

A full moon is positioned in the upper center of the frame, set against a sky with a teal-to-blue gradient and wispy clouds. Below the moon, a landscape features a single tree on a grassy hill, with distant mountains visible in the background. The overall mood is serene and ethereal.

ETERNAL
LIFE

JR DICKEY

Eternal Life

J R Dickey



Eternal Life

Copyright © 2024 by J R Dickey

AuthorHouse™

1663 Liberty Drive,

Suite 200 Bloomington, IN 47403 www.authorhouse.com

Phone: 1-800-839-8640

© 2009 John Dickey.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means without the written permission of the author.

First published by AuthorHouse 9/1/2024 ISBN: 111-1-1111-1111-1 (sc)

ISBN: 111-1-1111-1111-1 (ebk)

Printed in the United States of America Bloomington, Indiana

Dickey, John. Fire Eyes: The Revelation of Jesus Christ . AuthorHouse. Kindle Edition.

Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	ix
1. Eternal Life	1
2. One of Christ's Commands	4
3. When Love Waits	6
4. Head Scratcher	10
5. Babel	13
6. What's It Going To Be?	15
7. I Will Work With That	18
8. It's Getting Nuts 'Out There'	22
9. Then We'll Be Perfectly Perfect	25
10. Humbling Three Revisited	29
11. Your True Identity	34
12. Heavenly Things	38
13. Can't See!	42
14. Being Small	46
15. Perfect	49
16. Darkness	51
17. Basic Training – One	54
18. Basic Training – Two	57
19. Basic Training – Three	60
20. First Day	64
21. Second Day, First Heaven 15	68
22. Third Day, Doubly Good	77
23. Fourth Day, Let's Clear the Air	80
24. The Gap	83
25. In the End - Part 1	86
26. In the End - Part 2	90
27. In the Light	95
28. Don't Drift	98
29. Warning From Prison	100
30. Broken	103
31. Like Him	107
32. Challenged	111
33. Third Day	117
34. Days of Noah	120
35. Timing	123
36. The Fellowship	127
37. The Scars	129
38. Discipleship	132

39. The Joy of Your Lord	134
40. Never Stop Trusting	137
41. At Home	139
42. Dead Body Walking, Live Spirit Waiting	142
43. One Perfect Man	144
44. Thoughts Along a Shady Country Lane	147
45. The Ugly 'P'	149
46. God of Peace - Part 1	154
47. God of Peace - Part 2	156
48. Know God	159
49. THE Promise	161
50. Rest	163
51. The Twin	165
52. In One Another	167
53. Several Amazing Things	169
54. Curling with Faith	172
55. Try or Trust	175
56. Lowest of the Low	180
57. The Physician's Account	182
58. Finishing the Feasts	185
59. Welcome to the Last Days	188
60. Are You Ready?	190
61. Considering "Things above" – Part One, God Almighty	193
62. Considering "Things above" - Part two, Jesus	200
63. Considering "Things Above" - The Holy Spirit	207
64. Considering "Things above" - Part four, Heaven	208
65. A Time to Fight	211
66. Adversity's Advantage	213
67. Foreshadowing Redemption	216
68. Caves	219
69. Awake	221
70. Persevere	223

Acknowledgments

Thanks to my dear friend Dean Chiquette for his amazing help in putting these two volumes together and to the knowledgeable authors I have cited – to David Guzik, to Max Lucado, to Chuck Smith, and many others.

Thanks to my incredible wife, Darlene, who is my best friend and the *'love of my life'*.

Introduction

Living in Jesus Christ is a moment by moment eternal experience in which we joyously learn, obey, rest, and know Him. His Word is our Lamp and our Light as we journey. His presence is everything to us. He lifts us when we stumble, cleans us and repeatedly covers us with grace.

Some of the greatest minds, the greatest believers have written massive tomes and superb illustrations attesting to the greatness of our Savior. And as I consider this, I know He is worthy of so much greater and grander thoughts and words than mine; but He is my Love, the One I adore and so I am compelled to share with you these meager devotions. I hope you may find them helpful for your own moment by moment journey, your daily meditation and reflection.

Chapter 1

Eternal Life

You know, life is not simply living any more than love is simply a handshake. A heartbeat, a breath, standing upright are signs of living but not signs of life. To put it frankly, living in this world is simply a sham, a fraud, a deceit because it isn't life, it is death delayed. It is merely existence, at times punctuated with 'blips' of revelry as distractions from the harsh reality of 'living' in darkness.

I know that isn't inspiring. But if you are truly born again, life, eternal life, the magnificent quality of eternal life is IN YOU. No longer are you simply existing. Now, your body, your 'flesh', is not part of this life for even when it's 'living', it's dead. Don't be discouraged, defeated or deceived when it does not cooperate with the life in you. You see, for as long as you are housed in it, God intends for you to learn—to learn humility, to learn to trust Him—truly trust Him, to learn to listen, to learn faithfulness and obedience.

Understand, you are not your 'flesh'. Your flesh, despite its influence on your soul, is not you. When you are saved, you are "one Spirit" with the Lord¹. You don't work for that, it's a gift. Just as Adam and Eve did not make Eden—God did and placed them in it in order to have fellowship with them. Their original purpose was to know God and that purpose which they lost, was re-established for us in Christ.

*“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and
Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*

— (John 17:3)

So, let's explore some more about this eternal life. In doing so, I'll borrow a bit from a couple of my fellow bloggers.

What is eternal life? It is first of all uncreated; and as such it is self-existing and ever-existing; unlimited; full of attributes; and indestructible.

Being eternal is one of God's qualities; He is the Self-Existing and Ever-Existing One. Some translators use the term "everlasting life," but this does not capture the meaning, for everlasting merely refers to time without end. In actuality, with God there is nothing called time. Eternity has to do with the quality and nature of this life. This life is eternal because it is the life of the self-existing and ever-existing God; it is eternal because it is unlimited and indestructible.

So now, what are the attributes of this life? We may be familiar with the commonly mentioned attributes of love, light, holiness, and righteousness. I would also bring to your attention that oneness is also a divine attribute. When you consider the oneness of the Triune God, you must acknowledge how wonderful a thing such oneness is. On this earth, there is no such thing.

When you are one with this Person Who is the eternal life,² you are also one with His transcending power. When I'm one with Christ, I'm one with His love, light, holiness, righteousness, oneness, purity, singleness, harmoniousness, and I'm one with His power because these are all in Him, these are all attributes of this one eternal Person.

So then, what kind of power does God possess? Resurrection power! Ascending power! Enthroning power! The power that is infinity and thus overcomes all limitations! This power is another of His attributes.

(Thanks Titus Chu for some of this.)

Now, though I'm glad "eternal life" includes the grandeur of the new heaven and new earth, its focus really is elsewhere. Eternal life is a quality of life before a quantity—it's knowing Jesus Christ and our heavenly Father in the most intimate relationship imaginable. This is the essence, heartbeat, crux, core, magnificent splendor of eternal life.

To know God is to begin the journey of fulfilling our deepest longings for connection, relationship, and intimacy. No mere humans can satisfy these insatiable cravings—not a spouse, children, friends, parents, co-workers... only God. Only His Holy Spirit is powerful enough to bring us into such intimacy, and to take us further up and further into the matchless riches of such grace.

To know our Lord is to be fully known—in all of our brokenness, beauty, weakness and neediness. Equally, it's to be fully loved—way beyond our current grasp or capacity to imagine, as well as the immensely powerful hope that such a relationship with Him could be ours. (Thanks Scotty Smith for some of this.)

Is He your Shepherd? He said:

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one."

— (John 10:27-30)

Do you understand His message?

“And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”

— (1 John 5:20)

Yes, eternal life is a quality of life and that quality is entirely based upon your relationship with “*the Way, the Truth and the Life.*” So, I’ll take quality over quantity any time, even when there is no more time!

Love the Lord!

1. *“But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.”* — (1 Corinthians 6:17 NKJV)
2. *“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”* — (John 14:6 NKJV)

Chapter 2

One of Christ's Commands

Among the important words in Christianity—love, faith, peace, joy, kindness, etc. there is one that is rarely mentioned but vitally important. It was one of Jesus' commands, a fervent command and yet we tend to yawn at it. Even the disciples were rebuked because they could not do it for even one hour¹.

We need to understand it from a spiritual perspective Not so much physical. If we believe Jesus, we'll do it; if we don't or don't care about His commands or we don't really love Him, we won't do it and sad to say, we may even mock those who do.

Some say doing it is just too intense for them. Some think that to do it is fruitless or boring. Some say they are too involved in 'more meaningful' activities 'for the Lord'. They just don't get it.

Most, if not all these excuses show a lack of understanding of the nature of this command.

“And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”

— (Mark 13:37)

“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

— (Luke 21:36)

Jesus is talking about His return, and He commanded us to:

“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.”

— (Matthew 24:42)

Now, quite simply to watch means to stay awake and alert. So, clearly the Lord wasn't saying stay physically awake and alert but rather He's speaking to a condition of the inner man. In Revelation, He addressed the church in Sardis as having “a name that you are alive, but you are dead”—serious indeed. And He also says,

*“Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.
Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you
will not know what hour I will come upon you.”*

— (Revelation 3:3)

In this verse, we can see that to not watch is the counterpoint or opposite to remember how you received and heard the gospel and hold it fast.

With Sardis, it is apparent that He is referring to His instantaneous appearing at the rapture but He also speaks to the remnant of Jewish believers during the Tribulation when He says,

*“...you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return
from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him
immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes,
will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and
have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them.”*

— (Luke 12:36-37)

So, watching is synonymous with having a real relationship with your Savior—not lip service or just going through motions. Even in the times of greatest trial, when you know Him and know His love, you will always remember His words and hold them in your heart.

You'll watch.

Chapter 3

When Love Waits

“Then the angel, whom I saw standing on the sea and on the earth, lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, WHO CREATED HEAVEN AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE EARTH AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE SEA AND THE THINGS IN IT, that there will be delay no longer, but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He proclaimed good news to His servants, the prophets.”

— (Revelation 10:5-7)

Sometimes, God waits, and we’ve all gotten used to accepting the old adage that He does things ‘in His time’. As we can see above, there will come a time when His mystery is finished and He will proclaim via His angel that there will be no more delay. What’s this mystery? Wait for it...

But generally, we do not do well with His delays, in fact, we can get pretty freaked out. Even the best of us can react this way. The prophet Daniel cried out to God,

“O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name.”

— (Daniel 9:19)

King David cried desperately,

“But I am poor and needy; Make haste to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay.”

— (Psalm 70:5)

But then when his heart was stronger, he also exhorted us to look to the Lord in times of delay.

“Behold, the eye of Yahweh is on those who fear Him, on those who wait for His lovingkindness,”

— (Psalm 33:18)

“Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Wait for God, for I shall still praise Him, For the salvation of His presence.”

— (Psalm 42:5)

And the prophet Micah echoed the same thing:

“But as for me, I will watch expectantly for Yahweh; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me.”

— (Micah 7:7)

Now the Jewish people need this encouragement in particular because the Lord has made them wait for two thousand years as He has extended His grace to the gentile world. By the way, according to 2 Peter 3:8, that’s two days:

“But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.”

So that brings me to the reason for this lesson and helps me better understand the story of Jesus with Lazarus when it says,

“Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. And it was the Mary who anointed the Lord with perfume, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.

