

FROM THE DARKNESS OF WORD OF FAITH TO THE GLORIOUS LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL

My name is Elly Achok Olare. I am a pastor in a small town in Kenya called Mumias, in Kenya's sugar belt, about 500 kilometres west of Nairobi. It was in the year 1994, when I heard what appeared to be the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In reality what was advertised to me then was a Jesus who would meet all my needs and fulfil all my dreams as a young man. I was told that to be unsaved was to sign up to a life of misery, sickness and poverty. To embrace Christ was to step into a world of limitless blessing. I made then what appeared to be a practical and most logical decision to 'accept Christ into my heart'. Zealous and wanting all that God would have for me, I quickly rose through the ranks and soon became a preacher of the same message I was given. I would later learn that this is the Word of Faith teaching, also called the Prosperity Gospel, or as some would call it, 'the Health and Wealth Gospel'. I knew nothing else because there was nothing else apart from this that I heard. I only knew that God was good and that meant nothing negative or uncomfortable came from Him. I was taught at the start to deal with Satan who caused all negatives in my life in what I later came to know as 'spiritual warfare'. It was ingrained in me that I was in the 'God class' (as Crefflo Dollar and Kenneth Copeland would insist), and therefore had absolute authority in and of myself to 'create my own world' by positive thinking and faith-filled confessions. It was God's will for me to be healthy and wealthy and anything less was to be repudiated in faith and the opposite called to existence by my positive confession. I learned that if all else fails, I was to engage the 'heavenly language - the language of angels' and bypass Satan and the hosts of darkness by praying in tongues. These I had thoroughly learned and taught others for many years

So when my wife and I lost our first child in 2003, a girl we had named Whitney, I had to face the self-imposed reality that 'the spirit of death' had prevailed over me. The turmoil that ensued was chaotic in my soul, perhaps more so for my equally 'faith-filled' wife. How could a good God, who we served faithfully, let the devil overrun us like this? The well-meaning church people who came to us suggested in different ways that our calamity was due to either a sin our lives, some curse, or as I held very firmly, a lack of faith on my part. My grieving wife and I would spend many months repenting (in case there was hidden sin). We also sought answers from our families, in case this was a generational curse (a teaching that was very dominant at the time, and still is, what is known as 'spiritual mapping' and 'identificational repentance'). In this painful ordeal of inner turmoil in the context of bereavement, we became pregnant again. This time we would get a boy child. From Hospital that sunny afternoon my wife and I, jubilant in our final triumph, took Robin home. The next 24 hours would be the darkest period the Lord took us through (yes, He did).

Baby Robin developed complications and we went into a frenzy of prayer, spiritual warfare and a wide net of intercessory appeal went forth. This time we were not caught off guard (or so we thought), and 'faith' had assured us that the devil would not take Robin from us. Everyone we called returned 'prophetic assurances' that only life was permitted; death was not our portion. But despite our bravado, the night was growing more intense.

I have been a Pentecostal/Charismatic/Word of Faith preacher for a better part of my adult life, and I think I am competent to say that night must have been one in which heaven got busy with dialled calls. My wife believed then that she had a prophetic gift and she saw several visions that single night. In some our Robin

was happily playing in the mud; in another he was an 'international preacher' addressing thousands as his father 'taught him by example'. All these she shared with me in tears in the presence of the many faith and prayer warriors we had gathered in our small house.

It would be past midnight when I would cave in as the condition of the child grew worse, and some 'prophetic word' indicated that the healing of our son has been placed in the hands of a doctor (all to rationalize the deep darkness of the word of faith error). So off I left with my boy clutched in my hands, behind me a praying wife supported by a battery of 'faith warriors'. At the coast general hospital, at 3:00 am, the doctor looked into the determined eyes of a 'faith-filled preacher' and declared the worst news I could possibly hear - Robin was dead.

To say my world collapsed around me is a huge understatement, yet to date I still do not know how to put to words the millions of chaotic feelings that assailed me. I know I screamed "I am tired Lord", and it was in disappointment at God for failing me yet again. I had done all things right, exercised tremendous faith, how could God let this happen to us? I felt like a fraud for preaching what never worked for me. Hurt and confused and angry at God, I vowed I would quit the ministry. I had officially stepped into a crisis of faith. Many years later my brother and friend pastor Barnabas, who was one of the 'faith warriors' in my house at that time, would preach a message that would bless me exceedingly; he called it "THE DEATH OF FAITH IN THE WORD OF FAITH" (obviously borrowing John Owen's title, and tweaking it a little). God became an enigma to me and issues of faith an impossible labyrinth.

