

7DAY FAST

DAY SIX

SUZANNE HALL

Hello Victory Tribe! It is an honor to address you today. Please note that unless otherwise specified, all Scripture is from the ESV translation. Let's get right into it, shall we?

In Isaiah 43:18-19a God says "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

After the book of Malachi in the Old Testament, God was silent for 400 years. In the Gospel of Luke, we meet a priest named Zechariah who is married to Elizabeth, a descendant of Aaron. They are advanced in years and Elizabeth is barren. Enter the angel Gabriel who brings a word from the Lord God to Zechariah.

Luke 1:13-17 says "But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

Of course, Zechariah was skeptical and doubted what he saw and heard, so he was struck dumb. Elizabeth conceived and gave birth to a boy as had been prophesied.

Luke 1:59-63 says “And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, ‘No; he shall be called John.’ And they said to her, ‘None of your relatives is called by this name’. And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, ‘His name is John.’”

After 4 centuries of silence, God announced the birth of John the Baptist. This was a man with pedigree. There were traditions attached to a man with such pedigree, but from the start, he was anything but traditional. He traded the rigid, structured life of temple priest for the wilderness (Luke 1:80). He gave up fine linen for camel hair; sumptuous feasts for locusts and wild honey (Mark 1:6). He preached in the wilderness of Judea, not in the temple or even a synagogue, but the wilderness. He preached a message of repentance: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” People flocked to him to hear his preaching and receive his baptism of repentance. He confronted the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Matt 3:1-12). He confronted the Jewish civil authority, King Herod, and lost his head for it (Mark 6:14-29).

John the Baptist was the one prophesied by Isaiah as Mark tells us in chapter 1, verses 2 and 3: “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

He was no shrinking violet. He was not concerned about offending people’s senses. He was not concerned for his welfare or for his life. He had a message from God and it was burning inside of him to be heard. He was preparing the way for one, John himself said, was too good for him to even untie his sandals.

He was preparing the way for Jesus, the Christ, who just so happened to be his cousin according to tradition.

A few months after Elizabeth conceived, Gabriel was sent on a mission by God to visit her relative, a virgin named Mary, betrothed to be married to a carpenter from the house of David.

Matt 1:28-33 says, “And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’” In verse 38 we read, “And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her.”

This Jesus, conceived through the Holy Ghost and raised by a Jewish carpenter, began His ministry on earth at about 30 years of age (Luke 3: 23), after being baptized by John. John the Baptist recognized that Jesus was the one that he was sent to herald. Jesus began by preaching, “Repent! The Kingdom of heaven is at hand!” For the next three years or so Jesus turned everything upside down. In some cases, literally. He preached in the synagogues, in the temple and in the fields.

Like John the Baptist, Jesus upset all the apple carts. He regularly offended the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He called them a brood of vipers and white washed tombs filled with dead men’s bones. He illustrated their care for following the letter of the law to suit their own ends, all the while forgetting about the people of God.

Not only did he point out their pomposity, but he confounded them by showing mercy and compassion to the cast offs of Jewish society. Jesus broke bread with sinners, such as tax collectors and prostitutes. He touched the unclean, like lepers and a woman with an issue of blood. He healed the lame on the Sabbath! He even showed mercy to some gentiles!

Let's skip forward a bit to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Matthew 26:37-46 reads "And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even unto death; remain here, and watch with me.' And going a little farther he fell on his face, and prayed, saying, 'My father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.' And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter. 'So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.' And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for a third time, saying the same words again. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, 'Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.'"

Jesus Christ, who walked among us in the flesh, fully God and fully man, prayed to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. One account says that as He prayed, He sweated blood, such was the heaviness of the moment. After His arrest, this man who knew no sin, had His flesh torn from the bone, was spit on, mocked, his beard hairs plucked out, a crown of thorns shoved down onto His head, was paraded through town, and hung naked on a cross to die outside of town like a common criminal.

But the worst of it wasn't the agony of His flesh; it was the weight of our sin covering Him. All of this He endured out of mercy and compassion for us and out of loving, obedience to the Father. He died, was buried, and on the third day, He rose again from the dead to live forevermore at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us. He is our one and only Eternal King in heaven and on earth! He is our Savior. He is our Redeemer. He is the Living Word. He put the devil under His feet, into the dust where He belongs. Jesus, the Christ, has the keys to death, hell and the grave. Once we are washed from our sin and covered in His righteous blood, we walk in His authority, filled with the Holy Spirit, holding the same keys.

Is 43:18-19a "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you perceive it?"

Do you perceive that God is doing a new thing now? We who are new creatures in Christ, have been placed here on earth for such a time as this. It is not happenstance that we are here now. We each have a call on our lives. We are each here for a purpose to be fulfilled, but if we refuse our calling, or neglect it, God will find someone else. Our lives are not our own and if we are seeking Him first, before anything else, He will lead. When He calls us by name, we say, "Here I am."

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." We are the ecclesia, the church that Christ is building. 1 Peter 2:5 reads "you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

Rather than looking at it as if the gates are coming to get us, the true meaning of the text is that as we proclaim the victory of Christ to a dying world filled with besetting sin and tragedy, the gates of hell will not be able to withstand it.

We are a house of prayer that Christ is building and when we come together in the name of Christ Jesus, declaring His Word back to the Father, we are establishing His authority over the land and the people!

Revelation 12:11 reads “And they have conquered him [the accuser of the brethren] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.”

As Christ’s followers we have been given the mandate to make disciples of all nations, including our own!