So, the sisters sent to Him, saying, ‘Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.’ But when Jesus heard this, He said, ‘This sickness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.’ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days in the place where He was.”

— (John 11:1-6)

Yes, Jesus made them wait two days and when He arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. That corresponds to four thousand years, prophetically. And take special note that the scripture says He waited those two days because He loved them. Huh? And note, also that the call of Abram was just about four thousand years ago. Hmmm.

You see, I’m convinced that Lazarus is indeed a type or prophetic symbol of the Jews. Christ’s coming to Him was delayed for two days because of love and as he was in the grave for four days, in like manner, the Jews have been spiritually dead (i.e. separated from God) for two thousand years because of their rejection of Christ, and even for four thousand years—why? Because although they have walked in humble acknowledgement of and loyalty to and even service to God it has not been in union with God because that union can only come from trusting in the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So why did they reject their Savior? How could they go two thousand years in disbelief-‘in the grave’ so to speak? Blindness.

“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”

— (Romans 11:25)

You see, as Paul wrote, they were blinded so that the Gospel could be taken around the world.

“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.”

— (Isaiah 42:1)

Just as the book of Revelation declares above, this “good news” was proclaimed to/by the prophets, and as for their blindness—this was spoken of by prophets like Isaiah and Moses (See Deut 29:4 and Isaiah 29:10 as examples).

Why even the life of Jesus (that's His testimony) portrayed this with Lazarus. John recorded:

“And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’”

— (Revelation 19:10)

All this is to say that Jesus waited for two days because He loved Lazarus and his sisters. And, He's waited two prophetic days for the same reason—He loves His people.

Chapter 4

Head Scratcher

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.”

— (John 10:1-4)

Whenever Jesus gave the Pharisees an allegory to consider, you can imagine them just scratching their heads (or turbans) and here He goes again. In context, He’s not directing this only at His followers but at His detractors. Starting off, He says there’s a sheepfold (lit. sheep palace) with a doorway. He then says there is only one way into this sheep palace—the door.

Every other religion in the world is somehow based upon works—climbing up to heaven. The one and only true religion is about trust and relationship with God. The sheep trust the Shepherd because they know the Shepherd. He says that all other religions are thieves and robbers because as agents of the wicked one, they want to steal your soul away from the Father.

A few verses later, He tells us that He is the door. And this agrees with the declaration,

“I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

— (John 14:6)

Then He states that there is the shepherd Not shepherds. Just one, who

enters by the door. Now, as I mentioned, Jesus will soon say that He is the door, and He will also say that He is the Shepherd of the sheep. So, is he telling them the door enters by the door? Yes, but like I said, for a Pharisee, it was a head-scratcher.

You see, Jesus is the Door and of course you use a door to enter someplace; additionally, to do that you must trust that the door leads into someplace you want to enter. You must trust the door so to speak. So Jesus is saying, if you want to get into the sheepfold, heaven, you have to trust Me and enter Me. It's about trusting One Who is higher than you. For us, it's Jesus; for Jesus, it's the Father.

“If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.”

— (John 14:28b)

So, Jesus is the Door and Jesus is the Shepard. “He who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.” Jesus entered (re-entered) heaven by trusting/obeying in the Father and thereby led the way before His sheep as a shepherd.

We know that Jesus is the only way to the Father for us. How about for Jesus? How did He come before the Father? By the obedience of the cross. That was the only way. In the garden, Jesus prayed, saying,

“My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done.”

— (Matthew 26:42)

Jesus chose to obey and trust the Father. That was His door. And in entering it, He became our “Chief Sheperd”

“To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”

— (John 10:3)

Now, Who is this Doorkeeper? I believe this is the Holy Spirit—He is the One Who opens hearts, our hearts, and that's when we hear our Shepherd's Voice. And the Shepherd leads His flock in and out of the sheepfold. You see, the sheepfold is for protection, but the sheep also need to eat. So the Shepherd also leads us out to green pastures—places of ministry.

Remember, Jesus told His disciples,

“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work.”

— (John 4:34)

And the Psalmist adds,

“A Psalm of David. Yáhweh is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake.”

— (Psalm 23:1-3)

So, the Shepherd leads us out and He Himself is our protection—to do ministry and in the process to be refreshed and restored. You see, this parable is about life -

“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

— (John 10:10)

And, it’s about how we get that life –

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”

— (John 10:11)

That is, Jesus gave His life for us. And...

“I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me,”

— (John 10:14)

We get to have a relationship with the Shepherd, to know Him. And that relationship leads to wonderful rewards -

And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

— (1 Peter 5:4)

So, for His sheep, this isn’t a ‘head-scratcher’. It’s a glorious promise of life, relationship and rewards—just listen to Him, trust and follow.

Chapter 5

Babel

A long time ago, just after the flood of Noah, as mankind began to repopulate the earth, the evil-hearted who did not trust God decided to build for themselves a city with a tower. It was called Babel. Now God wanted men to spread out but these people were against that and intended to band together.

God knew that this unity would be problematic and would recreate the same conditions on the planet that moved Him to send the flood.

“And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.”

— (Genesis 11:6)

To a prideful human heart, it might appear that God simply wanted to hold them back, that He didn't want them to advance. But this is again the same thinking that the serpent in Eden used on Eve.

The reality is that if they could do all “that they have imagined to do”, there would be a big problem for preceding the flood:

“... GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

— (Genesis 6:5)

So, once again, God decided to protect them from themselves. However, soon after this, along came the one the Bible calls “the mighty hunter against the Lord” Nimrod. He used this place to build his own city that he named Babylon. Years later, the king of Babylon Nebuchadnezzar, brought his army to Jerusalem

and leveled it. He took the holy articles from the treasury and the temple and brought them back to Babylon along with many select boys, one of whom was Daniel.

It was this king Nebby, that forced Daniel the prophet to interpret his dream in Daniel chapter two. See my devotional, “Dreamworld” for more on that. Succinctly, the dream prophetically displayed all the kingdoms that would rule over the Jews and Jerusalem.

So, it’s not surprising that the name Babylon comes up again at the end of our age:

“And he (one of God’s angels) cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.”

— (Revelation 18:2)

Babylon started off as a tower, became a city and then a regional empire and in the final end-times represents the entire planet. The heavenly angel declares that Planet Babylon has become the home of all the evil in the cosmos—yep, that’s Earth under Satan’s rule. The name Babylon means “confusion” and that’s appropriate because all the deceit and evil in every corner, in every heart, will bring with it great confusion.

But don’t let that circumstance cause you any fear or concern. When the angel declares this, the church is in heaven having been taken there at the rapture/resurrection. In the meantime, the stage is being set and indeed the days are globally going from bad to worse. More war and violence is ‘on the menu’, more delusion and deception, more hatred—the world is indeed a war zone spiritually.

John Rich, the singer, has put out a new song and video that highlights this. It’s called Revelation. This is the link:

<https://youtu.be/Yk6YPFCUaqA?si>

Hope you enjoy it.

Chapter 6

What's It Going To Be?

As believers, it's important for us to put 'first things' first and 'major on the majors'. Sadly, the preponderance of us are like the men in John chapter six who wanted more banquet miracles (loaves and fishes). They ran after Christ, but Jesus tested their motives and gave them something to ponder when He said,

“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”

— (John 6:27)

Oh, most of us are not going after Jesus to be fed, but we do get hung up on the doing. What do I mean?

“Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?”

— (John 6:28)

You see, our minds can more easily understand doing something to earn God's favor and we often put that doing first before anything else. And for that reason, our churches are 'running over' with people willing to attend, to give, to work, but coming up short on spiritual depth. Christ gave them an answer that for many is still a conundrum today:

“Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent.”

— (John 6:29)

In fact, the whole notion of ‘being’ is important to God. It’s a ‘first thing’. For instance:

“When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.’”

— (Genesis 17:1)

“For I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”

— (Leviticus 11:45)

“Be still, and know that I am God;”

— (Psalm 46:10)

“Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.”

— (Isaiah 45:22)

Yes, to be blameless, to be holy, to be still and know, to be saved, these are ‘first things’ with God. And they follow the first of the first things—believing on Him whom He has sent—Jesus.

That’s because being these things is directly linked to KNOWING God.

“Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the LORD; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart.”

— (Jeremiah 24:7)

And, of course, many of you realize that the verb ‘to be’ is an existential verb. “To be” is a verb, like, I am, you are, he/she/it/one is, we are, they are, etc. Notice each of these ‘first thing’ being statements also includes God saying, “I am”. In fact, He introduced Himself to Moses that way:

“And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ”

— (Exodus 3:14)

In the Hebrew, this “I AM” is YHWH. Scholars say that YHWH is ... derived from the Hebrew verb *hayah*, which means “to be.”

Latin-speaking Christian scholars replaced the Y (which does not exist in Latin) with an I or a J (the latter of which exists in Latin as a variant form of I). Thus, the tetragrammaton became the artificial Latinized name Jehovah (JeHoWaH).

“Scripture says Christ embodies every attribute that is true of Jehovah, Colossians 2:9: *“For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form.”* And Hebrews 1:3 says Christ *“is the radiance of [Jehovah’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature. Jesus is Jehovah God.”* — C.H. Spurgeon

All that is to say that Jesus is I AM. He said so Himself –

“Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.’ ”

— (John 8:58)

So here’s the summary—getting the ‘first of the first things’ (believing in Jesus) leads to the rest of the ‘first things’ as you are fully submitted to Jesus. And they lead to Knowing God. So what’s it going to be?

Chapter 7

I Will Work With That

So often, the scripture shows us that the very thing(s) that we think disqualify us, or that give us doubts about ourselves or even God, are the things that God shows, 'I will work with that.'

*“And Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’
Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’”*

— (John 1:46)

Now, Jesus, when He saw Nate approaching said, “Behold, an Israelite with no deceit!” (I paraphrase) We don’t know a lot about his background or character, but we can certainly trust Jesus. Nate was a straight shooter. So, when he doubted that anything good could come out of Jesus’ hometown, it was an honest doubt. It was sincere.

What was the nature or source of his doubt? Perhaps he had some personal history that prejudiced him or maybe he’d heard so many bad reports from other people that he was entirely convinced. It could have been a social/religious or even political deal for history shows us that Nazareth did not have the greatest of reputations politically. Following the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC, the Roman armory in Sepphoris (four miles from Nazareth) was robbed, and the Romans retaliated by crucifying 2,000 Jews as a disincentive to such revolts. Whatever the case Nate was dead set against the notion that the Messiah could come from such a place.

Now, his doubt wasn’t born out of apathy. He doubted precisely because he cared about the coming of the Savior intensely. You see, he was evidently one who looked for the Messiah. His friend, Philip, was like-minded. Here’s the story:

“Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom

Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ And Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’

Philip said to him, ‘Come and see’. Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!

*Nathanael said to Him, ‘How do You know me?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were **under the fig tree**, I saw you.’ ”*

— (John 1:45-48)

“**Under the fig tree**” was a phrase Rabbis used to describe meditation on the Scriptures. And, because of this, there’s a lot of speculation about whether Jesus actually saw him or was referring to a spiritual observation. In either event, what mattered was that Christ’s statement was like a trigger that ignited a bomb of sorts blowing up Nate’s doubt.

