

## How Sweet It Is

For the past two weeks, I've done some travelling and have spent time with my siblings, family and old friends. This past week I drove up to Virginia for a visit and to see my aunt (age 72), who's health was failing. My brother had called and asked for prayers on her behalf when she was going through an issue of poor circulation that was causing the amputation of her right leg. We sent it out on the prayer chain and she came through in good health and spirits after losing her leg.

In the interim, she had been diagnosed with colon cancer that had spread to her liver and lungs. After completing the amputation, she now had a new bombardment of challenges. She stopped eating and quickly went downhill. She decided she did not want to be hooked up to a feeding tube and signed a DNR request. No one from her family asked for prayer on her behalf. She was essentially written off as it was her decision. She was in and out during our visit but I managed to get her to laugh at least once. I heard my uncle tell my brother during the visit, that she was all set to go to heaven and see everyone. I didn't intervene. It is sad to see someone to simply give up and abandon hope. I guess one must have hope to begin with.

I also had the privilege of visiting my cousin who is in a nursing home, who is also been battling cancer for a few years. My cousin (who is 68) was about as joyful as

anyone could possibly be under those conditions. She shared a room with an elderly lady who wouldn't stop yelling, I mean yelling, the whole time we were there. It was like a live taping of the "Exorcist" and we kept waiting for her head to spin around.

My cousin was the one who reached out for prayer for her son last December. He had a rough case of Covid and nearly died. However, her faith and the prayers did what God intended. She was emphatic on sharing that "God healed my son" and she told him to be grateful to God. "I know God healed him" she said over and over. She has always been a happy person and one of my favorite cousins. Her joy is contagious, a joy to be around. **Psalm 16:11**- "You will make known to Me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy. At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

**Psalm 32:11**- "Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous; and shout for joy, all you upright in heart." It was obvious that she was at peace with her situation according to her faith in God. She definitely displayed the "faith of the centurion."

**Matthew 8:5-13**- "Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, beseeching Him, And saying, "Lord, my servant is lying in the house paralyzed and grievously tormented." And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." But the centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You

should come under the roof *of my house*; but speak *the* word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I say to this *one*, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another *one*, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does *it*.” Now when Jesus heard these words, He was amazed; and He said to those who were following, “Truly I say to you, nowhere in Israel have I found such great faith. But I say to you, many shall come from *the* east and *the* west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go, and as you have believed, *so* be it *done* to you.” And his servant was healed in that hour.”

Now I know my cousin goes to church on a Sunday, but I’m amazed at her faith, much like the Centurion. Andrea and I talked a little bit about the Centurion and his display of faith. We can only guess, but it is highly unlikely he left the Roman Legion and followed Jesus or kept the Sabbath and Holy Days as they would have probably executed him for being a traitor. But he still had faith. I’m sure there are pure hearts are out there and their place in God’s Kingdom will take place at the Second Resurrection. I’m confident, their conversion and teaching will be an easy transition.

What a difference in families. We are all related on my mom's side of the family. My cousin and her family were always tight knit. My aunt (my mom's sister who passed away yesterday), her husband and daughter always had turmoil and animosity. You never heard them sharing kindness amongst themselves, much less share God. Although her husband does attend the little Methodist church I remember as a child. Some really genuine nice folks but as with so many, they play church.



I hope these photos stay attached as I was taken back a bit by the “decoration” left up on the back patio building of the church. I showed it to my brother who dismissed it as a leftover Christmas decoration. I get that but it is also a Wiccan symbol for witchcraft. Just sayin’...

Before I left to come home yesterday, I prayed with my brother for my aunt that God wouldn't prolong her suffering and that her passing would be peaceful and painless. She died nearly seven hours later.

As we've just read in the essay, it is critically important for the true Christian to grow, we must have fellowship. To think otherwise is opening the door to be led

by someone other than The Master. Whispers of “doing it better” will only increase a growing pride within. Gaining infinite wisdom in a matter of months isn’t likely as the journey we have chosen and *are on* will take us *the rest of our lives*. “I’m going to do it my way” or “I’ve got a better way” is definitely based in self-pride and not the right direction.

**Proverbs 3:7-8-** “Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil. It shall be health to your navel and marrow to your bones.”

However, *if* anyone so chooses, God will not oppose such choices. He will not take away our free will. He *will be there* when the inevitable train wreck occurs and help you get back on track. Remember, He will finish what He started in each of us (**Philippians 1:6**), if we do our part and stay out of His way.

The most important fellowship we can ever have will be the one we have with God The Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. It isn’t with any pastor, TV series or your own ideas of how to be “holy.” If you want to know God, hang your flesh on the cross every morning when you wake up. Erase “I” and “me” from your vocabulary. Stop trying to impress God by playing church. Believe it, He knows the heart and the motive. The instant we throw “I or me” into the mix, God usually steps out of the way and says, “have at it.” This doesn’t negate any efforts on our part to do His

will, just make sure what we're attempting is His will. Seek it through prayer and trust in Him to guide you.

**Proverbs 3:5-6-** “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”

You're probably wondering why I titled this “How Sweet It Is” after bloviating about my trip. Well, hang on here we go.

With all I witnessed within family and friends over the last two weeks, I cannot begin to count or fathom just how blessed we are to know God, His Word and Way of Life. Out of all the population of the entire Earth, we have been chosen to know Him! Personally! Cookie's words to me after she was baptized will echo in my heart forever, “How blessed we are to have been chosen.”

I used the phrase, “How sweet it is” that was coined by Jackie Gleason, a late TV and movie star. He is best remembered for his role as Sheriff Buford T. Justice in the “Smokey and the Bandit” film series and Ralph Kramden from the TV series, “The Honeymooners.” The phrase came from his TV variety show from the 60's and 70's and he would always say it during his opening monologue.

