

**Russell Kelfer**

# **God's Plan for Survival**

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**Series: Let God Be God**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • [www.dtm.org](http://www.dtm.org) • [dtm@dtm.org](mailto:dtm@dtm.org)

# God's Plan for Survival

The first law of the animal kingdom is the law of survival. The strong survive. The weaker die. And the first law of fallen man is exactly the same. It is the law that governs the business world. The bigger and stronger, like vultures, consume the smaller. The more successful absorb the less successful. The chains overtake the independents. Then the bigger chains force the smaller chains out of business. Big banks eat little banks like they were having lunch. Survival. You win by taking.

In the nations of the third world today, survival is also the order of the day. From the Philippines to the Mideast, and from Africa to the Caribbean, the strongest survive. Governments are toppled overnight. Dictators who appeared on Monday to own the world and to be invincible, by Wednesday are banished to a country thousands of miles away in exile. Often, that country doesn't want them either.

Survival. It's a cruel word, and it's a cruel world. There's a cruel battle going on that will ultimately end only at Armageddon, when once and for all, the forces who consider themselves to be invincible are suddenly overtaken by God Himself. But until then, it is, and it will be, a battle for survival.

It was into a world like this that Jesus came. He came to give man a reason for living and, in the process, to expose man to a totally different way of life, a way of life so radically unorthodox, that the natural mind of man would never even have the capacity to grasp it. So God sent His Spirit and implanted His Spirit in human hearts to interpret that way of life, and make sense of that way of life.

What God did, for the most part, was reverse the order of all of life. He took the ways of man and turned them around 180 degrees so that whatever the natural mind would do, the spiritual mind would normally do the opposite. No small wonder the Master met with such opposition, for to those without His Spirit, His ways and His Word made no sense at all.

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Today's words from the lips of Jesus were just such words. To the mind of man, they make no sense at all. They are foolishness. They are a stumbling block. They invoke either anger or confusion; but they do not compute. To the believer, however, they are a blueprint for reality; they are the Master Plan of Truth".

Jesus, you remember, was sending the twelve out to evangelize. He painted an honest picture of what awaited them, as He always does. There are no sugar-coated promises from the lips of Jesus to lure you into His service unaware. Always, He tells it like it is. The choice is yours; but the decision is always clear.

He began with such, not so encouraging, promises as this:

Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake...

But when they persecute you in this city, flee into another:...

The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord.

(Matthew 10:22a,23a,24)

Hardly the words of an army recruiter! But then came words of encouragement:

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father (Father's permission).

But the very hairs of your head are numbered.

Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.

(Matthew 10:29-31)

It was on that upbeat note of a reminder of God's love that we left off in our last study. It is there that we take up today. The Master continues His preparation of the twelve. Listen:

Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

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He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. (Matthew 10:31-39)

Now I make no bones about it, this lesson is heavy-duty stuff. It is the meat and potatoes of the Gospel. It is hard-line Christendom with no holds barred. Some may get nervous just reading that passage. Some may say Jesus couldn't possibly have meant what He said, so they ignore the passage entirely. Before you do that, however, try to listen to what the Master was really saying.

### THE ISSUE OF CONFESSION

First we need to see the context in which the Master's statement was made. It begins with a "therefore," and as has been so often said, whenever you see a "therefore" always ask what the "therefore's there for". As is usually the case, it is there to form a bridge between the prior and latter subjects. The prior subject was the love of God. Remember? It ends like this: "you are worth more than many sparrows." More than many sparrows... that's how much our God loves each of us. He loves each sparrow so much that not one falls to the ground without the Father's permission, yet He loves each of us more than all the sparrows in the world. So that is the foundation upon which Jesus is building. It is important to understand that Jesus is saying, because of my much love for you,

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

(Matthew 10:32)

That verse is wrought with great power; yet it is often greatly misunderstood. Let's look at it, and try to see just what it was Jesus was saying to these soon-to-be itinerant evangelists.

