

RUSSELL'S RUMINATIONS
A LETTER OF ANALYSIS AND COMMENTS ON ISSUES
OF INTEREST TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Vol. 6, No. 1
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Cobden, IL 62920
April, 1985

Dear Friends:

Last year I succeeded in composing and sending out three of these letters, and the Spirit was reasonably satisfied with this "accomplishment." I felt that I had established a fairly easy pattern of one every four months, but here I am, at the end of April, just before finals, with stacks of papers to read... and just commencing this missive. But a recent Teaching started off thusly:

Later in this month you will develop another letter called Ruminations, the basis for which will be stories from the Holy Scriptures upon which I have commented. I would have been more pleased if it were ready to mail now, but you have had other important responsibilities. If you spent less time feeling sorry for yourself and more in actual positive work you would accomplish a good deal more. Just know that there shall be no acceptance of failure to accomplish these two major tasks this month. From one Who affirms that there finally is no such thing as time these are strange but strong words. (From "Abraham and Isaac", April 4, 1985)

I heard Lenore telling someone the other day that according to the height and weight tables she is 6' 3" tall; in like fashion, I shall certainly finish this on time if the month is a little longer. April shall just have to lap over into May in this year of 1985. (Remember that my last Ruminations affirmed that the Lord has a fine sense of humor. I shall count on that.)

I received a number of letters about that gentle November affirmation that a sense of fun and humor is a part of God's nature... part of that which He has shared with us. Interestingly, no one penned a protest. No one challenged me with the doctrine that the Bible does not say that God has this attribute nor do the Scriptures portray Jesus as exhibiting a sense of fun and joy. I suspect that some readers felt this, because of the way they relate to God, but just didn't write it to me.

I had two letters from which I was going to quote... both marvelous statements of experience with this nature of our Creator... but as I sit down to put this in tangible form neither note can I find. I take this as a sign that I should get on with the new composition rather than as lack of organization on my part.

But first... as is my established custom... a few words about the source of these portions that I refer to as "Teachings." I won't repeat all the details. Suffice it to say that on the 11th of May in 19 and 79 I was forcefully led to enter into an early morning meditation in which I wrote. Soon after this beginning I began to "hear" thoughts that did not originate in my head. I wrote these down as faithfully as I could, and the Source repeatedly has identified Himself (Herself) as the Holy Spirit, the very one Jesus promised in John 14-16. I had no previous personal desire to participate in this kind of a "mystical" meditation, but I have continued it because this is a truly loving, friendly, helpful Spirit that speaks. The vocabulary, syntax, and punctuation are basically mine (why not?), but the ideas are those of the Spirit.

This I reaffirm. The books containing my original, handwritten pages now number 22. This receiving of Teachings is now a normal, and a continually satisfying, part of my life.

As the paragraph quote I offered on the first page tells you, this letter will bring you comments and interpretations on stories from the Bible. Most readers are Christian and hence will know these stories... or know that they should. For those who are of some other spiritual “persuasion”, tradition, or “path”, please appreciate the stories for their spiritual content. I am not a Hindu (and really never expect to be one), but I gained a good deal of spiritual insight from the Bhagavad Gita, and it helped me see some truths in Christianity that I had not truly seen before. So turn not away from stories.

My format will be: (1) a designation of the story (2) the relevant Scriptural verses that tell the story, from the Revised Standard Version, the “official” translation of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. (3) the Teaching, or the pertinent portions thereof, that the Holy Spirit has offered to me and (4) my ruminations on all of the above.

One powerful truth that has been hurled at me time and again in these meditations is that while God can be described, He never can be limited or circumscribed... and though I don’t have the spiritual maturity to “understand” all that God is and does, I shouldn’t limit myself to one interpretation of a story, even from the Scriptures. A different interpretation can teach yet another truth, not necessarily better than the traditional one, but certainly different. So the Spirit is alternately fundamental and orthodox... and creative and deviant. This can be done in fun or in seriousness, and these complement rather than contradict one another.

So... let’s be on with it. First there was a general Teaching entitled “Bible Stories.” I’ll let you read the first three paragraphs, then I’ll insert the Scriptural passage to which it refers, and then, probably, I’ll have something to say.