Something about Nazareth had clouded Nate’s mind but Jesus brought in the light, swept away the clouds and Nazareth was no longer an issue. This is the doubt that many people hold to who want the truth but can’t get past the prejudice of their ‘logic’ or the frustration of ‘rabbit-holes’ that turn up empty.

Then, there was Thomas, the disciple also known as the “Twin” who was so adamantly a doubter that even today we can refer to someone who’s doubtful as a “doubting Thomas”. Tom’s character was a fervent and expressive one. When Jesus told his group of followers that He was headed to a little settlement close to Jerusalem (in order to raise Lazarus from the grave), at a time when the powerful Jews were wanting to kill Him, the scriptures say,

*“Then **Thomas**, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with Him.’ ”*

— (John 11:16)

Tom was loyal and true to what he could see. Some speculate that he was called the Twin because he looked so much like Jesus.

But after the Lord’s torture and crucifixion he split from the rest of the disciples. We don’t know why, but when the risen Christ appeared to the others in their hide-out, he was missing—the only one. And when he returned, this is what happened:

“Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

So, Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’

And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them,

‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’

‘If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

The other disciples therefore said to him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’

So, he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.’ ”

— (John 20:19-25)

You can’t help but sense Tom’s offense. He may have thought, ‘Why did He appear when I’m gone—the only one missing?’ Clearly, he was angry and perhaps feeling left out. His doubt wasn’t simply because he couldn’t see the Lord; I firmly believe the issue of the scars was an excuse—he was offended, feeling shunned and left alone. But God had a purpose in mind.

This is the doubt that is emotional and based in hurt or disappointment. I have two children who have been through such a circumstance. When life is merciless and we experience bitter pain and as a result we are often ‘missing’ when Christ shows up. It can seem like everyone else ‘gets it’, everyone else is included. I mean Thomas missed the giving of the Holy Spirit (though he got it later).

But Jesus didn’t exclude Thomas, indeed, He had him in mind. Here’s the story:

“And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘Peace to you!’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving but believing.’ ”

— (John 20:27)

To both of these ‘doubters’, Jesus showed compassion and mercy and grace. As a consequence, each of these men uttered the greatest confessions of the New Testament:

“Nathanael answered and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ ”

— (John 1:49)

And...

“And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ ”

— (John 20:28)

Both men followed Christ faithfully for the rest of their lives even unto death. And perhaps, Jesus had **John** in mind too because it was this incident that he says stirred him to write the Gospel of John:

*“Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have **believed.** Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have **believed.**’ (like us)*

*And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; **but these are written that you may believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that **believing you may have life** in His name.”*

— (John 20:29-31)

Both these men were honest about their doubts. You can be too. God can handle them; in fact, He will work with them and ‘blow them away’.

Chapter 8

It's Getting Nuts 'Out There'

Matthew 24:37

“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.”

— (Genesis 6:5-6 NKJV)

In like manner, our current societies are becoming filled with anger and violence. To back up this statement, if it isn't obvious, I've clipped a few segments of semi-recent research on this topic which follow:

When people think of violence, they think of war. But about 83 percent of violent deaths now occur outside conflict zones. From 2007 to 2014, more civilians died violently in Mexico than in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2015, Brazil had more violent deaths than Syria.

And what about the media we are addicted to? Is it a contributor?

Among the same study participants Now at age 30, early exposure to TV violence did correlate with self-reports of adult aggression among men (Huesmann & Miller, 1994), including the “severity” of criminal behavior (Wilson, 2008);

A 15-year study of 500 individuals, released in 2003, followed children from the 1st or 3rd grades into their early to mid-20s (Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, & Eron, 2003). This study, which did control for parental aggression as well as early IQ, social class, and other variables, found that heavy exposure to TV violence in childhood predicted increased physically aggressive behavior in adulthood for both boys and girls (based on self-reports) (Bushman & Huesmann, 2012). Among the findings were that “heavy viewers of violent TV shows in 1st

and 3rd grade were three times more likely to be convicted of criminal behavior by the time they were in their 20s" (Bushman & Huesmann, 2012). Specifically, males who had watched large amounts of violent television during childhood were "nearly twice as likely to have assaulted their spouses 15 years later, 18% more likely to have threatened or used a knife or gun on someone in the last year, and significantly more likely to have been arrested for a crime" (Bushman & Huesmann, 2012)

"The most recent meta-analysis of research about video game violence (Anderson, Shibuya, Ihori, Swing, Bushman, Sakamoto, Rothstein, & Saleem, 2010) included 12 longitudinal studies that met the "best practices" criteria and that explored the effect on physical aggression. These studies, some of which were conducted internationally, included a total sample of 4,526 participants. They found a positive relationship between amount of time spent playing violent video games and later violent behavior."

"Children exposed to violent programming at a young age have a higher tendency for violent and aggressive behavior later in life than children who are not so exposed."

— American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, American Psychological Association, American Medical Association, American Academy of Family Physicians, & American Psychiatric Association

Media and Violence: An Analysis of Current Research

A Common Sense Media Research Brief 2013

"Meta-analysis suggests that effect of media violence is positive on aggression based anxiety. The anxiety that stems from the viewing violence in media. Theoretical frameworks like social learning theory also supports the assumptions that exposure to media showing aggression increases the anxiety of people who are exposed."

MEDIA VIOLENCE AND ANXIETY: A META-ANALYSIS ON THE OUTCOMES OF AGGRESSION BASED ANXIETY 2024

"Research suggests that young people in the United States spend more time interacting with various digital media than in any other activity except sleeping, with a typical 8- to 18-year-old using some form of media for an average of 50 hours per week or more. On average, U.S. teens spend more than seven hours per day consuming a variety of entertainment screen media (e.g., smartphone, social media, gaming, music) and 8- to 12-year-olds spend more than four hours per day."

"In 2000, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) released a report noting that media violence is a risk factor in shootings in school. A 2003 review identified media violence as a significant causal factor in aggression and violence. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued a 2007 report on violent programming on television and noted that there is "strong evidence" that exposure to violence through media can increase aggressive behavior in children."

"These reports and others are based on a body of literature that includes more than 2,000 scientific papers, studies, and reviews demonstrating the various

effects that exposure to media violence can have on children and adolescents. These include increases in aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, bullying, fear, depression Nightmares, and sleep disturbances. Some studies found the strength of association between consumption of violent media and these behaviors to be nearly as strong as the association between cigarette smoking and lung cancer, ...”

“Nearly all American teens—97% of males and 83% of females—play video games. Many video games contain violent content, and studies have shown a significant association between violent video game exposure and increased aggression, increased desensitization to violence, and decreased empathy.”

Violence in the Media and Entertainment, AAFP 2020

“...thoughts that cause distress and are often unprompted are known as intrusive thoughts. Intrusive thoughts are not uncommon, and in fact, studies have shown that more than 94 percent of people have experienced intrusive thoughts at least once in the last three months.”—WebMD

Of course, I could continue to cite from literally thousands of references that all lead us to the same conclusion—it’s getting nuts ‘out there’. Add to that violence in the Middle East, violence in Ukraine and the threat of violence all around the world.

Now, the reason I bring all this up is because as I opened with, violence was the key characteristic of the world before the flood, that is the flood of Noah’s day. Jesus Himself said that:

“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.”

— (Matthew 24:37 and Luke 17:26)

So, keep spiritually alert. Watch! This sad state is just another sign that the Lord’s return is near.

Chapter 9

Then We'll Be Perfectly Perfect

1 Corinthians 13:12

I've written about our identities as born again believers—we are human beings made perfect or complete spiritually by Christ as His Spirit lives in us and one day soon we'll be perfectly perfect when He transforms our earthly bodies to be like His own heavenly body—fitted for eternity if you would. That will happen, we are told, at the rapture/resurrection.¹

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed (to change, to exchange one thing for another, to transform).

For this corruptible must put on (clothe oneself in) incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

— (see all of 1 Corinthians 15 NKJV)

In the meantime, we are told to consider our flesh as dead.

“Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

— (Romans 6:11)

“Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry.”

— (Colossians 3:5)

So, as you can see, our sinful flesh is still, in this life, part of the ‘equation’. Now, God sees us as complete, perfect because of the indwelling presence of His Son, Jesus. But He also knows that presently we are saddled with a ‘dusty’ body, a tent so to speak.

“For He Himself knows our form; He remembers that we are but dust.”

— (Psalm 103:14)

He knows that our dead, dusty body is like a sin-megaphone, constantly trying to make us think it’s still alive. He knows that we will occasionally listen and stumble.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”

— (1 John 1:8, 10)

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

— (1 John 1:9)

So, we are not to ignore our sin or dismiss it. Understand that it’s not us Not our spirits—Christ redeemed us. It’s the ‘not us’—the dead flesh that continues to encourage sin. This is what Paul recognized in Romans 7:15-25². We are to ‘lay it aside’ (i.e. stop it in its tracks).

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, laying aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,”

— (Hebrews 12:1)

Therefore, as 1 John 1:9³ says, we are to confess it—to the Lord. When we do, He forgives us and cleanses us completely; there’s no trace of its stink. This process teaches us truthfulness, humility and trust—all while we are indeed perfect spiritually, but our souls are still being transformed into the complete image of Jesus Christ.

*“But we all, with **unveiled face**, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed (changed into another form, transformed, transfigured) into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”*

— (2 Corinthians 3:18)

*“For now we see through (look into) a glass (**mirror**), darkly (lit. obscurely); but then face to face: now I know (perceive) in part (partially); but then shall I know even as also I am known.”*

— (1 Corinthians 13:12)

You see, if you are truly born again, you're learning to trust Him all the time. You're learning to be honest about yourself and to recognize Him in you and actually AS YOU. Of course, if you're like the rest of us, you probably are thinking, I only see Him in me occasionally.

Trust me, He said that if you came to Him, He'd never leave you.

“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”

— (Hebrews 13:5)

But to see Him, you must take the veil off (unveiled face). That is, be honest and open (no ‘fig leaves like Adam and Eve). If you are, you are going to transform, by God's Spirit with increasing glorious trust in Him, and the evidence/fruit of His Spirit will become more obvious. I say trust because for now, your dead flesh ‘clouds’ the view so to speak.

When you look into that mirror of your soul, who do you see reflected? The greater you learn to trust and submit your ‘all’ to Him, the clearer the view of Him will be. Oh, He's always there in your spirit in utter perfection. But as you abide in Him and allow Him to express Himself to and through you, you'll realize His glory. And one day the view will be “face to face”.

-
1. *For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.”*— (Romans 7:15–25 NKJV)

2. *“For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.”—(Romans 7:15–25 NKJV)*
3. *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”—(1 John 1:9 NKJV)*

Chapter 10

Humbling Three Revisited

Daniel 7

I think it's time to revisit some of my 'last days lessons'. One in particular is "Humbling Three" which is based upon a section of Daniel chapter seven. In it, I cited information on the Transatlantic Union which just petered out. But low and behold, another initiative popped up called the Trade and Technology Council ("TTC"). I'll explain why that is significant a little later.

In the meantime, I'll step through Daniel Seven verses 19 through 27 and explain what it pertains to and why it's important. You may want to take a few notes and do your own study. The section begins with the prophet Daniel speaking to an angelic helper (v16) about a vision he experienced:

"Then I wished to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its nails of bronze, which devoured, broke in pieces, and trampled the residue with its feet; and the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn which came up, before which three fell. Namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth which spoke pompous words, whose appearance was greater than his fellows."

