

## “AMBASSADOR TO ISRAEL”<sup>1</sup>

Dear family and friends: Good evening!

Thank you for being here. A banquet given in my honor is a new experience for me, and I am touched that you wanted to participate in it.

As I stand here, I am a bit uncomfortable, for I am acutely aware that, if I have achieved anything at CPM during the past almost thirteen years, the praise must go to God, not to me. For you to understand that, however, I need to give you some background.

In early 1980, I was living in Grafton, Vermont, practicing architecture, managing a 300 acre farm which sold beef, pork, lamb, eggs, maple syrup, and timber, and serving in several community organizations. At the age of almost 43, I possessed almost everything that the world values: a strong mind and a strong body, the best education and training available in the 1950s, a solid profession, supportive parents and close siblings, a beautiful, intelligent, athletic, and adventurous wife, two lovely daughters, a band of close men friends, social connections, and money, for my parents had given me a fortune in my mid-twenties.

Then in March of 1980, God opened my eyes and unstopped my ears to the truth about himself. He exists. He created all things. He entered into his creation once in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He lived a sinless life, witnessing to the greatness, goodness, and glory of God and serving the needy in Israel. He died on the cross at Calvary to atone for the sins of all who acknowledge him as their Savior and Lord. He rose again to defeat death and to be the first fruits of the resurrection. He ascended into heaven to sit on the throne of God. Wonder of wonders, he called me to himself, and I answered his call. Suddenly I could sing John Newton's famous hymn with understanding and joy: "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I delivered this address on Saturday, October 17, 2009, at a banquet at the Yale Club of NYC which was given in my honor by Chosen People Ministries (CPM) on the occasion of my retirement as Chairman of the Board.

<sup>2</sup> "Amazing Grace" by John Newton c. 1772.

How all this happened, however, is not the story I will tell you tonight. Tonight I want to talk to you about how I came to CPM and what I learned along the way.

I am ashamed to admit that, shortly after becoming one of the Lord's followers, I began to pray that He would let me be one of His great warriors. After all, I had the assets which I have just listed. The Christians around me were impressed by them, and so was I. We thought that the Lord had caught a pretty big fish. Alas, I was proud – not haughty, but nonetheless proud – of all the things which I had been given, but for which I could hardly take much credit. I was a far distance from following Paul's advice to fellow-believers: avoid thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think<sup>3</sup> and exhibit "lowliness and meekness"<sup>4</sup> in our demeanors.

About a year later, I was providing architectural services to a Benedictine Priory in Weston, Vermont. It was the home of a group of brothers who were well known at the time as "the singing monks." One Sunday, I drove up to the Priory to attend a late-morning mass. I arrived a bit late, and the shed where they held their summer services was overflowing. I sat out on the grass, in the shade of the shed's roof. During the service, the brothers began singing and dancing a Hebrew hora, accompanied by several instruments. Suddenly I felt a wave of the Holy Spirit wash over me and impress upon me the idea that somehow I would be serving the Jewish people. Perhaps, I thought, I needed to study Hebrew.

Either that evening or the next, I attended a service of the house church of which I was a member at the time. At an appropriate point, the elder presiding over the service asked if any of us had anything to share. I described what I had experienced on Sunday morning. He then asked the group to pray that the Lord would reveal to us what He wanted me to do. After a few moments of silent prayer, he went round the circle asking people whether or not they had received anything. The girl on his left said, "I think he will be an ambassador to Israel." Others echoed that thought. Nearly everyone got the impression that I was being called to become an emissary to the Jewish people. We then discussed how unlikely it was that an unknown Gentile architect in the Green Mountains of

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 12:3.

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 4:2.

Vermont, who had some Jewish friends, but had not been in touch with most of them for years, would become U. S. Ambassador to Israel, but we acknowledged that "...with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."<sup>5</sup> The group concluded that I should hasten to find someone to teach me Hebrew, and then the elder anointed me with oil to affirm the calling which we believed God had placed upon me.

Sadly, this experience added fuel to the fire of my ego. I surmised that the Lord had heard my plea that He let me be one of His great warriors, and He was going to make me U.S. Ambassador to Israel, from which platform I would speak His Word to the Jewish people.