The phrase *confess me before men* has a richer meaning than our English translations give to it. The literal translation is, "He who will confess *in me* before men, I will confess *in him* before my Father who is in Heaven". The phrase does not speak solely of verbal association, but of *spiritual identification*. The word *confess* used here means "to come to a point of assent or agreement

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with". When followed by *in* as it is in the original language, it literally means, *identification with*. It means to be so at one with another that your every thought and every action demonstrates the character of that person. That's *to confess in*.

Jesus is talking about the abiding relationship with Him that is indicative of union with Him, and makes our spirits inseparable with His. That is what *confessing* Him is all about. That's what Jesus meant when He said

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter  
into the kingdom of heaven;... (Matthew 7:21)

He said some of you will confess me with your lips but not be in union with me in your hearts. You will have never been born again. Your confession will be worthless. It will be a mere show of hypocrisy that will be revealed on that day. Not so the born again ones, listen to Jesus when He prayed:

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. (John 17:23)

Total identification. The world looks at them, Jesus says, and sees me; just as they look at me and see the Father. That's confession. You identify yourself by receiving the Son, and he will identify with you as you stand before the Father. The reverse is true. "If you deny me," Jesus goes on, and here the word *in* is not present, "I will deny you before my Father in Heaven." The word translated *deny* here actually means *to disown*. It means to decline to be identified with.

So Jesus here is not talking about whether or not you verbally name His name in a given situation. He is not saying that if you fail to witness in a given opportunity, He will deny before the Father that He knows you. Not at all. He is speaking of permanent identification that demonstrates union. Identify with the Son through conversion, and He will stand before the Father on your behalf. Refuse to identify with the Son, decline to be *owned* by Him, and He has no choice but to deny in the presence of the Father that you are His, because you are not. The inference here is clear. "How can you neglect so great a salvation?" You have a God who has numbered the very hairs of your head, who notes the fall of every sparrow, and who has clearly stated that He loves you more than many sparrows. With that kind of a loving Father, how could you not identify with His Son?

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If you have never identified with Jesus Christ by inviting Him into your life, He must stand before the Father and declare, "I never knew you." Not because His heart did not beat with compassion for you. Not because He did not weep over you as He did over those in Nazareth who would not believe. But because you did not reach out and accept the gift He has offered you of eternal life. Accept Him today. The first thing Jesus will do is turn to the Father and say, "That is one of your children, Father; He has identified with Me." Praise God!

### The ISSUE OF CONFLICT

Having established just what it means to be identified with Him in Heaven, He now begins to explain what it will mean to be identified with Him on earth, and it's not much fun. In fact, it will scare you "plum to death" if you look at it in the flesh. He returns to the issue of the cosmic conflict that will emerge in the life of those who identify totally with their Heavenly Father. I say returns, because much of the earlier verses in this chapter were devoted to warning these men about what they would face as they attempted to take Jesus into that real, rough, tough, antagonistic world they lived in. It would be worth it, because Jesus was identifying with them in the presence of the Father as they went; but it would not be a picnic.

Too often, even today, preachers and teachers try to make the gospel one of prosperity and ease in a world of chaos and despair. They indicate that God will identify with you by making you successful and safe. Wow! I'll bet these men would have loved to have heard a sermon like that about now. Listen to what God Himself promised them.

Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues.

On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles.

Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me,...

When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another.

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

(Matthew 10:17,18,21,23a,28 NIV)

Does that sound like a Sunday School picnic to you? Does that

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sound like a life of being set apart unto comfortable experiences? Was their primary concern whether or not they would make the Sunday evening sing-along? Was their utmost worry whether or not the nursery would be adequate for the morning hour? I don't think so. Their lives were in jeopardy. They were, by identifying with Christ, being propelled head first into the most devastating cosmic conflict known to man. They were being thrust into the battle between Satan and God, and they were being assigned to form the lines. If these disciples, who had heard the Master speak of a peace that passeth all understanding, thought for a minute that this peace would be circumstantial, it was only for a minute. The King goes on:

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth.  
I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—

a man's foes will be the members of his own household."

Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; (Matthew 10:34-37 NIV)

That, too, is a misunderstood and often misapplied Scripture. Taken in the context of all of Scripture, it goes without saying that the will of God is peace in the family and submission to those in authority, be they Christians or not. We know that this verse is not in conflict with the basic precepts of the Word; then we'd best see what it really says.