Coming home my wife, she was drained to the bones, she looked up to me and called me by an endearment she had never used before and she has never used again to date. "Daddy," she said, "he is alright now. Bring him I want to feed him." She couldn't have chosen worst words. I don't know that I have screamed from the deepest recesses of my guts like that dark morning. She and I would literally fight for the child as she madly sought to wrench the dead body from my hands.

What followed was prayer for resurrection from the dead, because we were taught that we had power over death itself. It turned into a huge circus which fortified our pain. Answers were in short supply and our consternation and perplexity at God were indescribable. Next followed a series of early miscarriages. God did not make sense, faith remained a mirage, yet we had appearances to keep up and we had to pretend that we were not despairing. So inwardly we suffered with many unanswered questions, doubt and unbelief, feelings of cursedness and so on.

How could we understand the issues of evil and good that seem to co-exist in our world? How as Christians could we reconcile those 'bad' things that happen to us and the portrait of a good God which had been marketed to us aggressively, especially in the Word of Faith teaching? We had learned to dismiss the suffering of Job as a consequence of his negative confession when he said, "the Lord gives and the Lord takes away". But how could we make sense of Apostle Paul who fell sick (Galatians 4:12) and even rejoiced in his afflictions (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). How could we reconcile that Biblical portrait with the super 'apostles' who market

health and wealth in their books, DVDs and mega meetings (stuff we consumed with zeal and hope)? Could we legitimately expect our best life now and still hold to a genuine hope in the hereafter?

These questions would tumble restlessly in our minds. Soon however the balm of time would drown them in the routine activities of 'Churchianity'. Our conscience dulled to these inner struggles; but just for a time.

THE LORD MIGHTY TO SAVE

In 2006 my Church posted me from Mombasa to Mumias in Western Kenya. Here I would be engaged in Pastoral work in the Pentecostal/Charismatic/Word of Faith context despite my horrendous experience in that system. I was bullish in my errors, stubbornly propagating a failed system, the more so because it was now a means of earning a livelihood and I entertained a hope that I would be rich in this way, believing, confessing and visualizing it ... in the meantime faking it until I make it.

It was in the year 2008 August when the Lord knocked me off my beast, wrestling me to ground zero and laying waste to all pretensions. I would come to grips with the saving grace of Jesus Christ after 17 years in the gross darkness of a vain and false religious system of works, greed and no creed at all. An Australian couple had visited a pastor friend of mine one afternoon en route from Uganda. Papa Billy Sked and Mama Tessa Sked would be God's messengers to me to pluck me from the flames of hell and eternal damnation despite being a popular preacher of the Word of Faith.

My friend had asked me to help with translation as Billy spoke in English and I was to translate into Swahili. The subject was 'Justification by faith alone through the imputed righteousness of Christ'. Never in my life had I come across such a 'ridiculous' interpretation of Holy Scripture. The one hour in which I literally forced myself to translate could be perhaps the most difficult hour I have ever had on stage. I was by that awkward situation forced to convey to people what I personally decided was a heretical and unbiblical message. But the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord was at work in my heart, calling forth reason and introspection from within my deepest recesses. It was as though the inner witness to the truths being propounded overruled what was clear in my head. Within that blessed hour of a secret struggle the Spirit of the Lord had planted sufficient doubt as to the veracity of the system I defended with all my might. The next three weeks would be a monumental fight within me as God 'tortured me' with the error of my ways, making it apparent with every text I had thought supported my ways. Now those same texts looked different, they affirmed what Billy was saying and rebuked my coloured look of them. As a crusade preacher, I had impressed upon people not only the immense value of their own contribution towards their salvation, but also their ongoing effort at keeping their salvation. I had insisted to them that if they lived right and believed right and confessed right then God was obligated to do whatever they desired. Now that sandy edifice crumbled and made no sense in the light of Scripture, that 'salvation is of the Lord ... and the righteousness by which am saved is of Christ and not my own.' It was hard to accept by faith that only He the mighty Saviour would keep to the day of His coming those whom he has called effectually. I was now confronted with a Biblical Gospel that ran counter to everything I knew. Weeks and months would follow in which I would engage Billy and Tessa Sked in constant email conversation. The Lord helped them to answer and to send material, nurturing my new faith in Christ. The Kingdom of God was unfolding right in my eyes and in my heart, putting my faith in the finished work of the Saviour for me. I had stepped into the Kingdom of His dear Son and He was lovelier to me and more valuable than anything on earth. The shackles of lust and desire for health and wealth seemed to hold no sway with me anymore, only Christ did. That is how decisive my conversion was; almost immediately aligning

my heart to Truth. Not so much that I understood the fine points of Christian Truth, but my heart now yearned for Christ and His word. Enthralled by that beatific vision of Him who bid His own, "take up your cross daily and follow me", I would now be enjoined in the fellowship of His suffering, considering that the "sufferings of the present age are not worth to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). For the Apostle elsewhere insists that such "...momentary afflictions work for us an eternal weight of glory ... while we look not at the things which are seen but those which are unseen" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