JAN. 13, 1985
SUN., 7:13 AM

BIBLE STORIES

FARM
STUDY

Soon you shall do an issue of Ruminations, a letter, certainly, but a good deal more, based on Teachings that have commented on Bible stories. Now that’s an interesting term, isn’t it? Stories. The first impression can be that this is something different from reality. Reality is facts, based on systematic observation and careful reporting. Stories are told or read and then repeated, emphasizing what the teller values. Well, I tell you that stories are more important than facts... and probably the most important way of expressing reality that humans have. And because the Bible is the most important record of reality for you and other Christians, the Bible stories must be taken seriously.

This is also a call, o son, to become more familiar with stories that are the narrative basis for your faith. You know that the Bible is, fundamentally, one long, complex story of My relationship (as Almighty God, both judging and merciful, as Jesus, the Begotten Son, and as the Holy Spirit, working in a great many ways) with a small group of humans in the earth. It tells of how I relate and interact and of how I respond to human behavior. The individual stories are not necessarily consistent. Yet this is a better representation of reality than a single, homogenous story which then limits Me, by leaving out aspects of Me that are important, but not necessarily loveable or “pretty”.

Stories can be quite complete, with much detail or they can be somewhat to very sketchy, with opportunities to let the reader or the hearer assume details, which usually make the story more relevant. Stories range from long and complex to short and to the point. Short stories usually deal with a limited period of time, which makes it appropriate to wonder, “What happened next?” or “What happened the next day?” You have responded in this way to the story usually called The Prodigal Son.

And so, from Luke’s Gospel...

THERE WAS A MAN WHO HAD TWO SONS; AND THE YOUNGER OF THEM SAID TO HIS FATHER, “FATHER, GIVE ME THE SHARE OF PROPERTY THAT FALLS TO ME.” AND HE DIVIDED HIS LIVIGN BETWEEN THEM. NOT MANY DAYS LATER, THE YOUNGER SON GATHERED ALL HE HAD AND TOOK HIS JOURNEY INTO A FAR COUNTRY, AND THERE HE SQUANDERED HIS PROPERTY IN LOOSE LIVING...

AND HE AROSE AND CAME TO HIS FATHER. BUT WHILE HE WAS YET AT A DISTANCE, HIS FATHER SAW HIM AND HAD COMPASSION, AND RAN AND EMBRACED HIM AND KISSED HIM. AND THE SON SAID TO HIM, “FATHER, I HAVE SINNED AGAINST HEAVEN AND BEFORE YOU; I AM NO LONGER WORTHY TO BE CALLED YOUR SON.” BUT THE FATHER SAID TO HIS SERVANTS, “BRING QUICKLY THE BEST ROBE, AND PUT IT ON HIM; AND PUT A RING ON HIS HAND, AND SHOES ON HIS FEET; AND BRING THE FATTED CALF AND KILL IT, AND LET US EAT AND MAKE MERRY; FOR THIS MY SON WAS DEAD, AND IS ALIVE AGAIN; HE WAS LOST, AND IS FOUND.” AND THEY BEGAN TO MAKE MERRY.

NOW THE ELDER SON WAS IN THE FIELD; AND AS HE CAME AND DREW NEAR TO THE HOUSE, HE HEARD MUSIC AND DANCING... BUT HE WAS ANGRY AND REFUSED TO GO IN. HIS FATHER CAME OUT AND ENTREATED HIM, BUT HE ANSWERED HIS FATHER, “LO, THESE MANY YEARS I HAVE SERVED YOU, AND I NEVER DISOBEYED YOUR COMMAND; YET YOU NEVER GAVE ME A KID, THAT I MIGHT MAKE MERRY WITH MY FRIENDS...” AND HE SAID TO HIM, “SON YOU ARE ALWAYS WITH ME, AND ALL THAT IS MINE IS YOURS. IT WAS FITTING TO MAKE MERRY AND BE GLAD, FOR THIS YOUR BROTHER WAS DEAD, AND IS ALIVE; HE WAS LOST AND IS FOUND.” (Luke 15:11-13, 20-15, 28-29, 31-31)

The Spirit comments...

The day he returned, his father was the epitome of forgiveness, thankfulness, and graciousness. How was he on the next day... or the next Monday? The brother who stayed home was jealous and angry. How was he the next week? Do such “sequels” also contain spiritual truth? You bet. (From “Bible Stories”, January 13, 1985)

Now I have envisioned the father in a range of responses. If this is supposed to give us a picture of God the Father, then he remains forgiving, and there is a wonderful (but unrealistic) reconciliation. In response to his father’s generosity, the prodigal is penitent, humble, hard-working, and appreciative, everything he had never been before. And maybe (even hopefully) a truly loving father (and mother, too) can bring about this marked change.