What it really says is, "Dear, dear children! I'm not sending you to an after-church fellowship; I'm sending you to war. You have identified with the King, and have thus been inducted into His army. Satan and his demonic host will not take that lying down. They will attack you. They will assail you. They will attempt to deceive you. They will endeavor to discourage you. They will try everything known to man, and some things unknown to man, to defeat you. I'm not leading you into a world of peace, even though I am leading you in peace into the world."

Now here's the clincher, lest we be taken unaware! Jesus describes the most devastating surprise of the entire conflict. He says that unless I tell you in advance, you'll be blindsided by whomever the enemy uses to get to you. He says Satan is going

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to take those closest to you, energize them with the world's lies, and take the battle right into your living room. You may wake up one day and find out that your foes are those of your own household. Now God did not set father against son and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. Incidentally, that phrase literally means "newlywed" against her mother-in-law. No, God did not do that. Sin did that. Thus, the entrance of the Gospel caused that.

There are very few listening to or reading this message who have not experienced what Jesus was describing. Two people were living in darkness. Enter the Gospel. Enter transformation. Enter light. The light penetrates the darkness. There is conflict. Life penetrates death. There is conflict. Now granted, most of the conflicts Christians have today in this country with their loved ones come purely from poor judgement as to how to communicate their newfound faith in love, and not condescension.

But go to *almost any other nation in the world* where either pagan religions, state religions, or communism reigns supreme, and openly identify with Christ; and your foes will immediately become those of your own household. They will try to get you to denounce your faith at once and return to what they call "normal behavior". They will call you mad, disown you, and in many cases write you off as dead. That's the ultimate but unexpected direction the battle may take. Beware! Be on your guard! *When that happens, you have a choice to make.* A clear choice. Stand with God or yield to the pressure of those who may love you, but who do not understand what has taken place in your life.

Jesus went so far as to state unequivocally that *when* that happens, if you choose father or mother at the expense of your newly-born faith, you are simply not worthy to be in the army. If, as soon as you enlist, someone tells you to go AWOL, and you do so, you don't deserve to wear the uniform.

### THE ISSUE OF SURRENDER

Jesus now concludes His discourse on allegiance by summarizing His message.

and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not  
worthy of me. (Matthew 10:38 NIV)

These men were not yet familiar with how Jesus would die. But they were familiar with the word "cross". It was an instrument of death, just as the electric chair or the gas chamber or the



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firing squad might later be used. He is saying that any of you who wants to be my disciple, but isn't willing to give up anything that stands in your way isn't worthy to be called My disciple. I want you to follow Me; and where I am going, there's no room for excess baggage. A soldier can't go into battle carrying his teddy bear along with his gun. A pilot can't take his tv set along on a crucial mission so he won't miss the Cosby show. It doesn't work. If you're going to be in the battle, you've got to lay aside everything that would hinder you. If it means too much to let go of, then die to it...and die to it now! And if need be, be willing to die for your faith, as well. If you go into the conflict wanting to win, but not willing to die, you're not a soldier. If you're going to crouch in fear at the shadow of the enemy, you're in the wrong army. God needs soldiers, not children in make-believe uniforms. It's not a costume party. It's a war...an all-out war for the souls of men. If *anything* or *anybody* means more to you than winning that war, then you don't belong on the front lines. You'll get killed, and so will your buddies. Get out of the way before it's too late. God is looking for willing warriors...men and women who will, if need be, stand before the enemy as the firing squad of the satanic host calls your name as they did Stephen's. God needs men and women who, like Stephen, will quietly yield to the Father's will, even if it means death, rather than fold and flee in the face of the fire.

How about you? I know how we all are on Sunday. This is when all the soldiers come together to share war stories and act like heroes. We're all comfortable here. But what are you like on the front lines on Monday when the enemy turns his heavy artillery your way, and you are persecuted, and ridiculed, and misunderstood...when you are assaulted through circumstances and tempted to quit...when mother or father or husband or wife forsake you because of your relationship with Jesus Christ... what are you like then?