How offensive all of this must have been to the Lord! In any event, He went to work stripping from me just about everything that I and the people around me regarded as important.

First to go was my reputation. Its departure had two causes. The first was identified by Jesus when He told his disciples that, since the world hates Him, it would hate them as well.<sup>6</sup> The second, however, was my own fault. I abused everyone around me. I evangelized family, friends, acquaintances, and strangers with passion, about which I will say more later. In many respects, I made a spectacle of myself – speaking at dinners and giving interviews to radio and newspaper journalists. Alas, I drove those whom I most loved and most wanted to reach with the Gospel away from Jesus rather than toward Him. The result: I lost the respect of many of the people whose respect I valued most.

Next to go were my money, material possessions, and livelihood. A manufacturing company that I had launched to glorify God got caught in the recession of 1982 and failed. I spent the next 18 months liquidating the company's assets and my assets to pay off all the company's debts. There went our beautiful farm, including our home and much of its contents, and my ability to earn a living, for I was too distracted by this calamity to attend to my architectural practice. I left Vermont in early 1984 with a traumatized family, a negative net worth, and no prospects for employment.

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<sup>5</sup> KJV Matthew 19:26.

<sup>6</sup> John 15:18-20.

We went to New York City, and, after months of looking for work, I finally got a job as a vice-president of the Episcopal Church Building Fund at the Episcopal Church Center on Second Avenue. After two years, however, I was fired because, I believe, I had been continually calling the bishops and priests of the Episcopal Church back to orthodoxy. I then spent a couple of years as an architectural and planning consultant to a number of clients, including Merrill Lynch, which soon hired me as a vice-president in its Corporate Real Estate division.

At this point in my life, I was acutely aware of the disparity in worldly success between me and my peers, most of whom were moving into important positions in both profit and non-profit enterprises. For instance, my brother David was president of Marsh & McLennan Inc., the world's largest insurance brokerage firm; my brother-in-law Harvey Lichtenstein was director of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, probably the world's foremost home of the *avant-garde* performing arts; and my step-brother Nick Platt was U.S. Ambassador to several nations [and a senior diplomat in]<sup>7</sup> China. Although I was given a good deal of responsibility at Merrill Lynch, I was a long way from moving in the corridors of power – either there or anywhere else. Alas, the prospects of my becoming U.S. Ambassador to Israel were growing dim.

Next to go was my strong body. In 1989, I was struck by a severe case of spinal stenosis, and the resulting operations in 1992 and 1993 left me with a badly weakened spine, lower back muscles in permanent spasm, and a damaged heart. I could no longer engage in the outdoor activities from which I derived such joy, like canoeing, mountain climbing, rowing, running, skating, skiing, tennis playing, or trout fishing.

While I was living through this dismantling of my life and the dissipation of many of the assets on which I had been relying - something else began happening. I had given up the idea that I would be an ambassador to Israel, but God had not.

Late in 1990, Billy Graham decided to hold a rally in Central Park in September of the following year. His organization created Mission Metro New York to initiate, plan, organize, and finance the rally, and then they asked me to chair the executive

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<sup>7</sup> Correction 5/11/2016.

committee which would run it. I proceeded to do so.

By May of 1991, however, I became aware that Graham and his people were ignoring the fact that almost half the people in New York City were Jewish. When I raised the issue, I was told that Graham had given his friend, Rabbi Tannenbaum, some indication that he would not “target” Jewish people. I pointed out that this policy was hardly biblical. Jesus had said that He came to save the lost sheep of the House of Israel,<sup>8</sup> and Paul had indicated that the Gospel should go first to the Jew and then to the Gentile.<sup>9</sup> I threatened to resign if Graham persisted in this policy. Graham’s north-American regional director flew in to talk to me, but I remained firm. So the Graham organization capitulated.

I then organized a Jewish Committee, which I chaired, and which consisted of the leaders of messianic congregations and ministries in the New York metropolitan region. I got their names from Mitch,<sup>10</sup> whom I had met at several Christian functions in the city, and I later learned that many of them had not spoken to one another – let alone worked together – for many years. The committee wrote a briefing paper for Graham, prepared handouts, trained counselors, and developed a follow-up plan for Jewish responders. It also selected Cathy Lee Gifford and Marty Goetz, both Jewish believers in Jesus, to perform at the rally and some prominent Jewish businessmen to sit on the dais with Graham.