"I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom."

In Chapter Seven, Daniel describes a vision of four beasts; he goes into detail on each one—I've dealt more with that in my lesson entitled "Daniel 7—the Quartet?". Herein, our focus is upon the fourth beast. This fourth beast is

traditionally said to be Rome (the iron legs of Daniel 2) but is also said to foreshadow the Antichrist government (the iron and clay feet and toes of Daniel 2) which arises out of the old Roman empire (principally Europe and the Arab dominated Middle East and North Africa). I think this creature does indeed picture the Antichrist government which I'll suggest will arise out of Europe (which, by the way is particularly supportive of the Arab world).

This war against the saints is the antichrist's attacks against the Jewish believers during the up-coming tribulation time. Therein the AC will indeed seem to prevail over them until the Ancient of Days—Jesus Christ—comes and deals a crushing blow. Daniel's narrative continues with the angel's explanation:

Historical accounts clearly describe Rome's behavior as a trampling and breaking in pieces during its conquests.

*“Thus he said:
‘The fourth beast shall be
A fourth kingdom on earth,
Which shall be different from all other kingdoms,
And shall devour the whole earth,
Trample it and break it in pieces.’*

*The ten horns are **ten kings**
Who shall arise from this kingdom.
And another shall rise after them;
He shall be different from the first ones,
And shall subdue three kings.”*

— (Daniel 7:23-24)

So, who are these ten kings? There are several good theories. One points out that there are ten European founding members of NATO. NATO's original members in 1949 were Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States. That's 12 but of course, the UK and the US are not in the EU.

Another theory points out:

The 10 NATO Countries With the Largest Militaries:

1. United States.
2. Turkey.
3. France.
4. Germany.
5. Italy.
6. United Kingdom.
7. Greece.
8. Spain.

However, the US and Turkey are not in the EU. For this reason, I think the first theory is more likely.

Now, who are the three that need to be “humbled”? “The EU three, also known as EU big three, EU triumvirate, EU trio or simply E3, refers to France, Germany and Italy, a group that consists of the three large founding members of the European Union.”

And the prophecy adds that another ‘horn’ or power, the anti-christ, will arise after the ten horns:

“He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, Shall persecute the saints of the Most High, And shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand For a time and times and half a time.”

So, it will look grim for the saints—the Jewish tribulation believers, especially during the last half of the seven yearlong tribulation.

“But the court shall be seated, And they shall take away his dominion, To consume and destroy it forever.”

You see, the AC is going DOWN. When Christ comes again with His hosts, that evil one is toast.

“Then the kingdom and dominion, And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him.”

— (Daniel 7:19-27)

Now, earlier in verses nine and ten we see portrayed the judgments of the Ancient of Days— definitely an end time event. Then, in verse eleven, the beast (the AC government) is slain and its body is given to the “burning flame”. This may not be the same event, but it is probably tied to the one described in Revelation 19 and 20 where the AC and his false prophet are cast into the lake of fire.

So, you can see that this ‘other’ or ‘little horn’ the anti-christ, is bad news for the world and especially for the Jewish nation. We read more about him in the book of Revelation (see my commentary “Fire Eyes”). In that book, we find something called the “image of the beast” which seems to be an artificial intelligence (AI) and a decree for the whole world to take a ‘mark’ that qualifies eligibility to buy and sell in the AC economy (the buy and sell club). As an information scientist/engineer, it’s clear to me that managing such a large scale campaign will require enormous computing capability, biotechnology and highly advanced computing and digital technology.

For that reason, I am watching the progress of the “TTC” mentioned above. The following snippets are taken from its website: (emphasis mine)

The sixth ministerial meeting of the Trade and Technology Council (“TTC”) took place in Leuven, Belgium, on 4 and 5 April 2024.

The acceleration of the digital transformation creates unprecedented opportunities for growth and innovation but also raises numerous risks and challenges that call for accelerating our efforts to establish joint leadership and continue robust coordination on our approaches for creating rules of the road for emerging technologies, such as **artificial intelligence (AI)**, **quantum technologies**, and 6G wireless communication systems.

Working with stakeholders, we continue to use the TTC to advance the governance of critical and emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, semiconductors, biotechnology, and online platforms

We intend to continue our trade and technology cooperation as set out below.

The United States and the European Union reaffirm our commitment to a risk-based approach to artificial intelligence (AI) and to advancing safe, secure, and **trustworthy AI** technologies.

We are also united in our belief of the potential of AI to address some of the world’s greatest challenges.

The United States and the European Union established a Quantum Task Force to address open questions on science and technology cooperation between the United States and the European Union on **quantum technologies**. (High speed computing)

The United States and the European Union affirm the importance of the rapid mobilization to secure our digital communication networks against the threats posed by the potential for a future cryptanalytically-relevant quantum computer.

The coordination on our respective efforts to build resilient semiconductor supply chains remains crucial to the secure supply of semiconductors, which are indispensable inputs to an ever-growing range of key industry sectors, and to ensure leadership in cutting-edge technologies.

We acknowledge the significant promise and risks associated with the integration of advanced **biotechnology** (mark of the beast) with other technological disciplines such as AI, information technology Nanotechnology Neurotechnology, chemistry, and medicine, which will drive innovation and have significant implications for academia, industry, and economic security.

Following a successful round of government-to-government technical exchanges, the European Commission and U.S. government released a Digital Identity Mapping Exercise Report.

The next phase of this project will focus on identifying potential use cases for transatlantic interoperability and cooperation with a view toward enabling the cross-border use of **digital identities and wallets**.

The United States and the European Union are advancing discussions with relevant financial institutions for the mobilisation of support for secure digital connectivity infrastructure projects with trusted vendors. (buy and sell ‘club’)

Since its inaugural meeting on 29 September 2021, the TTC has realized substantial progress... **for safe, secure, and trustworthy AI globally** ; to advance the resilience and security of our ICT infrastructures; and to finance and promote secure connectivity with trusted suppliers around the world. (buy and sell 'club')

As you can see, we are very close to the prophesied worldwide oppression of '666'. Let's keep our eyes OPEN.

Chapter 11

Your True Identity

Philippians 3:12

“Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”

— (Philippians 3:12 LSB)

Jesus told us that the path of discipleship would be difficult¹. Some of that difficulty is from the outside, it's external to us and some of it is internal. Paul expressed some of this latter part when he wrote,

“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

— (Romans 7:24)

What he came to understand was the dichotomy:

“So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.”

— (Romans 7:25)

I believe this is what he meant when he wrote that he had not yet become perfect (complete). But for the born-again believer there is a sense in which we are indeed perfect. Let me explain:

“But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.”

— (1 Corinthians 6:17)

This “joining” is what Jesus prayed for:

“that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

— (John 17:21-23 NKJV)

More specifically, this union, which by the way is two-way, in Christ’s ‘absence’ is accomplished by His Spirit:

“A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”

— (John 14:19-20, 16-17 NKJV)

What this means is that, once you are joined with Christ, by His Spirit, you are spiritually perfect but not perfectly perfect. What do I mean?

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”

— (2 Corinthians 3:18 LSB)

There is a transformation going on. And Christ is patient with it:

“It is a trustworthy saying and deserving full acceptance: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost. Yet for this reason I was shown mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Christ Jesus might demonstrate all His patience as an example for those who are going to believe upon Him for eternal life.”

— (1 Timothy 1:15-16 LSB)

You see, Paul came to understand the ‘dichotomy’, but God is not finished. The ‘perfectly perfect’ we all can look forward to is the perfection of our identity. Our reborn spirit is alive in Christ and our sinful flesh is dead. Thus, we are not yet completely perfect for our identity is “human being”—body, soul and spirit.

“God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;’”

— (Genesis 1:26)

“Then Yāhweh God formed man of dust from the ground (body) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (spirit); and so the man became a living being (lit. soul).”

— (Genesis 2:7 LSB)

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

— (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

Jesus showed us the ‘finished product’ so to speak when He showed Himself to the disciples after His resurrection:

“Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.”

— (Luke 24:39)

Christ led the way for us:

*“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will **transform our lowly body** that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”*

— (Philippians 3:20-21)

“And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.”

— (1 Corinthians 15:49)

*“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we **shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.** For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”*

— (1 Corinthians 15:51-53)

Why isn't God finished? Why is the 'dichotomy' not the end?

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

— (Romans 8:29)

So how you perceive yourself is very important to your overall spiritual health. Do you think Christianity is a self-improvement program? Do you continue to try to overcome sin in your own strength? I hope not because Jesus settled that once and for all. Do you just continue in your sin? I hope not because if so, you haven't realized who you are—your identity in Christ. If you're identifying yet with your 'flesh', you've missed the point of salvation, the indwelling of Christ in you. You are a human being, if saved, you're redeemed by the blood of Jesus and one day soon you will be a glorified human being transformed by the power of Jesus.

Yes, you are complete, you are perfect. Trust God for that—from heaven's perspective, it's done. For now, you must learn to trust the Lord that He is IN you and you are IN Him. Thus, your sins are paid for in full. You can truly enter, even now, into His rest—like God did with the Sabbath, cease from your own works, your own efforts to 'be like Him', to overcome sin on your own. The 'dichotomy' is not your end; being 'perfectly perfect' is.

And like Paul, our calling is clear:

“Him we proclaim, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.”

— (Colossians 1:28 LSB)

1. *“Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”—*
(Matthew 7:14 NKJV)

Chapter 12

Heavenly Things

John 3

Nicodemus seems to have been pretty unconventional among the religious elite of his day. (See *John 3*) He actually listened to Jesus and wanted to understand. The rest or most of the rest were closed-minded. Jesus called them white-washed tombs—pretty much ‘dead men walking’ spiritually.

And Nick was no slouch intellectually. He was a known teacher. But Jesus befuddled him with His “born again” assertion.

“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

— (John 3:7,8)

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”

You have to appreciate his honesty. After all, Christ challenged him to open his mind to some things that shook the core of his beliefs and then went even further...

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.’”

— (John 3:10-11)

Now the capitalization we see in English was not in the Aramaic that Jesus

spoke or the Koine Greek that John wrote in but the translators clearly acknowledged what Jesus was implying when He said repeatedly “We”. That is, “My Father and I” or “All three of Us in the Godhead”. Of course, this again challenged Nick, but then He ‘hit it out of the park’ with...

“If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, the Son of Man...” (John 3:12-13)

The first “heavenly thing” Jesus shared showed that God in heaven does not live in time. In fact, Jesus asserted that He ascended and came down, to and from heaven in the past—**our** past—because **we** are in time.

Now, we can read this “heavenly thing” and even if we don’t quite understand it, we can accept it and trust the Lord. But Nick is a Pharisee, a “teacher of Israel”. His cohorts condemned Jesus to death. For him to ‘hang in there’ with Christ was more challenging than it was for the disciples. So when he accompanied Joseph of Arimathea to bury the body of Jesus in the garden tomb when all the disciples were hiding in fear, you can’t help but sense that the change he went through was stunningly profound.

And the teaching continues for the teacher of Israel...