If, on the other hand, this is a real father with a real prodigal, who returned because he was hungry and broke, I can imagine the father in a different mood the next morning when the son wants to sleep late in his elegant robe. He is still thankful for his son's return, but he wants to see some change in attitude and behavior... some desire to be a working member of the family again. Is the son really ready to be back home? Is he ready to respond with appreciation to the forgiveness offered him? What do these two interpretations suggest about eternal life? (You fill in something.)

I've usually thought of the brother as like unto the good church person, who was raised in the church, has never left its fellowship, has never sinned boldly or vividly... and is, well, resentful when the abject sinner comes in with a repentance story. If he isn't very highly developed spiritually (either my church person or the brother), his behavior the next day and next week is keyed to that of the "sinner"... acceptance if the one who comes in is truly penitent and really desirous of a new life... and rejection if much of the old worldliness and sloth keep showing through. What if the brother really is well developed spiritually? He reacted with resentment and anger, but he quickly sees the selfishness in this. He even joins the party and is glad to see his brother back again. His attitude of acceptance and lack of concern for "his own way" may be just what the reforming wastrel needs to truly repent and become a loving, functioning member of the family again. Haven't you sometimes wondered, "What's the rest of the story?"

The next comment in the Teaching is on Jonah, so in case you forgetteth that story... God called upon Jonah to go the great city of Ninevah and tell them to repent of their evil ways lest God destroy them for their iniquity. Jonah didn't want to do this, so he boarded a ship going away from Ninevah... a great storm came up... Jonah "took the blame" and was thrown overboard... was swallowed by a great fish and regurgitated (undigested) on the shore close to Ninevah. He then decided to do what God wanted...

JONAH BEGAN TO GO INTO THE CITY... AND HE CRIED, "YET FORTY DAYS, AND NINEVAH SHALL BE OVERTHROWN!" AND THE PEOPLE OF NINEVAH BELIEVED GOD; THEY PROCLAIMED A FAST, AND PUT ON SACKCLOTH FROM THE GREATEST OF THEM TO THE LEAST OF THEM... WHEN GOD SAW WHAT THEY DID, HOW THEY TURNED FROM THEIR EVIL WAY, GOD REPENTED OF THE EVIL WHICH HE HAD SAID HE WOULD DO TO THEM; AND HE DID NOT DO IT. BUT IT DISPLEASED JONAH EXCEEDINGLY, AND HE WAS ANGRY. AND HE PRAYED TO THE LORD AND SAID, "I PRAY THEE, LORD, IS NOT THIS WHAT I SAID WHEN I WAS YET IN MY COUNTRY? THAT IS WHY I MADE HASTE TO FLEE TO TARSHISH; FOR I KNEW THAT THOU ART A GRACIOUS GOD AND MERCIFUL, SLOW TO ANGER, AND ABOUNDING IN STEADFASH LOVE, AND REPENTEST OF EVIL. THEREFORE, NOW, O LORD, TAKE MY LIFE FROM ME, I BESEECH THEE, FOR IT IS BETTER FOR ME TO DIE THAN TO LIVE.

Jonah 3:4-5, 10; 4:1-2

The Teaching continues...

The story of Jonah is vivid, imaginative (even doubtful), and memorable. I dramatically altered Jonah's attempt to go against My will, and so he reluctantly and fervently did My bidding. But the story leaves him sitting under a dead vine, angry and frustrated. Does that say that I simply may leave a person, waiting and expecting? If Scripture is sufficient unto itself, then that's a valid conclusion. (From "Bible Stories", January 13, 1985)

I've wondered what Jonah's life was like before and after the memorable couple of weeks, the action of which is recorded as Scripture. He obviously wasn't ready to be a prophet of doom, and he was willing to directly go against what God would have him do. After the dramatic evidence that God wasn't going to let his free will prevail, he set to his Ninevahan task "reluctantly and fervently." (I still don't want to do it, but if I have to... look out!?) He proclaimed his message, the people responded as he didn't expect them to, and he was angry that God accepted their repentance. (Could he have been related to the elder brother?)