As a result of their experience working together on the Graham rally, these messianic leaders decided to create a forum for socializing and discussing issues which affected the messianic community in the New York metropolitan region. Much to my surprise, they honored me by asking me to chair the necessary steering committee, and so the Messianic Association of New York (or MANY) was born. This committee wrote MANY’s organizational documents and selected MANY’s initial members. Although I was asked to become MANY’s president, I declined. I was the only Gentile on the steering committee, I would have been the only Gentile on MANY’s board, and I felt that I had done enough by getting MANY up and running.

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 15:24.

<sup>9</sup> Romans 1:16.

<sup>10</sup> Mitch Glaser – at the time Regional Director of Jews For Jesus, later President of Chosen People Ministries.

As a result of our close association in Mission Metro New York and MANY, Mitch and I began meeting regularly for lunch.

In late 1995, Mitch left Jews for Jesus, where he had served for 25 years. His departure was difficult for him and his entire family. He honored me by seeking my counsel, and thus I spent a lot of time during the ensuing year with him, Zhava, Miriam, and Jenny – an experience which engendered the love and affection which I bear for all four of them today.

In 1996, Mitch started a ministry to the Jewish people in Brooklyn under the aegis of Arnold Fruchtenbaum's Ariel Ministries. Again Mitch honored me by asking me to serve on its board of advisors.

Then in March of 1997, CPM's board of directors asked Mitch to become CPM's president. Mitch sought the counsel of his advisors, and we were unanimous in urging him to accept the position. The next day, Mitch called me and said, "I'll do it if you come along." He suggested that we could have a lot of fun together. After much prayer and consultation with my Christian brothers in a prayer group that met at the Harvard Club on Friday mornings, I decided to go with Mitch.

At first I was a full-time consultant to CPM, focused primarily on its financial health. Then, in 1999, I became CPM's chief administrator - responsible for its administration, finance, and development. During the five years of my consultancy and employment, I was blessed to work with and get to know well the board members, missionaries, and administrators that make up the CPM family. There is not another group of people on earth who are more desirous of serving the Lord and sharing His Gospel with the Jewish people.

In late 2001, I began having serious trouble with my heart, and, after several difficult months, during which Mitch graciously carried me on CPM's roster without my doing very much, I retired. But my involvement with the Jewish people did not end there.

In early 2002, CPM's Board invited me to join it. I accepted its invitation and soon found myself involved in many interesting meetings and projects. Three of the latter are worth mentioning. First, I worked on CPM's transition from traditional

board-governance to John Carver's Policy Governance, which I now regard as the most significant breakthrough in organizational management in history. Second, I helped Mitch develop a vision and strategy for moving CPM into the future. Finally I was intimately involved in finding, purchasing, renovating, and furnishing CPM's beautiful messianic center in Jerusalem. All these projects were stimulating and fun. Moreover, they and others took me to new places and introduced me to new people, including many Jewish believers in other ministries in the U.S., Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Israel, China, and Australia.

In 2006, the leaders of messianic congregations and ministries across the U.S. decided to create a forum for presenting papers on and discussing issues affecting the messianic community in the U.S. Again much to my surprise, they honored me by asking me to chair the necessary steering committee, and so the Boro Park Symposium was born. This committee organized, selected the presenters for, published the papers of, and invited the participants to the first symposium in October of 2007. It was working on a second symposium when I resigned in 2008. Again I was the only Gentile on the committee, and I felt that I had done enough to get it up and running.

So in many ways I became an ambassador to Israel – not the secular Jewish nation in the Middle East, but the Messiah-following Jewish communities around the world. What did I accomplish? That is for them to say. If nothing else, however, I hope that I was an irenic influence - that I made it easier for them to meet, talk, and work together in a spirit of brotherly love and mutual respect despite whatever disagreements they may have had.