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Eternal life does not mean that this life goes on forever. Instead, eternal life also has the idea of a certain quality of life, of God’s kind of life. It is the kind of life enjoyed in eternity. — *Guzik*

More than any other man, the Pharisee’s admired Moses. But the serpent on the pole¹ was a symbol of evil AND a symbol of salvation. That would have been another mind-boggler for Nick. What was symbolized and what even the disciples did not comprehend was the destiny of Jesus taking on all of our sins—becoming sin for our sakes². Serpents are often used as pictures of evil in the Bible (Genesis 3:1-5³ and Revelation 12:9⁴). However, Moses’ serpent in Numbers 21 was made of bronze, and bronze is a metal associated with judgment in the Bible, because bronze is made with fire, a picture of judgment. So the bronze serpent was a picture of evil/sin judged which will lead Jesus into His next heavenly thing—maybe the ‘clincher’...

“For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

— (John 3:17-19 LSB)

Note, God ordained for mankind the freedom of choice from all the way back in Eden. However, Jesus here seems to be explaining to Nick that from heaven’s perspective, those who do not believe have already made that choice and have been judged already. Again, there is no time as we know it in heaven.

Now we do live in time and we do NOT have that perspective; thus, as believers we are to obey the Great Commission to preach the Gospel to everyone.

And that Gospel is summed up in the verse I skipped over so we could end with it ...

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”

— (John 3:16)

Everlasting Life: This describes the duration of God’s love. The love we receive among people may fade or turn, but God’s love will never change. He will never stop loving His people, even unto the furthest distance of eternity.

We may say there are Seven Wonders in John 3:16.

1. God — The Almighty Authority
2. So loved the world — The Mightiest Motive
3. That He gave His only begotten Son — The Greatest Gift
4. That whoever — The Widest Welcome
5. Believes in Him — The Easiest Escape
6. Should not perish — The Divine Deliverance
7. But have everlasting life — The Priceless Possession

“If there is one sentence more than another which sums up the message of the Fourth Gospel, it is this. The love of God is limitless; it embraces all mankind. No sacrifice was too great to bring its unmeasured intensity home to men and women: the best that God had to give, he gave— his only Son, his well-beloved.” — *Guzik/Bruce*

This is the greatest of the “heavenly things” Christ shared.

1. *“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.’”*—(Numbers 21:8 NKJV)
“So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.”—(Numbers 21:9 NKJV)
2. *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”*
 —(2 Corinthians 5:21 NKJV)
3. *“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat it. Nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’ Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”*—(Genesis 3:1–5 NKJV)
4. *“So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”*—(Revelation 12:9 NKJV)

Chapter 13

Can't See!

Genesis 3

Understanding how 'it' all began is a fundamental help in growing or maturing as a believer. For that reason, I love to ponder our beginnings. Why do we act and think the way we do? Let's consider Genesis chapter three. The Holy Spirit tells us that a creature referred to simply as a serpent in most translations appeared in the garden that God had made for communing with mankind. It says that he was the most cunning or crafty land animal that God had made. Interesting that this serpent could speak, and he engaged Eve, Adam's mate with a question that baited her into a trap of sorts.

"Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'"

The immediate implication was that God was being arbitrarily restrictive. So Eve tried to explain to this creature that was clearly Satan or possessed by Satan.

"We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it. Nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

At this point, the serpent could tell that Eve was in over her head because God said nothing about touching the tree. Where did she get that part from? Perhaps Adam in wanting to protect her added that part on his own. We don't know.

But that's when the serpent struck.

"You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

So, there were multiple lies in this attack. First, death indeed came into our existence. Second, he asserted that God was withholding something desirable, something god-like—to know evil. You see, the truth was that she and Adam already knew or literally perceived with the eye “good” because as the scripture tells us, at the conclusion of His creative work:

“Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.”

But Eve took the bait. To “be like God” enticed her to disregard the warning. Who was it that first wanted to “be like God”?

*“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer (soon to be Satan), son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, **I will be like the Most High.**’ ”*

— (Isaiah 14:12-14)

At that point, Eve was trapped and taken captive so to speak. She believed the serpent’s lies and decided not to believe God. She doubted, and it immediately changed how she perceived the threat.

“So, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.”

Before she ever ate the evil fruit, she was drastically affected by the lies. Everything she saw or perceived was off. Believing the lies turned her against God’s warning.

“She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.”

Now the scripture tells us that Adam was **not deceived**. He made the decision to eat himself without the serpent’s lies. I submit that it’s possible that he knew they would die but was so ‘connected’ to Eve that he did not want to live without her. Be that as it may, what God warned them about took place in multiple ways. First, they both died spiritually. That means that one part of their triune being, their spirit, detached, separated from God’s Spirit. You see, most literally, that’s what death is—separation from God.

Next, something in this vile fruit effected the perceptors in their brains, perhaps the cerebrum or visual cortex. At any rate, as is evident, they could no longer perceive correctly.

“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked...”

Now they could see or rather perceive something new, evil, but more than that, as we noted, they could **not perceive** accurately. What was previously good was now perceived as evil and this became the fundamental flaw in humanity. It was imprinted into our DNA so that we are no longer independently capable of communing with or heeding our Creator. Even the Apostle Paul said:

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.”

— (Romans 7:18-19)

In addition, sin immediately brought shame which of course is based on pride which is the first and most pervasive sin of mankind:

And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

Wow. That had to itch!

Also, it brought fear—specifically, fear of God—remember, their perceptors had become corrupted:

“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ So he said, ‘I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.’”

So, this is how it all started. The single decision to stop trusting God and instead, listen to Satan enslaved all of us since that time. It brought spiritual blindness (we’re not even aware of the evil one’s influence), shame, pride, fear and later, hatred, envy and more as mankind tumbled downward and downward.

One man, and his mate, brought us from the paradise of Eden into the hell of planet ‘Babylon’. He was created perfect—no sin. But just like Lucifer, he had free will and his choice was calamitous. The good news is that one Man, the Son of Man, also perfect, used His free will to choose to trust and obey God and He redeemed all of creation. It cost Him His life but with it He covered or atoned for our sin. This too is pictured in the beginning:

“Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.”

— (Genesis 3:21)

Those tunics, those coverings cost an animal its life—pointing to the Lamb of God. Of course, we individually, because we all have free will, have to choose whether or not to believe and accept that. You see, Calvary was never an issue of ‘crisis management’ for God. It was in the Plan from before the beginning.

*“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord Nor of me His prisoner; but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling Not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus **before time began**, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel...”*

— (2 Timothy 1:8-10)

Jesus restored our sight. Now...

Who do you trust? The serpent, yourself or the Son of God?

Chapter 14

Being Small

Matthew 18:3

You really can't 'do' small. But this morning, I was impressed that 'being' small in your own estimation is something God can and will work with. So, what does 'being small' mean?

Well, first of all, it's not really so much a physical characteristic. It's not being tall or short or numerous or few. Rather it's a character attribute that walks hand in hand with humility and lovingkindness.

It also goes with submission and obedience to the one you esteem greater than yourself. King Saul stood head and shoulders taller than all the rest of his countrymen, but when he 'did his own thing without God' Samuel the prophet said to him,

"When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel?"

— (1 Samuel 15:17)

You see, the problem was Saul did not want to be small in anyone's eyes.

Look around you. Everyone, yes virtually everyone has this same mindset naturally. I say virtually because once in a while someone with a unique character fashioned by hardship or trial develops the godly 'being small or little' attitude. The Psalmist had it. He wrote,

"I am small and despised, Yet I do not forget Your precepts."

— (Psalm 119:141)

And then, of course, is the example of Christ-

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

— (Philippians 2:5-8)

And though God is big, really big; His hand’s span stretches across the universe, He also expresses Himself to us surprisingly ‘small’-for instance, in dealing with a dejected, depressed Elijah,

“— and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.”

— (1 Kings 19:12)

You see, with God, there are no size hang ups. He’s perfectly at peace, perfectly God either way, big or small. But when he reaches out to us, it is often with the little things. Even in providing the heavenly manna in the desert wilderness with Israel,—

“And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground.”

— (Exodus 16:14)

Of course, this foreshadows Jesus for He told his followers,

“This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

— (John 6:50-51)

Thus, it’s clear that ‘being small’ is a quality God uses. But it’s not just ‘being small’ but it’s the **being** period, being what God desires and that’s the difference between religion and a genuine relationship with Him.

Being is not the same as doing because being is God’s work Not ours. It goes all the way back to the beginning. God’s first command was a ‘be command’-

*“And God said, Let there **be light**: and there was light.”*

— (Genesis 1:3)

Then He followed with seven more-

“And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. ... And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. ... And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. ... And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. ... And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air; and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

— (Genesis 1:6, 9, 14-15, 22, 28)

So, when the Lord tells us,

“...Be ye holy; for I am holy.”

— (1 Peter 1:16 KJV)

He is NOT telling us to do anything but rather to allow Him to do His work in us, to submit to the work of His Spirit. I think ‘being small’ in my own estimation is in fact part of that submission.

Jesus said,

“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

— (Matthew 18:3)

So ‘being small’ is a big deal; it’s a key to entering God’s kingdom.

Chapter 15

Perfect

Luke 23:34a

Then, Jesus said,

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”

— (Luke 23:34a)

Blood dripping from His punctured wrists and feet, with exhaustion so heavy He could not carry the cross, His back ripped open by whips, thorns pressed into His scalp, almost unrecognizable from the beatings, mocked and spit upon, jeered and taunted—the only perfect man to ever walk among us.

These, His first words from the cross, a prayer, were not for help or comfort or vengeance—nothing for Himself at all. It was why He came. He died just as He lived—utterly selfless, loving and forgiving. Not in all eternity past nor eternity future does any act compare—no heroism No martyrdom No words or deeds Nothing compares.

No human being could do this—it took God incarnate Who revealed Himself to us and at the same time exposed the lies of the evil one.

Now, unfortunately many if not most of us have heard and read and seen these words so often that in our minds we tend to trivialize them but these words, coming from this person—the Word, the one who created all things (see John 1) ignited the PERFECTION.

In one moment, He Who is perfect unleashed the truly cosmic destruction of darkness and establishment of the perfection of God’s light and life into the tainted creation. Far more, far greater, far, far, far greater than our pitifully small minds can comprehend. The angelic host cheered in astonishment, the demons

shrieked in fear, the cosmos was redeemed from evil as the Perfect heart of our Creator was revealed.

“Eye has not seen Nor ear heard Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.

— (Isaiah 64:4)

God originated that prayer and God heard that prayer and God answered that prayer and God demonstrated His approval by completing the most Holy sacrifice and raising Christ from the grave and seating Him at His right hand. Indeed, all of creation led up to this moment. The spiritual realm became tainted by Satan and his demons, Lucifer became Satan and tainted the physical creation as well—sin, evil, death and all darkness had to be dealt with and we were created not only to be objects of His affection but instruments through which the cosmos could observe the Perfect ‘heart’ of the Perfect One.

“Father, forgive them...” Who are “them”? The soldiers? The people watching? The Hebrew nation? The Romans? The world? The cosmos?

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For “He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.”

— (1 Corinthians 15:22–28 NKJV)

Now, we live in time. God does not. You may say, “but I don’t see it”. Nevertheless, in eternity, it’s done, and trust Him, in the end you will realize it. No wonder all God’s holy ones in heaven exclaim, “Holy, Holy, Holy” to He who is indeed Perfect. Thank you, Father!