The story ends without an ending. What does Jonah do then? Does God give him more tasks, or is this it? Does he tell his story through out life, and, if yes, what does he emphasize?

The Teaching goes on, and there are some equally provocative questions about Lazarus.

You have wondered what happened to Lazarus after I, as Jesus, revived him after four days of death? Did he live a life of active ministry, empowered by the miracle which returned him to life? Was his "second life" long and productive, or short and painful... or some other combination? Was there any purpose to his additional life beyond the miracle which showed the power of God over the forces of deterioration?

How theologically accurate are Bible stories? When I said to the thief on the cross, "This day you will be with Me in Paradise?" did that mean that consciousness continues, and there is an immediate awakening in a wonderful non-earth realm? Is that better epistemology than the notion that at My Second Coming the trumpets shall sound and those who have been dead for centuries shall rise? Is each an aspect of reality or is one wrong?

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke have me telling many stories or parables, either to make more people understand or prevent many from understanding. (Actually it is both.) John tells of Me giving a long theological discourse at the Last Supper, with much assurance of My role and My future. The principle holds each contains important truth and should be remembered and retold. John's story is that to which you relate best. Good. Know it well. But do not neglect or denigrate the others.

**There is continual new truth in this Story and its composite stories. You can never come close to all the understanding possible. And yet as you walk with your hand in Mine, I can tell you of wisdom... "all is vanity." And I smile. Selah
(From "Bible Stories", January 13, 1985)**

I think the vital lesson here is that much can be learned from stories... and there's nothing wrong with having unanswered questions as the tale is told. And new learnings may come with any rereading or retelling.

* * * * *

Now let's go back in Biblical time to the "Beginning of the faith" - - God's calling of Abraham and the strange test that was necessary for him to become one with many descendants. The 22nd chapter of Genesis tells the story.

AFTER THESE THINGS GOD TESTED ABRAHAM, AND SAID TO HIM, "ABRAHAM!" AND HE SAID, "HERE AM I." HE SAID, "TAKE YOUR SON, YOUR ONLY SON ISAAC,

WHOM YOU LOVE AND GO TO THE LAND OF MORIAH, AND OFFER HIM THERE AS A BURNT OFFERING UPON ONE OF THE MOUNTAINS OF WHICH I SHALL TELL YOU. SO ABRAHAM ROSE EARLY IN THE MORNING, SADDLED HIS ASS, AND TOOK TWO OF HIS YOUNG MEN WITH HIM, AND HIS SON ISAAC; AND HE CUT THE WOOD FOR THE BURNT OFFERING, AND AROSE AND WENT TO THE PLACE OF WHICH GOD HAD TOLD HIM... AND ABRAHAM TOOK THE WOOD OF THE BURNT OFFERING, AND LAID IT ON ISAAC HIS SON; AND HE TOOK IN HIS HAND THE FIRE AND THE KNIFE. SO THEY WENT BOTH OF THEM TOGETHER. AND ISAAC SAID TO HIS FATHER ABRAHAM, "MY FATHER!" AND HE SAID, "HERE AM I, MY SON." HE SAID, "BEHOLD, THE FIRE AND THE WOOD; BUT WHERE IS THE LAMB FOR A BURNT OFFERING?" ABRAHAM SAID, "GOD WILL PROVIDE HIMSELF THE LAMB FOR A BURNT OFFERING, MY SON." SO THEY WENT BOTH OF THEM TOGETHER.

WHEN THEY CAME TO THE PLACE OF WHICH GOD HAD TOLD HIM, ABRAHAM BUILT AN ALTAR THERE, AND LAID THE WOOD IN ORDER, AND BOUND ISAAC HIS SON, AND LAID HIM ON THE ALTAR, UPON THE WOOD. THEN ABRAHAM PUT FORTH HIS HAND, AND TOOK THE KNIFE TO SLAY HIS SON. BUT THE ANGEL OF THE LORD CALLED HIM FROM HEAVEN, AND SAID, "ABRAHAM, ABRAHAM!" AND HE SAID, "HERE AM I." HE SAID, "DO NOT LAY YOUR HAND ON THE LAD OR DO ANYTHING TO HIM; FOR NOW I KNOW THAT YOU FEAR GOD, SEEING YOU HAVE NOT WITHHELD YOUR SON, YOUR ONLY SON, FROM ME."