That is the question. Jesus is saying on those occasions, if you are not willing to lose it all to gain Heaven's crowns, forget it. You're not really a soldier. You're deadwood that serves as an ornament around the barracks or a decoration at the officer's club. That's not a soldier. A soldier won't fold when the bullets fly. A soldier will stand...even if standing may mean death.

THE ISSUE OF SURVIVAL

Which brings us to the final statement in this portion of Jesus' discourse on warfare. He winds it all up by saying this:

Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life  
for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:39 NIV)

A better rendition would be, "whosoever clings to this life, will lose the blessings of the one to come; whosoever willingly gives up what this life calls important for the sake of the Gospel, will find what real living is all about." He is saying that God's plan for survival is to give yourself away. Try to cling to what you have and what you want, and as you cling, your arms will not be able to reach out and wrap themselves around a needy world. God's plan for survival is for you to lose yourself to find yourself. It is the exact opposite of the world's way. It always is. It isn't survival of the strongest. It is survival of the weakest, because His strength is made perfect in weakness. So, when the world deals you a bad blow, when "fate", as they call it, brings grief and horror into your life, you needn't run.

When the enemy assails you, love him. When someone begs for your coat, give it to him. When someone slaps you on one cheek, let him slap the other as well. That's God's plan for survival. You say, "But wait a minute; our foes are those of our own household. Our enemies are everywhere." Right. Don't get confused about who your enemies are, and how you are to fight the battle. The battle isn't yours to fight. It's God's! Set yourselves. Stand still. See the salvation of the Lord (II Chronicles 20).

Do you want to survive in a world that's falling apart at the seams? Here's God's prescription for survival.

1- Identify yourself with Jesus Christ. Confess Him before men by receiving Him as your Savior and openly acknowledging Him as Lord. He will, in turn, identify Himself with you before the Father.

2- Recognize the devices of the enemy. This is no country carnival. This is war. Satan is battling the Living God for control of the hearts of men. Those closest to you may well be the heavy artillery he uses to fire at close range. Expect it.

3- Stop holding back anything that keeps you from being a good soldier. It may be an allegiance to a person; it may be a lust for something you should not have; it may be a hidden

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compromise that robs you of God's best. It matters not. Let it go or you cannot be a real disciple. You can wear the uniform on Sundays, but you'll get mauled in the real world on Mondays.

4- Finally, remember, though the battle is intense and the conflict personal, the outcome is not up to you. You can't huff and puff and blow Satan's house down. It's made of concrete and steel. It's not yours to huff and puff over anyway. You're to be the soldier. God is the Commander-in-Chief. Leave the results to Him.

That's God's plan for survival in a conflict that will not end until the enemy has been trodden underfoot.

You don't win by taking. You win by giving. You don't win by being strong; you win by being what the world calls weak. In fact, from the world's perspective, you may not win at all; but you have seen glimpses of Glory...and they haven't.

It's time to go now.

The commander is about to take roll call. Are you going to report for duty? May I remind you, it may cost you everything you thought was important. What a choice! What a God!

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### A Challenge for Application

1- Why do you think Jesus preceded His words about “confessing Him before men” with His encouragement about the sparrows? Do you think the two statements are connected?

2- At what point does a person confess Jesus before men? What does the word “confess” in this passage mean? Have you ever “confessed” Jesus as Lord? What promise then has God made to you? What confidence does that promise give you?

3- Make a list of the warnings Jesus gave in this passage relative to the dangers the disciples would face. By each warning, write a modern-day counterpart to that trial. Now find a Scripture, either in this passage or elsewhere, to give you the confidence you will need in that crisis.

4- What did Jesus mean when He said, “Be not afraid of those who kill the body but could kill the soul.” Why would we not be afraid of those who can kill the body? How?

5- There has been a lot of controversy over Jesus’ statement: “I have not come to bring peace but a sword.” How can you reconcile this statement: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.”?

6- Is it the desire of Jesus to cause a mother to be turned against her daughter, and a father against his son?

7- Can you imagine in your mind living behind the Iron Curtain, and accepting Christ as your Savior, and having to inform your family of what you have done? Now reread this passage with that scenario in mind.

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