated about the conflict in my mind that I started to cry at one point. In my lukewarm and ignorant state, I sincerely did not know what I was supposed to do with a Scripture that was already fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I read Isaiah 61 and Luke 4 repeatedly, trying to get a better understanding of what these words meant to me. I understood that these words epitomized Jesus' ministry on Earth, but as I mentioned, I was so spiritually deaf and blind that it took a while for me to realize that Jesus' entire and exact ministry was now the responsibility of His true followers. I did not permit myself to share what I was going through with any other human being because I am often predisposed not to trust or be satisfied with the advice or the well-intentioned explanations of other people. Therefore, I kept praying to God to help me and reveal to me exactly how I was supposed to respond or react to these words.

Finally, I felt led to embark on a spiritual quest where I fasted for a time, prayed constantly, and studied the scriptures intensely, fervently seeking answers and peace of mind for the inner turmoil that I was experiencing. This forty-day quest took place a few months after my thirty-first birthday. No other person knew what I was going through during the months prior or what I was really up to during these forty days. I can say without any doubt that the Holy Spirit helped me to keep it together and remain highly productive in every area of my life throughout the entire experience. Furthermore, my earnest quest for answers resulted in a spiritual transformation and state of enlightenment so phenomenal that I felt as though I had been awakened from a deep, long, and dark stupor.

Forgetting to Rest in Jesus

Before my spiritual awakening, I was a constant victim of religious affliction and condemnation either from myself or from the “well-meaning” Christians around me. I felt as though I had to be perfect in every way if I professed to be a Christian. I believed that since I “claimed” to have accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, I had to spend the rest of my life tiptoeing around as if “walking on eggshells.” The harder I tried to be perfect, the more mistakes I made and the louder the voice of accusation taunted my conscience. I believed that when I fell short of certain religious standards or made a mistake, I was not a good Christian and something was wrong with me. Maybe I was not even “saved” or a Christian at all. I compared myself to those individuals who seemed to have it all together or seemed to be having such good success with their Christian walk because it appeared as though they never lost their tempers or got caught up in the lusts of the flesh.

For years, I had failed miserably at being a “good Christian,” and I continued to fail in many areas, no matter how I proposed to do better over and over again. Some might ask, why try to be something that caused so much inner turmoil and made me feel so bad about myself when there were people who would accept me for who I was, just as I was? Well, the truth is, when I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior at the age of fourteen, I made a vow to serve Him for the rest of my life. It was a sincere, heartfelt promise, and my conscience kept reminding me of it. Furthermore, I continued to crave decency and order as well as right standing with my Heavenly Father despite my contrary actions. However, due to misguided teachings and beliefs, I was unable to keep my promise or live up to God’s standards, simply because I kept trying to do it all under my own strength. I had never grasped hold of the revelation knowledge that my righteousness and my ability to walk victoriously as a Christian required me to look to Jesus, trust in Jesus, hide in Jesus and depend on Jesus in all things for the rest of my life. However, the good news is that God had heard the sincere promise that I had made all those years ago, and He had been con-

tinually working behind the scenes to bring me to the point where I would eventually realize the gift and the purpose that was lying dormant within me all this time.

Imagine the inner turmoil of an individual who claimed to have accepted the gift of salvation at the age of fourteen and, many years later, was still having difficulty with the laws and standards of Christian living. I believed that after all this time, I should have been “perfect,” or at least I should have mastered the basic principles of Christian living. Unfortunately, I was still a religious mess, condemned by the impossible standards that I had set for myself or had allowed others to impose upon me. The harder I tried to live a perfect life, the more I messed up and the more mistakes I made. There were occasions when I was so far off course that I was too embarrassed to tell anyone that I was a Christian. After all, how could I be a Christian when my life was so riddled with mistakes and shortcomings to the point that I thought I was an embarrassment to God Himself? There were times when I made mistakes and just wallowed in them. Instead of trusting in God to help me out of my predicament, I stayed down and was the victim of my own condemnation for so long that I almost convinced myself that I could do no better, so I might as well just go with the flow. Like I said, “inner turmoil.” This means that from the outside looking in, everything was normal or going as well as it could be expected. However, I was constantly fighting for my life on the battlefield of my mind.

Throughout my years of falling and struggling to get back up again, God was merciful to me. He never gave up on me. His hands were always extended out toward me. So, when I finally reached up from my downtrodden state in an attempt to grasp at that lifeline, God Himself pulled me up and drew me into a closer walk with Him. It is the recognition of God’s unfailing love and unmerited favor that has propelled me into a more victorious and purpose-filled life. The Spirit of God finally made me realize that I was failing and would continue to fail unless I rested in Him. I was not falling short and making mistakes because I was sitting still, being complacent, or not trying at all. I was falling short because I was too busy setting my own standards for Godly living and trying to

live up to them under my own strength. For years, I had been living like the Israelites when they were in the desert. The journey to their destination was such a short distance, and yet they spent forty years wandering around in the desert. Similarly, the journey to my spiritual awakening was prolonged simply because I relied heavily on the approval or opinions of other people and trusted in my own strength and abilities far too often, instead of looking to Jesus and trusting in God.

Light at The End of The Tunnel

After becoming aware of my spiritual purpose and the power that is within me because of Jesus Christ, I am now able to stand up without any “crutches” or validation from others. I am no longer Satan’s punching bag, doormat, or latest joke. I am now a victorious child of God who knows that if I forget to walk by faith or mistakenly “walk in the flesh,” God does not and will not condemn me or cast me aside. Therefore, I no longer need to stay down, be stepped on, or wallow in the mud of my mistakes; instead, I can look to Jesus for forgiveness and deliverance as well as the strength to get up and continue pressing toward the mark of a higher calling in Jesus Christ. Jesus is my Salvation! He died and has already been punished for my sins, so there is no need to allow myself to be punished again and again unnecessarily for a debt that has already been paid in full!

As an ambassador for Christ, the Anointed One, I walk with the power of the Holy Spirit within me. This means that I have the power to resist sin and temptation the same way that Jesus did when He walked on the face of this earth. Unfortunately, if I continue to sin and be a victim of the same shortcomings again, it implies that the Christ (the Spirit of God) within me is no match for the sins and temptations of the world. However, 1 John 4:4 teaches that “greater is He who is within me than he who is in the world.” Therefore, I know that I have the power to walk in the Spirit, overcome all things, and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. As a born-again believer, my eyes have been opened to realize that sin and iniquity can no longer reign in my life or have dominion over

me. I am a new creation in Christ, which means that my old sinful ways have been crucified on Calvary, and I can live in victory each day by having my mind renewed continuously with this spiritual reality.

My spiritual awakening has caused me to realize that the gift of salvation is far too precious to squander away by continually making the same foolish mistakes and needlessly living life with a “victim” mentality. I am now acutely aware that with the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon me and within me, it is my duty to carry out the mandate of Jesus Christ. I also understand that, as an ambassador of the kingdom of heaven, I must function under the mantle of Jesus Christ, which is clearly outlined in the book of Isaiah chapter 61 in the passage that declares, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the recovery of sight to the blind; to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” The revelation that my anointing, my purpose, my life’s mission, my victory, and my prosperity are all clearly associated with and dependent upon my acceptance of the amazing gift that is in Jesus Christ has led to indescribable inner peace, exceptional purpose, and a Christ-centric state of mind that is definitely out of this world. As Jesus said in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