AND ABRAHAM LIFTED UP HIS EYES AND LOOKED, AND BEHOLD, BEHIND HIM WAS A RAM, CAUGHT IN A THICKET BY HIS HORNS; AND ABRAHAM WENT AND TOOK THE RAM, AND OFFERED IT UP AS A BURNT OFFERING INSTEAD OF HIS SON. SO ABRAHAM CALLED THE NAME OF THAT PLACE THE LORD WILL PROVIDE... AND THE ANGEL OF THE LORD CALLED TO ABRAHAM A SECOND TIME FROM HEAVEN, AND SAID, "BY MYSELF I HAVE SWORN, SAYS THE LORD, BECAUSE YOU HAVE DONE THIS AND HAVE NOT WITHHELD YOUR SON, YOUR ONLY SON, I WILL INDEED BLESS YOU, AND I WILL MUTLIPLY YOUR DESCENDANTS AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN AND AS THE SAND WHICH IS ON THE SEASHORE. Genesis 22:1-3, 6-17

And the Spirit continues with His "commentary", (the first paragraph of which is on the first page) titled "Abraham and Isaac"... given on Thursday before Easter, (I number the paragraphs here just so it is easier to find my referent sentence, should you care to do so.)

- 1. Early in the Biblical story of My active relationship with a chosen people here in the earth (and, yes, My choosing of the Jews also remains within the realm of mystery) you read the story of Abraham and Isaac. Upon this story I shall comment this day (since your cows are back in the pasture).**
- 2. Abraham was a chosen servant. He was chosen late in life by present standards, and he had no special qualifications for what I would have him do and be. Basically he had to be faithful and had to accept this relationship thrust upon him without much question. His role was not to be an active leader, as Moses became. He just had to be the faithful patriarch.**
- 3. You admit to some difficulty in seeing a direct link between the story of My relationship with the Jews (because you assume it continues... and you are right) and the Christianity of**

which you are a part and which is celebrated at this time of Easter. Just don't get sucked into either/or thinking; they are both intimately related and quite separate from one another.

4. I chose to develop the Jewish nation and its traditions out of Abraham, but not directly. Abraham had one son, not twelve. I told him he would be the father of my chosen people, but he had only one son... by Sarah, the chosen lineage. The other son, Ishmael, was rejected, as Isaac's other son, Esau, would be rejected. Yet hear Me say that those who appear to be rejected are not... necessarily. A way must be established, and some are cast aside, but then other opportunities come. Remember, of course, that I, as Jesus, was rejected, but from this rejection has come this vibrant faith, Christianity.

5. The story of My call to Abraham to sacrifice his chosen son, Isaac, is, admittedly, a strange one. In retrospect it was a test of faith, but did I know that he would be faithful? If I really knew he would be faithful, then it wasn't a genuine test?! If he had not been faithful and had refused, at any point, to carry out the sacrifice of this son of his, would he, himself, have been rejected? After all, he would be protecting him whom I had already called to be part of the line to chosen people. If he didn't trust me completely, in an irrational situation, he would be destroying the plan I had set in motion. The fact that I rescued Isaac, revealing the whole journey as a test of faith, makes a good story... but, could I have done any other?

6. The story of Abraham and Isaac is also the story of Ishmael and Esau, those who were rejected. There is The Way... My apparent chosen way. Some are part of that plan, and some are not. But I also care for those who are not chosen and who are rejected. As Jesus I respected the Jewish tradition from which I came, but I spoke some of My memorable words to those who were outside of this chosenness...or at least not highly valued within it. To Nicodemus I said, "You must be born again" (what if I'd said, "... and again and again?") To the Samaritan woman I said, "I am the Living Water... you shall never thirst again."

7. I am not capricious in My dealings with the world, but neither am I methodical nor completely logical. If Abraham had killed young Isaac would you be a devoted Christian today? Of course, but the story would have been different. In one sense the story, let's say the Easter story now, had to be the way it was. In another equally valid sense the story could have unfolded in many diverse ways, and any of them could be valued as "the right one". Ponder this revelation.