Before his quick rise to stardom, Gleason had a rough childhood growing up in Brooklyn, NY. His brother died of meningitis when he was three, his father left

them when he was seven, leaving his mother to care for him alone. They were poverty stricken and he often got leftover food from a shelter. Any stability he may have had was removed when his mom died during the depression. In 1934, he was just 19 years old and had 36 cents in his pocket. He even had to drop out of school and coming from poverty would shape his outlook on life. He broke into show-biz in 1949 and his rise to stardom was underway.

He was interviewed on TV's 20/20 and was asked if he had gotten everything out of life he'd wanted. He replied, "When you first begin to make money... you say to yourself, 'I better get all these things I wanted, because how fruitless it would be if you could afford these things and *didn't* get them.'" This echoes **Ecclesiastes 2:10**- "And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor, and this was my portion of all my labor." Is this what God wants for His called and chosen?

It isn't God's desire for us to pursue the material things of this world to the point of losing our sight of His will and purpose for us. There's nothing wrong with wealth or having things but we must not let anything become an idol and separate us from God.

**Matthew 19:23-24-** “Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it *is extremely* difficult for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through *the* eye of a needle than *for* a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

He doesn't want us to pursue vain things or that which perishes. He wants us to seek, to run with all of our hearts, after that which does not perish and does satisfy.

**Matthew 6:19-21-** “Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moth and rust spoil, and where thieves break through and steal; But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor rust spoils, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

The world and most everyone in it is motivated by self and “gimme, gimme, gimme.” Phrases like “he who dies with the most toys wins.” No, he who dies with the most toys is dead. Families are no exception.

The examples I used earlier of my aunt and cousin are typical. How many families do you know who openly tell each other “I love you?” Do you tell your children and friends you love them as well? We are to display this godly love toward one another and amongst the brethren.

**1 Corinthians 16:20-** “All the brethren salute you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.”

**2 Corinthians 13:12-** “12. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints send salutations to you.”

**1 Thessalonians 5:26-** “26. Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.”

**1 Peter 5:14-** “Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be with all of you who are in Christ Jesus. Amen.”

If we're not doing this within our own families, it becomes more difficult among the brethren. If kindness and godly love isn't displayed, how or why would anyone who may be hurting or seeking God want to be a part of His Family? All too often, *pride, resentment* or *grudges* from the past thwart any efforts to display such acts of affection. Being stubborn is simply being full of one's self and unyielding. It's okay to fall on the sword once in awhile for the sake of peace and doing things God's Way. There are 420 references to “peace” in the King James Bible. Peace must be a part of our families and our fellowship. If we take no offense with each other, we will have peace.

**Psalm 119:165-** “Great peace have they which love thy law: and *nothing shall offend them.*” (KJV) Offended by someone? You'd better take it up with God.

Argue with Him. Let us know how that goes...

The proof of doing it God's Way is in His Word. **Proverbs 16:7-** "When a man's ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." We have no enemies except Satan and our own folly.

By his own admission during the 20/20 interview, Jackie Gleason said owning all of the things he had wasn't as enjoyable as desiring them. This also resonates **Ecclesiastes 2:17-18-** "Therefore I hated life; because the work that is done under the sun *is* grievous to me; for all *is* vanity and a striving after wind. Yea, I hated all my labor which I had done under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who shall be after me."

We all know whatever we have, we can't take it with us when we die. I've seen it numerous times, the vultures within a family come out after someone's passing. "Hurry up and get their stuff!" Ever see greed turn a so-called close family into a pack of wolves? It happens more often than not. *God sees it all*. Apparently, Jackie Gleason learned what Solomon wrote in **Ecclesiastes 2:1-3-** "I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." and, behold, this also *is* vanity. I said of laughter, "*It is* madness;" and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?" I sought in my heart to give myself unto wine, yet conducting my heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, until I might see what was good for the sons of men, what they should do under the heaven the few days of their life."

We consider material things to be blessings and so many are. But the little things we may take for granted daily are by far more of a blessing when considering just how many people have none of what we have.

“If you have food in your fridge, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep *you are richer than 75% of the world*. If you have money in the bank, your wallet, and some spare *change you are among the top 8% of the world’s wealthy*. If you woke up this morning with more health than illness you are more blessed than the *million people who will not survive this week*. If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the agony of imprisonment or torture, or the horrible pangs of starvation *you are luckier than 500 million people alive and suffering*.”- author Unknown.

The world and its so-called churches miss the mark of God’s Truth to which we have been so amply supplied. To know this, to live this, to have the ability to know God personally, I cannot imagine something on this Earth any sweeter.

Jackie Gleason’s use of the phrase “How sweet it is” was in reference to being in the limelight and a successful TV and movie star. But what really is sweet is the Word of God, His giving us life, His Holy Spirit to each one of us and most of all, the blessed gift of His Son Jesus our Savior.

**Psalm 119:103-** “How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” Being privileged to have been called and chosen from the nearly 8 billion people on this planet is a tremendous blessing. Then consider all the billions of people who have ever lived and died and to have been chosen from that astronomical number is no less than spectacular.

By daily prayer, study of His Word and seeking Him in all things, life will become even sweeter than we think it is now. We work towards the prize that lies ahead and finishing the race according to His will and Word. What we have been given is priceless. **Psalm 119:72-** “The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver.”

Our goal in loving God, is being worthy to be in His Kingdom and serving Him forever. The day will come that we each hear Jesus say to us, “Well *done*, good and faithful servant! *Because* you were faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.”- **Matthew 25:21**. On that day I am certain we will all say, “How sweet it is!”

Amen.

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