Now I have given you an outline of what I have been doing and experiencing in the last thirty years, and I could go on at length fleshing it out. But I don't want you to get the impression that I am seeking either your sympathy for what I have lost or your admiration for what I may have accomplished. I have said enough to illustrate some of the lessons which I have learned, and which I hope you have learned or will learn without having to pay quite the price that I did.

Lesson 1: God has written the script for his creation in general and for each of his creatures in particular. Consider my story. He determined that I would become

one of his people and serve as one of his ambassadors to the Jewish people. At the age of 42, however, I was an atheist living in the Green Mountains and doing what I wanted to do – practice architecture, farm, and make modest contributions to the community in which I lived. Suddenly God began to execute his plan for me. He called me to himself. He stripped me of all those things which might have kept me in Vermont or kept me relying on myself rather than on him. He moved me from the leafy woods of Vermont where I wanted to be to the stone canyons of New York City where I did not want to be, but where lived the greatest concentration of Jewish people on the planet. He equipped me with administrative, financial, and development skills in places like the Episcopal Church and Merrill Lynch. Then he gave me numerous opportunities to serve the Jewish people with those skills – in his name.

Lesson 2: God will accomplish his will for each of us despite our help or hindrance. Again, consider my story. One minute I was a worldly creature seeking pleasure, prosperity, power, position, etc. But the next moment I was a new creature in Messiah – one of His bondservants - bought at the terrible price of His suffering and death on Calvary and expected to obey Him and to bear fruit for His Kingdom. When Jesus called me to be an ambassador to the Jewish people, of course, I was spiritually immature and therefore not ready to understand what He had in mind. Consequently I heard His call in the context of the world, not in the context of His Kingdom, and I expected Him to make me a U.S. ambassador, not His ambassador. I should have asked myself, “Just whose ambassador is He calling me to be?” To have asked the question would have been to answer it. Fortunately, my worldly self-centeredness and grandiosity did not stop Him from doing what He had determined to do.

Lesson 3: Achieving worldly success and bearing fruit for God entail different qualifications. In achieving worldly success, assets such as I listed a few minutes ago are very useful. In bearing fruit for God, however, only a humble, contrite, and faithful heart is essential. Moreover, the focus of the heart has to be Jesus. Initially I was focused on myself and on what I wanted, which was to be important to Him and to others in His Kingdom. The Lord had to get my focus off of myself and onto Him. At one point toward the end of the collapse of my life in Vermont, I broke down before the Lord. Falling on my knees and sobbing with pain, humiliation, and helplessness, I cried out to Him, “What are you doing to me?”

The sub-text of this question, of course, was, “Why are you diminishing me and depriving me of everything which could be so useful to you?” He answered with a question, “Am I sufficient?” “Yes Lord,” I answered, “You are sufficient.” At last, I was beginning to get it. All I needed then was Jesus – just as all I need now is Jesus.

Lesson 4: Bearing fruit for God cannot be done without being closely linked to Jesus. His parable of the vine illustrates this point. To paraphrase, Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Abide in Me. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the vine, so you cannot bear fruit unless you abide in Me. He that abides in Me will bear much fruit.’<sup>11</sup> I had to stop thinking about who I am and what I can do and start thinking about who Jesus is and what He can do. The reality is: I am nothing, and, apart from Him, I can do nothing of any importance to Him. He, on the other hand, is everything - the great God Almighty - and He can do all things - with or without my help.

Lesson 5: Bearing fruit for God requires that the unbeliever be approached with compassion – not passion. Do you know the difference between compassion and passion? Compassion refers to a loving and merciful concern for another’s suffering, loss, or lack, and it is usually accompanied by a determination to do something to assuage that condition. A compassionate person is driven by another’s needs, but he imposes his compassion’s costs on himself. Passion is quite different. In the classic sense, the word has two meanings: one refers to suffering – particularly Jesus’ ordeal on Good Friday; the other refers to zeal, ardor, or a vehement desire that is somewhat out of control. The latter is the sense in which I am using it here. Thus, a passionate person is driven by his own needs, but he imposes his passion’s costs on others. Compassion is a virtue, whereas passion – at least in the classic sense - is a vice.<sup>12</sup>

Consider the matter of sharing the Gospel of Jesus with unbelievers. A compassionate evangelist is driven by a genuine concern for the person to whom he is speaking, and he focuses on at least the following: (a) treating the person respectfully and lovingly; (b) listening to what the person has to say; (c) trying to

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<sup>11</sup> See John 15:4-5.