Chapter 16

Darkness

Isaiah 60:2

Towards the end of the Tribulation, when the planet Babylon's systems are crumbling and all hell literally has broken loose, the forces of Antichrist will come against Christ. Revelation 18 records,

“And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.”

— (Revelation 18:1-2)

Yes, Satan will gather every evil, foul, unclean and hateful spirit together to our rebellious planet.

Now, it seems like a large portion of the ‘moving and shaking’ today is done either openly or behind the scenes by those we refer to as ‘elites’ or 1%’ers. In the media, they are referred to as “influencers”. And it’s the media that basically tells us what to believe. Which, as most of you can see, is very powerful because an enormous number of people are utterly dependent and even addicted to this media.

At the same time, what we have witnessed over the last generation is an overwhelming ‘darkness’ that has taken over this media worldwide. I suggest that this is at least part of what Isaiah meant when he prophesied:

*“For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, And deep darkness the people;
But the LORD will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon
you.”*

— (Isaiah 60:2)

Fortunately, God is not ‘influenced’ by darkness, and He is not impressed by these elitists, these movers and shakers. In fact, those who have influence so to speak in His kingdom are quite the opposite of what you would expect. In fact, His Word says:

*“But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise;
and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things
which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are
despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to
nought things that are.”*

— (1 Corinthians 1:27-28)

Check it out—the foolish, weak, base, despised and the NOT-these are God’s elite, His chosen.

Now, Christ told his disciples to

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”

— (Mark 16:15)

so for two millennia His ‘call’ has gone out to many, many people.

“For many are called but few are chosen.”

— (Matthew 22:14)

Thus, for those of you who know Him, you ‘heard’ that call and by the gracious work of His Holy Spirit you responded and discovered that you were ‘chosen’—that is, you opened your heart and submitted to God’s love, life and forgiveness. And from that point onward, you’ve been prepared.

Prepared?

Yep. God’s been preparing you, training you, to TRUST Him in all circumstances.

That’s because, in a way, this life with Him is a ‘bootcamp’ of sorts for the day will come (and it is fast approaching) when the ten major ‘elitists’ of the world, the leaders and the powerful, those that the book of Revelation refers to

as 'horns', will support the antichrist world leader and fight against Christ. In fact, the scripture says:

“These shall make war with the Lamb (Christ), and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.”

— (Revelation 17:14)

Yes, today is a dark day; but Jesus told us:

“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

— (John 8:12)

and:

“But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.”

— (1 Thessalonians 5:4-5)

Chapter 17

Basic Training – One

Matthew 5

“And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:”

The most famous, perhaps the most important sermon of all time. He saw multitudes and went up higher. We don't know how many, if any, of the multitudes followed but we do know that His disciples drew near.

“And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,”

Of course, this is still and always has been the case—multitudes may gather and it's the multitudes that get the publicity, but it's the disciples who will “come unto Him”. And they are the ones who get the teaching. Their drawing near shows their desire to be close and to learn. Now, the disciples were probably a group larger than the twelve but the word means “learner” not simply the curious.

The “disciples” were those dedicated to “following the teaching”. And this whole teaching was not focused on salvation but upon godly conduct, attributes and the promises of God.

“Blessed [are] the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Each of the Beatitudes begins with “Blessed”. It is the word for happy. The [are] insertions are not in the original language. Blessed is an adjective with no tense—you could say it represents an eternal condition of its object.

Who are the “poor in spirit”? They are revealed by a confession that they are

sinful and rebellious and utterly without moral virtues adequate to be commended to God.

“The poor in spirit recognize that they have no spiritual “assets.” They know they are spiritually bankrupt. We might say that the ancient Greek had a word for the “working poor” and a word for the “truly poor.” Jesus used the word for the truly poor here. It indicates someone who must beg for whatever they have or get.” — Guzik

So, the poor in spirit have nothing of value to present to God, they are spiritual beggars if you would and what does God promise to them? The kingdom of heaven!

Why does God reward the spiritually poor? Simply put, it is they who know where they stand with God, that is, they know they need His mercy; they know they need a Savior. They are like the man in Christ’s parable:

Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise [his] eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified [rather] than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

— (Luke 18:9-14)

The next beatitude is for those who sorrow.

“Blessed [are] they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.”

Now, this mourning is not that you’re bummed or having a trial, a bad day. This word is a grieving, a wailing sorrow like from the death of a child or other loved one.

“Comforted” is similar to the name Christ used for His Holy Spirit—Comforter. It means to “call to one’s side”. There is no ‘quick fix’ for mourning, but God will call you to His side and walk with you. By His Spirit, He will soothe your pain moment by moment and give you hope. Both of you will share a fellowship of suffering¹.

“Blessed [are] the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”

People today just don't understand meekness or humility. To many of us it's scary because contemporary, let's say worldly, thought casts it in an extremely negative way. You see, humility is not just an act or a posture, it's a mindset, a whole way of thinking about God and about yourself. Living humbly, you consider others better than yourself. You are at peace with God and heaven is delightful. That's because humility is based in selflessness.

Likewise, pride is not just an act or posture but an opposite mindset. And all of humanity walks in this manner naturally. Thus, when you seek a definition of the word "humble" you'll find: "having a feeling of insignificance, inferiority, subservience, etc." or "low in rank, importance, status, quality, etc." And, so, as we think of humility via the filter of sin, we don't see it as God does. We see it only as a 'downer' literally.

But the Bible tells us that God lifts up the humble² to dwell with Him in the "high and holy place"³. There He beautifies them with salvation and revives their spirit⁴. So in heaven, the truly humble are highly exalted and actually live in the Almighty's presence.

And here on earth, contrary to what the dictionary says, it's not really positional—Moses, who led millions and spoke face to face with God was,

"very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth."

—(Numbers 12:3)

As you can see, these first three beatitudes turn us on our heads; their blessings run contrary to our 'flesh' expectation but that's to be expected (no pun intended) for godly thinking is pure whereas our own thinking is polluted with sin.

-
1. *"that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."*—(Philippians 3:10 NKJV)
 2. *"The Lord lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground."*—(Psalm 147:6 NKJV)
 3. *"For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones."*—(Isaiah 57:15 NKJV)
 4. *"For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation."*—(Psalm 149:4 NKJV)
"...With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones."—(Isaiah 57:15b NKJV)

Chapter 18

Basic Training – Two

Matthew 5

A large portion of the church today especially in the West is like those in Laodicea—they think that they are in need of nothing. They are blasé about the message—they’ve heard it all and their honest attraction to their ‘faith’ is lukewarm, mediocre at best. They are religious ‘couch potatoes’ so to speak. They come to be entertained because that’s all they know.

But the truly godly are different. Jesus spoke of them:

“Blessed [are] they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”

And these terms, “hunger and thirst”, aren’t saying, “I could use a snack or I’m a little dry.” They literally mean famished and craving ardently. We’re looking at the sense of extreme need. These people have a sort of spiritual vacuum—they deeply desire and aren’t content with the dribs and drabs of religiosity.

And I have to say that I think a better word for righteousness is rightness. Righteousness is a great word, but it carries with it unfortunately a lot of churchy baggage. The Hebrew word attributed to Abram means to be or to make right, to be just. In the Greek, it is integrity, virtue, purity of life, rightness, correctness of thinking feeling, and acting.

These blessed believers deeply, deeply desire rightness, for all things to be made right. They know that no man No agency in this world can provide that or even come close. Everything and everyone in this world is drowning in sin. Only God the Son, Jesus Christ can fill our lives, our hearts with rightness. And for those who “hunger and thirst” for it, He will.

“Blessed [are] the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.”

This is a ‘reap what you sow’ promise, isn’t it. It is the same with forgiveness, giving, and other godly qualities so why did Jesus include mercy in His ‘Basic Training’ sermon? There are many descriptors for mercy but the simple definition for it is “*to help the afflicted, to bring help to the wretched*”. Mercy is an action verb.

It is not just something philosophical or something you get from a Sunday sermon. Everyone needs God to show them mercy but the inherent and abhorrent tendency in all of us is to consider ourselves as ‘good enough’ because of what we did or did not do. Mercy however is a quality or attribute of God—the God Who lives in us by His Spirit. God, living in the Apostle Paul showed him the dichotomy of the flesh and Spirit and the futility of trying to be good in the flesh.

Yes, mercy is an action verb but it is God’s action. As with all God’s attributes, we simply must trust Him to demonstrate His mercy to us and through us. Understanding that we need mercy is paramount to putting our trust in Jesus for salvation. You see, all this Basic Training is not about your own self-improvement but the “godly conduct, attributes and the promises” of Christ in you.

“Blessed [are] the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”

In both Hebrew and Greek, all the various forms of pure, i.e. purity, purify, purifies, etc. are saying “clean” or “cleanse”. Frequently, if not most of the time, this cleansing is associated with the purging process of smelting as with silver or gold. So, clearly those who are pure or clean in heart will have the glorious vista of God. This is something every sincere believer in Christ wants so what causes this ‘smelting’ so to speak?

The Apostle John, by the Spirit, gave us the answer:

“And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

— (1 John 3:3)

Understand, this is not an ‘if-then’ statement. You do not purify yourself because of your hope in Him. You don’t purify yourself period. Only the blood of Christ cleanses. What this verse says is that it is the hope in Him that purifies (cleanses) just as Christ placed all His hope the Father.

As the Psalmist said,

“For in You, O LORD, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God.”

— (Psalm 38:15)

and:

“For You are my hope, O Lord GOD; You are my trust from my youth.”

— (Psalm 71:5)

While the prophet Jeremiah said,

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD.”

— (Jeremiah 17:7)

So then **hope is the purifying agent** and it is associated with trust. Where does this hope come from? Paul told us:

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only [that], but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

— (Romans 5:1-5)

So, we are purified by hope which comes by way of tribulation (testing) and it doesn't disappoint because God's love has been poured out in our hearts by His Holy Spirit. Ultimately, this leads to the conclusion that the blessing of this beatitude is the work of God by His Spirit.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,”

— (1 Peter 1:3)

Chapter 19

Basic Training – Three

Matthew 5

“Blessed [are] the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.”

— (Matthew 5:9)

Now the opposite of peace is war or conflict. The blessed here are not just those who enjoy peace but rather make peace. So where is this conflict, this war? Is it between the Arabs and Israel? Is it between the ‘right’ and the ‘left’? Is it between nations?

“The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name.”

— (Exodus 15:3)

Moses sang this after God took His people through the Red Sea and destroyed Pharaoh’s army. This was not the war we are looking for, but it is symbolic for Egypt has always been a type of the world spiritually.

“And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.”

— (Daniel 9:26)

This is part of Daniel’s famous 70 weeks prophecy concerning the Jews and

Jerusalem. It speaks of a war and desolations (tribulations). We've discussed in other lessons how this war is the one between Israel and God.

“Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD’S hand double for all her sins.”

— (Isaiah 40:2)

Both of these verses speak of the war between Israel and the Lord. This war came as a result of Israel rejecting her Messiah, God’s Son. Concerning is death they cried,

“His blood be on us, and on our children.”

— (Matthew 27:25)

This is part of the war we’re looking for, but there’s an even greater war. It is the universal war of mankind:

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God Nor indeed can be.”

