

She could have never seen this coming. There couldn't be anything more unexpected. A life that felt like she was lost in the dense fog of the sea. Ever since she was 19-months old, life came to her like a dark mist, seeing nothing but darkness, and hearing nothing but the silent whisper of soundlessness. Helen Keller in her blank and melody-less world erupted day after day in frustration. Mugs shattered, chairs flipped over, how could her existence be called "life?" How could life come to her? How could her dark and silent path be filled with music and color? Is this really what the Lord wanted? Why can't he break through this silent suffering? Have you looked at your own life's path in a similar light? Have you ever wished that Jesus would be the God you'd prefer for him to be? Or wondered why he doesn't come to you in the way that you see as best? As you look at the obstacles and adversity the Lord has placed in your life's way, are you lost in how he will clear those struggles away? As you prepare to celebrate Jesus' humble entering of our world the first time, how will he clear the way into our hearts?

The church family in Thessalonica stared down their life's pathway and they saw the barriers before they saw Jesus. This church has been born in the middle of riots. These Christians entered the darkness of opposition from its very beginning, and the silent hatred of their community. Thessalonica was a beacon of Rome, it overlooked Mount Olympus, its religion was its life. So when Paul and Silas broke through this pathology of mythology, disruption was the natural progression. Mobs verbally abuse, riots destroy and shame, how could a church family stand together? Events became so toxic and life-threatening that Paul and Silas were forced to leave this infant-congregation surrounded by a never-ending sea of hurtful haters. Is this really how the Lord Jesus would come to them? Through bitter opposition? Through shunning from their family? Through being outcasts in their society? Could this really be how Jesus would show his presence to their church?

Could this really be how Jesus clears the way to show his presence to you? Why does he choose such humbling mechanisms to enter our lives? Why ride into Jerusalem on a donkey when he could have swept the crowds away on an angel-powered chariot? Why not immediately establish an earthly kingdom where if you are a Christian, all your suffering disappears and all you can see is pleasure? Why strengthen faith through opposition instead of instantaneously making us perfect and holy the milli-second the Holy Spirit creates faith within us?

Are these questions hitting close to home? Whether you have actually voiced them, or heard them in your mind's ear, it's the struggle God's people have debated internally for millennia. From Adam to Moses, from David to Jeremiah, from Malachi to Peter. Why, Jesus, can't you be the king I want you to be! How much easier life would be if I could see Jesus physically with my own eyes right now, to see fully when he says "**Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.**" If I could hear the intonation of Jesus' words when I read the red-letters of his words in my Bible, I'd never think of sin again! Why can't the overwhelming display of power that will come when Jesus returns be the kind of power he always shows us in our lives? Why can't the second coming be Jesus' "always" kind of coming?

It is in this dark and soundless place that we begin to empathize with Helen Keller on a spiritual level. When the Lord comes near to us, it's never how we expect. It's never how we would prefer. When we look at the roadblock of our hearts, our sin that promises pleasure only to inflict pain, our guilt that hangs over us and alters our very perception of life, the certain future of death that alters every life decision we face. You and I look at these roadblocks and we pray that Jesus clear them according to our life engineering design. Demolish all roots of setbacks, steamroll any thistles of adversity, incinerate any thorns of resistance. You and I in our innate and inborn darkness, choose to allow the devil's deceptive voice drone on and on as we demand that Jesus come to us the way we *want* him to. Such listening clouds our sight, and such a sightless and soundless world boils over into frustration and confusion, a purposeless life, defined by the changing waves of life and out of control winds of emotions. Our life's pathway becomes overgrown with more thistles, more thorns, more obstacles.

Why can't Jesus come to us like we want him to? Why can't he be the mighty king instead of the humble messiah? He simply can't...because he wants to clear his way into your heart and life, and he trailblazes his path in the most unexpected of ways.