<sup>12</sup> In Colossians 3:5, Paul lists vices which followers of Jesus must eschew, and which he identifies as forms of idolatry. One is translated as “inordinate affection” in the KJV, but as “passion” in most other versions of the Bible. Passion turns its object into an idol.

discern where the person is in his journey toward God; (d) speaking in a way that the person will understand; and (e) all the while humbly recognizing that his success in reaching the person depends *solely* on the Holy Spirit. Thus, he manifests God's love to the person, thereby affirming that the person is one of Jesus' cherished creatures, made in His image. A passionate evangelist, on the other hand, is driven by his own need to proclaim the Gospel, and thus he focuses solely on what *he* is saying, not on the person to whom he is speaking. He fails to manifest God's love to the person, thereby treating the person solely as a listener and all too often turning the person into a victim. As you can see, there is a world of difference between a compassionate evangelist, who speaks the truth in love,<sup>13</sup> and a passionate evangelist, who speaks the truth inconsiderately. Alas, I was one of the latter. Now I can only pray that the Lord will undo the damage which I did. Don't follow in my footsteps.

That ends the lessons which I will share with you tonight.

So now I live in the Lord's shadow. I depend on Him...for every thing in every way...in every moment of every day, and I am grateful to Him every time He uses me in some small way to accomplish His will. There is a poem which captures all of this quite beautifully. It is called "The Watered Lilies." Unfortunately, we do not know who wrote it.

The Master stood in His garden,  
Among the lilies fair,  
Which His own right hand had planted,  
And trained with tend'rest care.

He looked at their snowy blossoms,  
And marked with observant eye  
That the flowers were sadly drooping,  
For their leaves were parched and dry.

"My lilies need to be watered,"  
The Heavenly Master said:  
"Wherein shall I draw it for them,

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<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 4:15.

And raise each drooping head?"

Close to His feet on the pathway,  
Empty, and frail, and small,  
An earthen vessel was lying,  
Which seemed no use at all;

But the Master saw, and raised it  
From the dust in which it lay,  
And smiled, as He gently whispered,  
"This shall do My work today:

"It is but an earthen vessel,  
But it lay so close to Me;  
It is small, but it is empty-  
That is all it needs to be."

So to the fountain He took it,  
And filled it full to the brim;  
How glad was the earthen vessel  
To be of some use to Him!

He poured forth the living water  
Over His lilies fair,  
Until the vessel was empty,  
And again He filled it there.

He watered the drooping lilies  
Until they revived again;  
And the Master saw with pleasure  
That His labor had not been in vain.

His own hand had drawn the water  
Which refreshed the thirsty flowers;  
But He used the earthen vessel  
To convey the living showers.

And to itself it whispered,  
As He laid it aside once more,  
"Still will I lie in His pathway,  
Just where I did before.

"Close would I keep to the Master,  
Empty would I remain,  
And perhaps some day He may use me  
To water His flowers again."

One last thought. You might ask, do I miss some of the things which God took from me? Sometimes – of course. Would I trade the lessons I have learned for the return of everything I have lost? Never! God had to do what he did and is still doing to me to mold me into the person He wants me to be. Why would I throw all that away? Besides, all worldly things – form and flesh, fame and fortune, and all the finery and furniture of life - get stripped from us by death, and I am only a heart attack away from such. When I stand on the other side of death, all I will have is the Lord Himself. But, I ask, is there *any treasure* that can compare with the Pearl of Great Price?

So now I take formal leave of CPM. In doing so, I want to thank all of you on the staff and all of you on the board for the wonderful time I have had as we labored together in this particular corner of the Lord's vineyard. So many interesting experiences. So much good talk. So much love. So much laughter. So much delight in seeing so many Jewish people awaken to the truth about their Messiah. I may be leaving you in body, but I shall remain with you in spirit.

Farewell, and may the Lord be with you all – this night and forever more.