This is an auspicious time in the Gregorian calendar. It is the 250th year of this nation. One could say a jubilee year for the USA. We've just celebrated the traditional time of Christ’s birth and we are now heading to Resurrection Sunday when Christ the Passover Lamb was raised from the dead. We stand at a crossroads in western civilization. Again I ask, do you perceive that God is doing a new thing, that old things have passed away?

The American church at large has lost its way over the last few decades. We spent more time cuddling up to the world system and inviting the spirit of Babylon into the church. We’ve preached a soft gospel full of grace and very little repentance. We’ve accepted happy, sappy little TED talks in place of convicting messages. Sloppy agape tickles our ears. We traded Pastors full of the Holy Ghost and fire for inoffensive, milquetoast creatures that let us wallow in our sin. We’ve spent decades examining the lint in our navels, being delivered from every conceivable devil, waiting until we are perfect in our own sight. We seek God’s hand before we seek God Himself. At its absolute worst, the American church has turned to glorifying sin, rather than God the Creator of all things seen and unseen. It’s steeped in rebellion, preaching heresy from the pulpit and indulging in all kinds of sexual sin.

In a book called Why Revival Tarries first published in 1959, Leonard Ravenhill wrote, “Let us stop looking for scapegoats! The fault in declining morality is not radio or television. The whole blame for the present international degeneration and corruption lies at the door of the Church! It is no longer a thorn in the side of the world. Yet, it has not been in times of popularity but adversity that the true Church has always triumphed.”

We like to say that the book of Acts is still being written. I submit that we have been more like the people of the books of Kings and Chronicles. We have swayed with every wind of doctrine and done what is right in our own eyes, rather than eating the Word of God and letting it read us. Rather than keeping our eyes on the King of Kings, we have followed men and man’s traditions. We’ve spent the last 40 years or more waiting for Jesus to return, white knuckled in our buildings as if the wood and brick is our ark.

It’s time we, the Church of Jesus Christ, got back to being THE thorn in the side of “culture”. It’s time we remember who we are and who we serve. We serve the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. We serve Jesus Christ who did not come to do away with the Law, but to fulfill it. We are not to care about our reputation among men, but only our reputation before God, our Maker.

Colossians 3:1-3 in the NKJV reads, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

In Ephesians 2:5-6 in the NKJV “[But God]...even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together , and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”.

Jesus Christ, when asked what the most important commandment was, said in Matt 22:37-40 “...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Do you love God enough to put your own flesh, spirit and mind under submission to Him? Do you love God enough that you will put yourself second to Him in your neighbor's eyes? Do you love your neighbor enough to tell them the hard Truth of the Gospel? Let's make this even more personal. Do you love your children enough to tell them the Truth of the Gospel and maintain your witness no matter how uncomfortable the situation is? Do you love God enough to upset some apple carts and offend the spirit of the age wherever it tries to raise its ugly head?? Now is not the time for soft hearted, well meaning, “going along to get along” platitudes. We are to redeem the time for the days are evil; the way is narrow and the road to destruction is wide.

Often our actions speak louder than our words. Let's look at Christ our Savior. Fully God and fully man. When He was hung on that tree, He could have saved himself. Instead, He was obedient to the Father. He meeked Himself to the Father. Meek does not mean weak. On the contrary, think of a war horse, strong and powerful, trained, respectful and trusting of his rider, one body, one mind, obedient unto death. That is our Lord and Savior in relationship to the Father. He laid down His life at the request of the Father, and out of love for Him, as well as for us. We, who follow Him, are to take up our cross, and boldly go out into the world, all the while seeing His image before our eyes. Think of our brothers and sisters in Nigeria, China, Iran, Syria and many other places, tortured, imprisoned and laying their lives down for the Truth of the Gospel.

Their obedience in death is a silent witness to us all, more powerful than words. They are persecuted for meeting together, for possessing even a page of the true Bible, for singing and they must whisper when together. Now even in England, one cannot pray in one's house if one lives within so many kilometers of an abortion center. One cannot pray silently on the street near an abortion center. These are prosecutable offenses. But for the grace of God, goes this nation.

James 1:2-4 reads "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Ephesians 6:10-13 in the NKJV reads, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

Leonard Ravenhill, again in Why Revival Tarries, wrote, "Sodom, which had no Bible, no preachers, no tracts, no prayer meetings, no churches, perished. How then will America and England be spared from the wrath of the Almighty, think you? We have millions of Bibles, scores of thousands of churches, endless preachers--and yet what sin!"

The spirit of the age would love for you to believe that it's time to abandon all hope. God disagrees! We are the watchmen on the wall!

In Ezekiel 3:18-21 God says to Ezekiel: “If I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul. Again, if a righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits injustice, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul.”

Isaiah 60:1 reads “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”

2 Corinthians 5:16-18 reads, “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”

Revelation 21:1-7 reads “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.' And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' And he said to me, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have his heritage, and I will be his God, and he will be my son.'"

Revelation 22: 20 reads, "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come Lord Jesus!"

This is the message we've been given for those in a dry and dusty wilderness land. A message of hope for those chained in sin, hobbled by oppression. God is doing something new. Jesus Christ is the hope of Glory and we, who call ourselves by His precious name, need to put off all our petty foibles. It's time to cast down every excuse and exorcise every shibboleth. It's time we made a joyful noise on the highways and byways of this dead and dying world. It's time we opened our mouths and professed the good news of Jesus Christ to everyone within our hearing. We are the heralds of this day, just as John the Baptist was in his day. It's time to offend religion, the spirit of this age and everything that is not of God. We need to be the shining ones walking in His strength, so filled and operating in the Holy Ghost that devils get uncomfortable and flee when we walk into the room. Future generations are depending on it! Out of love for Father, Son, Holy Ghost and all creation, let's be about the Father's business!