Amen (From "Abraham and Isaac," April 4, 1985)

Paragraph #2 commences with the affirmation of Abraham's being chosen... without any special qualifications that set him apart. He was chosen to be faithful, that's all. And this takes us into the fascinating question of our free will vs. God's free will. The questions in paragraph 5 are certainly provocative, with the final one being, "Could the story have been different?" "Could any of them in the drama have acted differently? Did God know exactly how it would come out?" My understanding is that we have relatively free will unless or until God chooses to intervene. Then we get "leaned on", and certain choices become powerfully skewed.

Paragraph 4 tells of being not chosen, even rejected. Abraham had an older son, Ishmael, and God certainly knew about him, yet He spoke of Isaac as Abraham's only son. Sounds like rejection to me. Later in the lineage Esau, also the older son, is rejected, and the story of God's people is one of the twelve tribes, all headed by sons of Jacob. Esau loses out, even as a blood descendant of Abraham. But the Spirit says that there are other opportunities, and those rejected at one time may be not "lost

forever.” Jesus is a vivid example... rejected and crucified, and still the basis for a vibrant faith, which is forever in somewhat of an uneasy relationship with Judaism, the “rejectors”, then and now. And what is God’s role in this relationship? Hmm...

Paragraph 6 comments further on this. God chooses and rejects, but cares just as much for those who are not part of the plan as those who are. Nicodemus was a Pharisee who tried to be on both sides. He snuck around and found Jesus at night, and was given that marvelous short sermon which is the basis for evangelistic Christianity... “You must be born again.” Later he argued with his fellow Pharisees that Jesus should have a fair hearing, and was rejected for this sympathy. Finally, he brought the spices that were part of a decent burial of a Jew. Nicodemus must have been mighty impressed with this Man with whom he spoke, presumably, only once. The person at the well was both a woman and a Samaritan, and yet Jesus gave her one of the great theological characterizations of Himself. Opposite kinds of rejectees were these two, but Jesus valued them, clearly.

I like the description in the final paragraph (#7)... God is not capricious, but also not methodical nor completely logical. There is an order to the functioning of and in the earth, but God can make changes... and then things are “different” than expected. But whatever happens is, finally, “right.”

* * * * *

One more story... that of the “first miracle” in the Gospel of John.

... THERE WAS A MARRIAGE AT CANA IN GALILEE, AND THE MOTHER OF JESUS WAS THERE; JESUS ALSO WAS INVITED TO THE MARRIAGE, WITH HIS DISCIPLES. WHEN THE WINE FAILED, THE MOTHER OF JESUS SAID TO HIM, “THEY HAVE NO WINE.” AND JESUS SAID TO HER, “O WOMAN, WHAT HAVE YOU TO DO WITH ME? MY HOUR HAS NOT YET COME.” HIS MOTHER SAID TO THE SERVANTS, “DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU.” NOW SIX STONE JARS WERE STANDING THERE, FOR THE JEWISH RITES OF PURIFICATION, EACH HOLDING 20 OR 30 GALLONS. JESUS SAID TO THEM, “FILL THE JARS WITH WATER.” AND THEY FILLED THEM UP TO THE BRIM. HE SAID TO THEM, “NOW DRAW SOME OUT, AND TAKE IT TO THE STEWARD OF THE FEAST.” SO THEY TOOK IT. WHEN THE STEWARD OF THE FEAST TASTED THE WATER NOW BECOME WINE, AND DID NOT KNOW WHERE IT CAME FROM (THOUGH THE SERVANTS WHO HAD DRAWN THE WATER KNEW), THE STEWARD OF THE FEAST CALLED THE BRIDEGROOM AND SAID TO HIM, “EVERY MAN SERVES THE GOOD WINE FIRST; AND WHEN MEN HAVE DRUNK FREELY, THEN THE POOR WINE; BUT YOU HAVE KEPT THE GOOD WINE UNTIL NOW.” THIS, THE FIRST OF HIS SIGNS, JESUS DID AT CANA IN GALILEE, AND MANIFESTED HIS GLORY; AND HIS DISCIPLES BELIEVED IN HIM. John 2:1-11

The Teaching relevant to this came on September 18, 1981 and was titled, “Jars of Wine.” After an introductory paragraph the Spirit says,

1. The story of the marriage at Cana tells of Me, as Jesus, providing wine for the continuation of the marriage celebration in a rather miraculous and excessive way. Large jars were filled with water and yet those who dipped from them perceived the drink as wine. Why did I do that? Fundamentally, all miracles are simply a display of the power of God to change a situation, usually from something undesirable to something desirable. This was

such, though it was rather quiet and unobtrusive. Only a few appreciated that I had done a miraculous act, in the name and power of the Father God.