— (Romans 8:7)

This enmity results in a struggle, a conflict which started all the way back in Eden:

“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you do not do the things that you want.”

— (Galatians 5:17)

This is the big war. This is the war in each individual with God. And the only way for there to be peace is with our surrender, surrender to God’s grace through Jesus Christ. Each of us individually can make peace with God this way. It is, in fact, the only way to make peace with Him.

And when you do that, you become a child of the Most High:

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name”

— (John 1:12)

“Beloved Now we are children of God, and it has not been manifested as yet what we will be. We know that when He is manifested, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”

— (1 John 3:2)

The last two Beatitudes go hand in hand and are linked with the final encouragement. If you’re going to follow Christ’s teachings, you’re going to follow Him. He said:

“Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”

— (John 15:20)

“Blessed [are] they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

— (Matthew 5:10)

Now, when you follow Him, you will receive persecution but when you do and you endure it humbly, don’t then get high-minded about it because if you’ll notice, your reward is the same as those who are poor in spirit. Remember Jesus’ example.

“Blessed are ye, when [men] shall revile you, and persecute [you], and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.”

— (Matthew 5:11)

Christ fully submitted to the Lord’s will all the way to and through the cross. It was in itself, such a powerful testimony that :

“And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, ‘Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit’: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost. Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, ‘Certainly this was a righteous man.’ ”

— (Luke 23:46-47)

The two main things to note are “falsely” and “for My sake”. Don’t give the enemy ammunition to speak evil of you truthfully and remember that the blessing comes from being persecuted for His sake Not your own.

“Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great [is] your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

— (Matthew 5:1-12)

“And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:”

— (Matthew 5:1-2 NKJV)

A heavenly reward is an eternal reward. The Apostle Paul, wrote:

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

— (Romans 8:18)

Why were the prophets persecuted? They spoke the truth via the Spirit of God. So if you do the same, you're in good company. Great is your reward in heaven!

Chapter 20

First Day

Genesis 1:1-5

I'm a literalist. I believe God created all of our existence in six days just as it is given to us in Genesis, but I also believe there is 'more to the story'. Jesus, Who by the way, according to the Gospel of John, is the One God used to create our existence, told His disciples,

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."

— (John 16:12)

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm NOT claiming to speak for Christ! But, I do want to give you some things to consider which I hope you'll hear and be motivated to do your own studying.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,"

— (Genesis 1:1)

First, God does not create chaos, For thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, (Hebrews tohuo—formless, place of chaos) Who formed it to be inhabited:

"I am the LORD, and there is no other."

— (Isaiah 45:18)

What God creates is “good”. That’s His own declaration. As we see in Eden, it is perfect, beautiful. Thus, I am convinced that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” in that condition. It was fully formed, complete and beautiful. This is the character of our God.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus speaking, we read,

“And He said to them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.’”

— (Luke 10:18)

Now, many commentators assert that this was because the 70 had just returned to Jesus joyful because the demons were subject to their authority. I’d say that that’s a big maybe. The question remains, how did the demons end up on earth in the first place? If Satan fell “like lightning” (suddenly, with violence) at this time or as a result of this event, we have a problem because there he is in Eden and throughout man’s history.

No, I suggest Jesus saw this fall long before for even the Prophet Isaiah wrote about it.

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!”

— (Isaiah 14:12)

And from Job, the oldest book in the Bible, we read:

“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. And the LORD said to Satan, ‘From where do you come?’ So Satan answered the LORD and said, ‘From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.’”

— (Job 1:6-7)

So, I’ll suggest that Jesus was possibly referring to Genesis 1:2:

The earth was (became) without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

That’s because that word translated “was” means equally “became” and because Isaiah said God DIDN’T create the earth ‘toho’ (and ‘bohoo’-an undistinguishable ruin). To create the earth in that condition might agree with the evolutionists but it is NOT the character of our God.

I suggest that Satan’s fall caused the devastation on our planet that once was

beautiful and probably full of life. He caused the ruin—the earth ‘became formless and void, and darkness covered everything.

And there we see the Spirit of God hovering (literally “brooding”) over it all. This verbiage implies that the Godhead was about to engage in bringing a ‘new birth’ and thus we have recorded the first creative act:

“Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.”

— (Genesis 1:3)

This is wonderfully analogous to what God does by Jesus Christ to the ruined soul of man, to the soul made ‘tohoo’ and ‘bohoo’ by sin and it’s loathsome darkness. John recorded,

“In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.”

— (John 1:4)

“Jesus told His disciples, ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.’”

— (John 8:12)

“And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.”

— (Genesis 1:4)

This is fascinating for it was the light that was good—not the darkness. Not the light and darkness—just the light. Nevertheless, He didn’t destroy or cast out the darkness, He separated it. He divided the light from it. In the physical sense, it could be that this is when the planet began to rotate again on its axis.

Spiritually, this is analogous to born again Christians with the light of the Spirit of Christ living in their souls having to exist in dark, sinful flesh bodies until freed by death.

“God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So, the evening and the morning were the first day.”

— (Genesis 1:5)

So the Spirit brooded and the Godhead began a restorative creation with Light. And God calls it “Day”. I suppose He could have just called light, light and darkness, darkness but He gives them identities—Day and Night. And He uses them as both physical and spiritual points of reference:

“I, even I, am the LORD, And besides Me there is no savior. I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, And there was no foreign god among you; Therefore you are My witnesses,’ Says the LORD, ‘that I am God. Indeed before the day was, I am He; And there is no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work, and who will reverse it?’ ”

— (Isaiah 43:11-13)

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.”

— (2 Peter 1:19)

“I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.”

— (John 9:4)

“But if a man walk in the night, he stumbles, because there is no light in him.”

— (John 11:10)

“And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.”

— (Revelation 21:25)

“There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.”

— (Revelation 22:5)

The first day is/was a wonderful creative act and a foreshadowing of God’s plan.

Chapter 21

Second Day, First Heaven 15

Genesis 1:6-8

The first day was all about bringing light to planet earth and then separating it from darkness. The second day events are recorded as:

Then God said,

“Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so.

And God called the firmament Heaven. So, the evening and the morning were the second day.”

— (Genesis 1:6-8)

One day, one creative act; God created the expanse—a large space between two layers of water, upper and lower. Then He called this expanse Heaven which along with Light is a key part of God’s divine plan.

The word “heaven” in both Hebrew and Greek is interesting in that the word is always plural. So, the word for “heaven” and for “heavens” is the same. Of course, the sky or heavens have always fascinated us and there’s good reason for that.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

— (Genesis 1:1)

In the very beginning, the heavens are the first of God’s physical creation.

“Indeed, heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LORD your God, also the earth with all that is in it.”

— (Deut 10:14)

Notice that God’s ownership or sovereignty over the heavens is primary while the same is declared as a secondary over the earth and “all that is in it”. That’s because man was intended to rule over the earth but his sinful disobedience in Eden put his works on it into a form of debt and consequently, temporarily under Satan’s rule (until Christ paid the debt on Calvary).

“All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, And the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; All their host shall fall down As the leaf falls from the vine, And as fruit falling from a fig tree.”

— (Isaiah 34:4)

“Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, The earth will grow old like a garment, And those who dwell in it will die in like manner; But My salvation will be forever, And My righteousness will not be abolished.”

— (Isaiah 51:6)

From these and other scriptures, we know that one day God will start over to cleanse the entire cosmos from sin while those who are saved will remain in God’s care.

“For thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD, and there is no other.”

— (Isaiah 45:18)

Yes, God made the earth to be inhabited and guess what. He made Heaven to be that way too. Jesus told us:

“In My Father’s house (in heaven) are many mansions (lit. dwellings); if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

— (John 14:2-3)

You see, there are three heavens. The first heaven is what we call the sky, that is, our atmosphere. The second heaven is what we call the cosmos or universe. The third heaven is what we call Heaven, the home of our Lord and our place of forever home. It is a spiritual place, entirely real, more real than our physical existence but truly indescribable. The apostle Paul being stoned and left for dead wrote about himself:

“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”

— (2 Corinthians 12:2-4)

The apostle John in recording Christ’s Revelation had much to say about Heaven. Here is my commentary on Revelation 21:

There is just one last item on the Lord’s agenda for man’s reconciliation. The church age has demonstrated the benefits of grace. The righteous have been resurrected or raptured. The Tribulation is over. All evil has been purged from the cosmos having first been confined to planet Babylon then cast into the eternal torment of perdition. The old heaven and earth have vanished. And now...

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also, there was no more sea. It’s a brand-new start—the word for “new” here not only means “fresh” but “of a new kind”. So, if you ever gazed over Yosemite Valley and marveled at its beauty—you ain’t seen nothin’ yet! For one thing, there’ll be no more sea. This may be literal, but I’m a bit more inclined to believe that the imagery of Revelation remains consistent and thus, since the sea has represented the gentile nations, this may mean that there will be no more unbelievers No more rebellious against or ignorant about God.

Then I, John, saw the holy city New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. I find it interesting that for the first time in his vision, John writes, “...I, John,...” as opposed to just “...I...”. By emphasizing the fact that John saw God’s kingdom descending, this very well could be referring to the fulfillment of Christ’s prophecy found in all three synoptic gospels — there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God!. And notice how the holy New Jerusalem is called the “tabernacle of God”. As we examine it in more detail, we’ll see that the pattern of the earthly tabernacle did indeed align with the heavenly.

But most important is the amazing pronouncement that “God Himself will be with them and be their God.” With this, we’re finally ‘back to Eden’ and even

better than Eden. For the Lord, it isn't just forgive and forget but also fellowship forever. Praise God!

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death. Nor sorrow. Nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” This is the blessed assurance of heaven. And it is the complete opposite of the damned. “no more pain” means “no more pain or great trouble”.

Hallelujah!

Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.” This is the Lord’s last command to write. I picture John just in awe, thinking “This is too good! I never thought it would be so fantastic!” And so, it’s like Jesus is saying, “Hey John, write it down. It really is true and trustworthy.”

Next, Jesus will declare that the revelation pertaining to the events of the last days is done. Yet, as He has done before, He will then give us some background information that covers a wide expanse of ‘time’. And here, as heaven is coming to earth, so to speak, it will help us to appreciate this marvelous conclusion. In the following, He will describe for us our eternal home. Are you ready?

“And He said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.’ ”

Since the church will be raptured before the tribulation, I believe that the majority of this book is intended for the Hebrew believers of the last days, else we would only have up to chapter four. That being said, the rest of the book of Revelation, though still focused upon the Hebrew saints, is intended as a blessing for all believers of the age of grace and tribulation.

The first thing Jesus wants us to know is that He is not only the Author but the Perfecter, the Creator and the Completer. And the first thing He wants to do as our glorified Lord is to give us freely the continual refreshment of new life. I submit that although this will be completed in heaven, it is begun even now, in this life—it’s all a matter of whether or not you thirst.

He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. “All things” means all things and so it seems that Jesus is saying that the overcomers will share with Him in His inheritance. What is this overcoming? I think it is sevenfold—we found that out in chapters two and three. Each church was admonished to overcome. Together, we are told to do this by:

- keeping our heart set on Christ and a deep love relationship with Him.
- holding on to our faith through all the circumstances of this life.
- searching out the truth of God’s word, expecting Him to feed our souls, and –
- serving No compromising—no mixture but rather holding to “pure religion and undefiled.”
- Stoking the fire of faith, ‘keep on keeping on’
- choosing to obey the Father’s will and
- trusting Him even in terrible trials.