It seems to me that with this new birth (for that is what it was) came new appetites, new desires, a set of new eyes with which I now looked at Scripture. I saw that suffering was a blessing, even a gift from God. That in a fallen world we are not to expect our best life now. Eyes trained in the hereafter I felt Christ of far infinite treasure. Yes he satisfied the longing within and rendered all else insignificant.

It is a careful study of Scripture that would clear the poison of the Word of Faith error in my life and understanding. In 2010 the Lord opened a door for me to attend a Reformed Bible College in Nairobi for three years. Here I would be tutored in God's word by Keith Underhill of Trinity Baptist Church. It was rich and fresh and gripping. Shocked at the blindness of my former religion yet gloriously introduced to a world where Scripture alone held sway, those were blessed years for me.

The Lord would send me back home to Mumias and to Mombasa where we would seek to bring the genuine Gospel to our people and counter the Word of Faith epidemic. In pursuing this we have since held Reformation Conferences, and started the Wisdom Training Center (WTC now in its fourth year), a boot camp Bible College where we bring Reformed Truths to largely Pentecostal/Charismatic and Word of Faith church leaders. Church plants have been established in the Reformed Gospel. The Lord has blessed these outreaches tremendously.

I feel very strongly that this is the mission of my life and to my people. May the Lord be pleased to convert more and send them to confront this dominant error of our times.

LESSONS FROM OUR DELIVERANCE FROM THE SLAVERY OF HERESY

The importance of sound and solid doctrine of Christian suffering. The above statement immediately militates against the most basic instinct of our fallen nature. We naturally cringe and move away at the suggestion of discomfort. The rich young ruler went away "very sad" (Luke 18:23) because his comfort had been threatened. Peter quickly denied his Lord at the prospect of pain. Demas loved the pleasures of this life and could not keep up with the way of the master (2 Timothy 4:10). This is not a good thing. But alas!!! this falling away has been legitimized and even glorified. Quite frankly, and at the risk of sounding scathing, I think the difference between today's average Christian and the saints of yore is the difference between a soldier in an army and a monkey in the zoo. The one endures hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 2:5) the other can only respond to carrots and bananas. Grandeur, wealth and showmanship is vaunted as the hallmark of blessing, the way of the cross has been despised.

We live in an age of the American dream (even if clothed in Christian jargon). Pastors seem little more than life coaches, entertainers like Hill Song who franchise their death agenda. They are professionals who offer

'therapy' for stressed out congregants. The pagan ideas of humanism, self-esteem and actualization are now unashamedly peddled on church pulpits as self-help ideas using crass and novel 'kangaroo' hermeneutics'. The result tragically has been a substandard brand of Christianity that is at worst a betrayal to the faith "once and for all time delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

This faith says, "you have been called, not only to believe in Him but to suffer with Him". It says, "...the present momentary affliction prepares for us an eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). This faith presents to us a history of men and women who did not modify the cross to ameliorate its offense. But followed the Lamb who said, "... in this world you should have many sorrows" (John 16:33). It is a faith of Apostles who died by faith (Hebrews 11:35); a faith of Paul who endured illness and was not despised by the Galatians (Galatians 4:12ff), who had a "thorn in my flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7) and endured unanswered prayers for deliverance, so he could boast in his weakness (verse 9 & 10) and in the Christ who strengthens him (Philippians 4:13). What does the Saviour mean when he says to count the cost, to take up your cross daily and follow me? Whatever else it means, it surely cannot mean amass wealth and enjoy health ... by any stretch of the imagination and credulity. It cannot mean get your best life now. By the standard of this dominant and pervasive Christian Doctrine in Scripture, it is safe to say the present day Christianity is diametrically opposed to the faith of the Scriptures, the faith of Jesus Christ.