2. It was a generous act, symbolizing Our willingness to provide amply for the needs of people... yes, even wants. In a strict sense the people there did not need more wine. They certainly didn't need all of those jars full of wine. Yet I provided beyond their needs and wants. That was an important symbol, and its truth remains to this day.

3. I provided it that the celebration might continue. Marriage is a fine, important institution, and it is proper to celebrate the occasion of a marriage. Wine can be a symbol for many things... in this case it was the symbol of celebration. I approved of the celebration. The symbol was spent. I was asked, in an indirect way, to provide more. And I did. It was plentiful and it was of recognizable high quality. The celebration continued. And, as I said, a few knew that the power of God had been manifested in that place.

4. Some certainly could have misused this gift. The fact that a gift is good and from Me does not guarantee that it never will be misused. This that We do together is a gift, and, in a sense, your volumes of written pages are "jars of wine"... once given they could be misused. The miracle is a matter of some changes, but most of the situation remains as it was.

5. The Lord provides amply, quietly, and beyond your needs. The Lord's gifts may be misused. There is a trust on My part that the results will be desirable. Celebration is a good. I approve of celebration. These are some of the learnings I offer to you as jars of wine. Go now and start a fire. And consider Me this day.

Amen (From "Jars of Wine", September 18, 1981)

Picking up the theme that He developed in 1985, the Spirit says in paragraph #1 (in 1981) that all miracles are simply a display of the power of God to change a situation... There was no great cosmic reason to do this miracle. As a matter of fact, many Christians have to be a bit embarrassed by this action... creating 150 gallons or so of good wine when the celebrants already have drunk freely. As reported, it was a quiet and unobtrusive miracle, not one most would cite as worthy of the Lord.

But the exegesis goes on in #2... the miracle was a symbol of God's willingness to provide not only for our needs, but for our wants, and beyond. He doesn't do this all the time; mostly the world functions "naturally" (though the simultaneous and interrelated workings of all that is necessary for life to be maintained is pretty miraculous, isn't it?) But God can provide, as we need, so says this story.

Why this time? For celebration, even the celebration of a wedding. Wine was the symbol of continued celebration, and Jesus wanted the party to continue. "Moderation in all things... including moderation." He could have said this (and made it Scriptural); his actions certainly were not those of a cautious, conservative Savior.

In #4 He raises the matter of misuse. Certainly some could have overimbibed, and some probably did, given the effects of good wine. The miracle, or the Lord's presence, didn't guarantee that no harm would come. When a life is saved by some miracle (perhaps God gets credit for more than He actually does... or perhaps less), there is no guarantee that this life henceforth will be only exemplary. A miracle is done, and then life goes on.

The analogous gift is, of course, these Teachings. I write them down, and they become tangible. I type one and reproduce it, sending it to some who may be interested. Then where? I send our nearly 200 copies of these Ruminations, and in this one I have mixed Scripture, Teachings, and my comments, conscientiously, but without the agony of decision. The gift is given. Will it be misused?

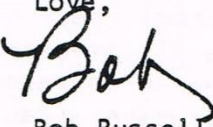
The final paragraph says He trusts that our use of gifts will be responsible. And He says again that celebration is good. Go and do thou likewise!

* * * * *

Well, here I am, close to the end of my self-imposed limit, and I still have stories yet untold and unenlightened. There is a marvelous exposition of “The Burning Bush”, which deals with being chosen, Moses being the obvious example. There are comments on both the Christmas and Easter stories, and, going way back, “Adam and Eve and the Garden” and then a sequel “Adam and Eve, Continued.” “Wise or Sharing?” is a great commentary on Jesus’ story of virgins, wise and foolish. And “The Woman...” gives important insights on justice and mercy as applied to adultery.

So, unless I am urged otherwise I shall continue with these in the next issue. This one is truly late. I can stretch April some, but not this far. The next one should be out in August. Comments, in general or on specific points, always are appreciated, the favorable ones immediately, and the carping ones after some time and careful thought.

May you experience much forgiveness as you drink good wine on Mt. Moriah this summer.

Love,

Bob Russell
Christian, Professor, Health Educator
Writer, Songsinger, Farmer,
Philosopher, Storyteller