After years of her disease-inflicted exile from life, Helen Keller had given up hope. This was her life permanently, no real human warmth, no extraordinary purpose to live, just a burden filled with adversity. All that changed when well-water forged rivers through the lines of her hands. As her teacher wrote the word "water" on her palm, and for the first time meaning met reality, words meant something, prayers answered! Light broke through darkness, her world heard the faintest of sounds! Who would have guessed that water from a well would make all the difference?

Who could have guessed water in a baptismal font would change everything for you and me?

Who would have guessed the almighty God in a manger, the King of Kings trotting slowly on a beast of burden, a little water spoken over with a Bible verse, would be the very entrance we long hoped for him to make? As Paul wrote, "**How can we thank God enough!**" Jesus clears the way! He broke through your once thorny, thistle-snatched heart, and made his home within you. The king has come to you! He demolishes your preferences and rules just the way you *need* him to. He steamrolls your doubts and paves permanency of peace. Night and day he intercedes for you. Have you ever reflected on that? In the infinity of the universe, Jesus has made it his calling to speak to our heavenly Father on your behalf? Could there be a greater honor? Could humility be the greatest form of majesty?

It's through humility that Jesus has chosen to come near to you. He would let nothing hinder him from coming into your heart. There was no thorn too sharp with pain, no thistle too tangled up to clear, even a crown of thorns and thistles wouldn't hold him back from knocking on the door of your heart. Jesus knew that if he tried to force his way into your heart through miracle and physics-busting wonder, such a coming would be a sham. His way into your heart was unmasked, unforced, unearned. He chooses to come to you through a bumbling 27-year old preacher, through a well-worn book on your shelf, humbling himself so he can be seen through the weak voice of human language. He enters your life through some drops of water, through a tiny glass

of wine, a meager wafer. He shows his power through weakness. He shows his presence through your brothers and sisters in the faith. Why such humble entrances in your life's eye?

Because Jesus is the king we *need* him to be. Because Jesus knows exactly how to lead us back to him. Because Jesus has cleared the way, and now he is clearing the way every day so each day you become more like him, so that each day as you draw closer to filling your lungs with heaven's air for the first time, that you live a life of constant joy and peace in a world hell-bent on drawing you into the frame of sadness and confusion!

Jesus, through his humble love, clears the way for your love to "**increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else,**" like Paul writes! His selfless love entering your life space splashes your life's eye with the color of prayer, night and day. This agape love fills your life's ears with a tune for service to God and others that you never want to get out of your head! You start to see loving your brothers and sisters in Christ as the most significant accomplishment you ever achieve. You scroll down Facebook feeds, Instagram posts, YouTube videos and news feeds without bitterness and pride, but with a heart longing that those who have put barrier after barrier in front of Jesus can experience Jesus clear the way in their life just like he has with yours.

You look at life like the Thessalonians did and you see the blessed effect of adversity for the Christian. You see your faith grow not despite opposition, but *through* opposition. As you oppose Satan, sin, and self, you see the Lord clear your personal weeds of pet sins, and your private thorns of grief. You begin to see the wisdom and compassion of your God who came to clear your path straight into the pearly gates of your true home.

The more Jesus clears the way in your life, the more he pulls all the invasive species of sins from your life, the more in focus his second coming becomes. Because the more he clears away the effects of sin in your life, the more you can picture yourself standing "**blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.**" And when you can picture yourself standing there, seeing Him in the clouds, the more clearly you see yourself for who you really are: a holy and blameless child of God. You see your purpose: A path-clearer, a painter of life in a world of darkness, a composer of the song of joy because your very existence cannot help but be captured by the One who is, who was, and who is to come.

Dear blameless saints of God, don't lose the still, small sights and sounds of your mighty God. As you continue on the way toward heaven, and those thorns of sin stick, prick, and scar, keep your eyes ahead on your humble King. See in his weakness the mighty grace of God. Watch as Jesus clears your way, and clears your sightline so all you want to see and hear is him. Jesus is coming again. What more could we possibly look forward to! Amen.