If there stands out a jewel in the crown of Christianity I think it must be the thoroughly and unequivocally Biblical Doctrine of suffering. Christian suffering is the Queen of Redemptive History and Future Grace is her handmaid. It is treasonous, how the Christian church has despised this doctrine, made it anathema in our churchmanship.

THEY MUST BE BORN FROM ABOVE - BORN AGAIN!!!

What on earth would motivate men and women to gladly accept to be burnt alive, eaten by lions and scourged with unimaginable cruelty? One of our pastors (also a student at Wisdom Training Center) recently drunk the cup of his Saviour, partook of his baptism. We buried Daniel three weeks ago, and he left behind a widow and five children in uncertain world. For the Gospel he received after many years in a false religion his own church orchestrated his arrest. In the hands of police brutality virtually every rib in his strong body was broken. The autopsy report suggests they beat him with blunt objects in ways that caused internal trauma and bleeding and showed little external signs. One inmate who by God's gratuitous providence was released in time to give testimony to Daniel's testimony spoke of a man who had the Gospel in his mouth to the very last breath. I saw the departed comrade before the processes of death had disfigured his remains and I can testify to a man who despite the pain died beholden to a joy that was out of this world.

Here was a soldier who loved heaven and despised this earth. He knew he was a pilgrim in search of a better country (Hebrews 11:23-16), the heavenly delights far outweighed earthly aggrandizements. Like Stephen he saw His Lord and desired to be received by Him.

Why do we cringe at stories like these? Because we have lost the doctrine of true salvation. Men and women will pander to innate appetites. A sinner will wallow in sin because that is the basic appetite that drives him. The neglect of true salvation and how it comes to people has resulted in a tragic tale of tares in the Lord's vineyard (Matthew 13:48). We essentially have 'reformed' unregenerate men and women with little if any change of heart. But how could they be different if they do not hear the true Gospel, the saving kind of Gospel?

Men and women have come to church as a social place, to meet friends and form networks. Many come to a Jesus of the Joel Osteen kind, who promises 'your best life now'. An average Christian in your average church has not come to terrifying grips with the tomb-opening, sin-slaying power of the authentic Gospel. Platitudes, entertainment and so called 'positive message' cannot do what the simple message of the gory, rugged cross (1 Corinthians 1:18, Romans 1:16) of a substitute Saviour, presented in its stinging potency, can do. It takes more than a choreographed seeker-friendly service, soulful music styled as worship, brilliant, smartly dressed 'cool' kind of minister, to bring a soul from spiritual death and worldly appetites. This 'born again' experience, death to life, new creature reality is a sovereign, unsolicited work of the mighty Holy Ghost. The result of which is a complete turnaround from idols (like worldly pleasure) to the true God (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). It brings about new appetites, priorities, a heavenly focus; Christ becomes an exceedingly great reward, in whose shadow all else is but dung. It is this paradigm change that will make one glory in suffering and say thank providence that his lot has been cast with that of his Saviour. The apostasy in our churches is pronounced by loss of the true Gospel, we do all else but preach the Gospel.

COUNTED WITH YOUR SAVIOR

Joshua stood before an apostate nation and challenged: "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve, if Baal be God follow him and if Yahweh be God, Then follow him". That challenge reverberates to our times. Cowardice and pursuit of comfort will keep us in Babylon (Psalms 137:1-4), and confirm us traitors to the way of our Master. I have been privileged to see many people make hard, unpopular and traumatic decisions. From pastors who have resigned pastorates because their denominations refused to consider "the ruins of Zion", to ordinary church folk who realize the stakes are too high to play nice and party games in the name of church membership. The call is to "come out from among them and be ye separate". I am very persuaded that even at the present time, there is a remnant, chosen according to Grace" (Romans 11:5).

The times have fallen upon us when the choices have never been clearer. We either continue friendship with the world and incur enmity with God (1 John 2:15), or be willing as Moses was to go outside the camp and bear the reproach of Christ with God's people. Biblical religion is not popular, it offends the sensibilities of natural man. No doubt there will be a price to pay and losses to be counted and friends to lose, yet this is exactly what the Lord meant when he said we must hate our very lives, count the cost, take up our crosses and follow Him.

We must follow the suffering Lamb wherever he leads... Follow the Lamb if that should prove a lonely path... Follow the lamb if my life should be forfeited by it. That slain Lamb has proved a beauty beyond all mention, His cross my glory and delight... So I trudge and plod along ... following the Lamb wherever he leads.

Amen and amen praise God!!!!

To Him alone be Glory who can shine the light of the Gospel in dark hearts

Praise God, praise God, and praise God!!! Amen