Notice also, that He doesn’t say that He will be our God and we will be His servants or acquaintances or guests. We’ll be His sons, His children!

But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” Now, this is one of the reasons John will later be told not to seal the book, meaning that it should be read and understood. The consequences of evil are eternally disastrous. Recall, the new heaven and new earth are completed at this point and these people are already in perdition. So, this isn’t spoken as we look forward but it’s a warning to all people from the time of the recording of this revelation until the Great White Throne judgment.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

As an encouragement and blessing for all of us as believers, John is now going to get a peek at perfection—the heavenly city as it continues its journey to the new earth.

...having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Some people think the jasper is a diamond, but whatever it is, it’s a “most precious stone”. This speaks of beauty and purity while the glory of God speaks of brilliance. This is a shining, brilliant, transparent city.

Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. On the breastplate of the High Priest, the gemstones representing the tribes of Israel were arranged in four groups of three. Since there are gates on all sides, the picture is one of easy access. Yet there is a wall and not only a wall but a “great and high” wall which implies protection and security. We’ll see that access is all a matter of ‘family ties’.

Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Hmmm. Twelve tribes and twelve

apostles joined together and surrounding the “tabernacle of God”. Does that ring a bell? Of course. The earthly tabernacle was the place of God’s presence and it was surrounded by two sets of curtains joined together by 50 gold clasps. We showed in previous letters that these represented exactly what we see here—the church and the believing tribes of Israel surrounding heaven’s holy place and joined together in Christ.

And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. Now, this length, breadth and height are about 1377 miles. That makes it about one fifth the size of our moon if it’s a cube. The phrase here “laid out as a square” implies a perspective from any vantage point, thus it seems to refer to a cube. If the twelve foundations are evenly spaced, that would represent over 22,750,000 square miles and each of the twelve layers would have its own sky over 100 miles high. It’s a big, Big house. But why does God care that we know these dimensions? What’s the point?

The city is already built. This isn’t a plan or design. The original language specifies 12,000 “stadion”, each of which is about 600 feet. However, of note, is that the word stadion also means “a race”. Also, the fact that the angel used a gold reed implies that the standard he used to measure is of the highest quality and trustworthy.

Recall that the city is described above as having been prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. In addition, in chapter 19, we read of the Lamb’s Bride, And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. The word “bright” here is specifically, “shining, brilliant and transparent” and “arrayed” is literally to be surrounded with a covering and indeed, can apply to a city.

Now, remember that the apostle Paul likened his ministry unto a race. In 2 Timothy 4:7-8 he said,

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness (or righteous acts), which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

In Acts 20:24, he used the same word, “course” in the KJV, which is derived from the word meaning to run, specifically “of those who run in a race course”. In Hebrews 12:1 we read, Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.... Clearly, each believer’s life and ministry is a race with a prize going not to the winner but to the finisher.

So as this cube New Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb who is prepared by her adornment, descends out of heaven, a trustworthy measurement reveals that her adornment or the measurement of what surrounds her is 12,000 “races” or 12,000 “lives of ministry unto the Lord”. But wait, it’s 12,000 on each edge and

there are 12 edges on a cube. So, there are 12 times 12,000 or 144,000 ministries which measure out her covering — the “righteous acts of the saints”.

This should ring a bell for in chapter 14 we rejoiced to see in heaven, standing with Christ all 144,000 Hebrew saints who gave their all for the Lord during the tribulation and evidently led a huge number of people to saving faith in Jesus as a result. I suggest that the measurements we’re given here are a testimony to their races—they finished them and like Paul, they finished them in faithfulness. As a result, their righteous acts are forever part of the shining, brilliant, transparent adornment of the Bride.

Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. We can’t be sure whether this measurement is the height or the thickness of the wall. Since this angel seems to be the same size as a man, that would make it about 216 feet. Gold, in the Bible, speaks of faith and royalty whereas “clear glass” would indicate purity. Unlike the city or throng of Babylon, this gathering is of those whose royal hearts are full of faith and purity.

The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. We can clearly link in the original languages eight of the twelve gems listed here with those on the breastplate of the Hebrew High Priest which represented the twelve tribes of Israel. Considering that the names of the twelve tribes are on the gates, I’m very much inclined to believe that the four remaining gems are also a match with those in the breastplate.

The High Priest, who represented Jesus Christ, wore the breastplate as a symbol that the twelve tribes were always on the heart of the Lord. It was, however, called the breastplate of judgment. But in Isaiah 59:17 and Ephesians 6:14, the breastplate donned by the Lord and by believers is called the breastplate of righteousness. This is a fitting picture in two ways—first, the judgment upon Christ for our sins made the church righteous in Him. Next, in the tribulation, the judgments of God upon Israel will bring forth a turning to the Lord and thus His covering of righteousness as well. I think that is why these same gems adorn the wall. They will serve as a continual reminder that God’s ways are always right, His judgments always just. Those who enter will consider that they do so because of God’s faithfulness to His people.

The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. This is one of the clearest and most powerful pictures in Revelation. How do you enter the heavenly city? You must pass through a pearl. This completes the picture of the surrounding wall of heaven—whereas the gemstones speak of the pressure and heat of judgment bringing forth righteousness in the Hebrew saints, the pearls speak of the righteousness obtained purely by grace. I’ll explain. You see, to enter you won’t pass through a wall, you’ll pass through a gate. Even though righteousness came to the Jews by way of the shock treatment, the judgments of

the tribulation, even they have to enter heaven by grace. Righteousness is a 'boundary' requirement, but grace is the point of entry. The church was made righteous and enters heaven by the gracious blood of Christ which covers all our sins. It took the judgments of the tribulation to drive the Jews to seek righteousness. They too enter only by this precious blood.

But what is a pearl anyway? It is a piece of dirt, a piece of grit, that has been covered and covered and covered and so on with countless layers of beautiful nacre. That's exactly like those who accept Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary. We are dirty, gritty, full of sin and our own ways, and we need a Savior. His grace covers and covers and covers our lives as often as needed and as a result, we are beautiful in His sight. Those who enter heaven by way of a pearly gate will be forever reminded of this wonderful truth.

But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. "Temple" here means the holy places of the temple so of course, with God Almighty and the Lamb present, they are the holy places. The word for "glory" can and usually does mean a shining, but it also means a judgment or opinion. As such, it is saying that not only does the shining brilliance of God illuminate heaven but the judgments (in the sense of teachings) of God bring wisdom to those in heaven as well.

And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light,... Though it is in the Greek, "walk" alludes to the Hebrew notion of how you conduct your life. And Who is "its light"? The Lamb! The word "light" is actually "lamp" or "candle"—that which gives forth light having been set upon a lampstand, a prominent place. You see, there is only one Name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved—Jesus Christ. Ever since His resurrection, the gospel has been taken to the whole world and those "nations" or literally ethnic peoples who have turned to it have indeed conducted their lives, crafted their laws, by its light.

...and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Again, this is background. Who are the spiritual leaders (kings) of Israel (the earth)? To answer that, we must note that the verb tense here for "bring" is in the present active. In other words, it was happening at the time the Revelation was given. The only leaders bringing people to heaven up until that time were the Apostles and disciples of Christ, the vast majority of whom were indeed Jewish.

Bringing people? Yes. Here's what "glory" can be translated as—the glorious condition of blessedness unto which it is appointed and promised that true Christians shall enter. And honor? It is literally a valuing by which the price is fixed. Makes sense since Jesus paid that price for us with His life and receives the value of all the souls saved in return.

Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). Because of Calvary, the gates are always open. That's why Paul said, We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. He knew that to die while saved only meant immediate entrance into Christ's presence².

And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. The “nations” are the gentiles, and combined with the future tense in the verb, this seems to be saying that “they”—believers in general—will first bring the gentiles to salvation. That has proven out historically. Nevertheless, we know from our studies in Revelation that God is definitely NOT done until all the redeemed remnant of Israel are gathered to Himself as well. Paul wrote of the Jews Now if their fall is riches for the world and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!...For if their casting away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?³

But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Though God has provided salvation, entry into heaven, to those who accept Jesus and walk in His light, He does not permit anyone else access. If you are in the Book of Life, “Come in!” If not, don't you think it's time to give your heart to Him?

1. *“Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”*—(Matthew 16:28 NKJV)
“And He said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.’”—(Mark 9:1 NKJV)
“But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God.”
 —(Luke 9:27 NKJV)
2. *“We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”*—(2 Corinthians 5:8 NKJV)
3. *“Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!”*
 —(Romans 11:12 NKJV)
“For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”—(Romans 11:15 NKJV)

Chapter 22

Third Day, Doubly Good

Genesis 1:9-13

If we are ‘paying attention’, we notice something ominous about the second day. It was the only day out of the six days of creation that did not mention that “God saw that it was good.” Recall that on that day, He separated the waters above and below by an expanse He called Heaven. Now, I’ll suggest for your consideration that this may have been for at least two reasons.

First, at the end of the second day, the heavenly environment was as yet incomplete, God wasn’t finished with it for we read in Genesis chapter seven, that in Noah’s day He poured down a massive flood of rain from the upper waters, thus depleting them and fundamentally changing the environment of the planet.

And second, as stated, the upper waters were used for a massive judgement upon a completely depraved and wicked mankind. God being omniscient and knowing beforehand that this would become necessary did not declare His tool of judgement to be good. I’ll mention a possible third reason later.

Now, on to the third day.

“Then God said, ‘Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear’; and it was so.” (v9)

“And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas. And God saw that it was good.” (v10)

The appearance of land God said was good. It is one of the seven times “good” is used in this chapter. Clearly, God elevated the planet’s crust in some areas and lowered it in others to achieve this. We should also note that this was the re-appearance of the land for we see that in the beginning God made the

planet complete and beautiful. Then during the ruinous chaos, it is evident that waters (the deep) covered all of it just as with the flood of Noah's day.

In Genesis 1:2, it is the Spirit of God that initiated the act of redemption as he brooded over the waters of the wasted planet. Then the Logos, the Word, began to work as God uttered "Let there be light." So here we see the Trinity in unison. John wrote,

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made."

— (John 1:1-3)

Father God called the land Earth which is sometimes the name (in prophetic picture) in Hebrew for Israel while the seas are a picture in prophecy of the gentile nations. That's fitting for while the earth remained covered by water on the second day, there was no mention that it was good but when the Earth appeared, God said it was good. Israel is His land and His people among the Gentiles. Through the prophet Joel He said,

"I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land."

— (Joel 3:2)

Then God said,

"Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth"
(v11)

and it was so.

"And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good." (v12)

God's desire for His creation and His people is fruitfulness. To the living creatures He made on the fifth day He spoke:

"And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth."

— (Genesis 1:22)

To Adam and Eve He spoke:

“And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

— (Genesis 1:28)

God the Son (Jesus Christ) Who is the Logos, the Word and the agent of God’s creation here, thousands of years later said to His disciples:

“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so, you will be My disciples.”

— (John 15:8)

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

— (John 15:5)

So both the appearance of the earth (typical of His people) and the fruitfulness of the earth (typical of His people abiding in Him) He saw as good, doubly good.

“So, the evening and the morning were the third day.”

— (Genesis 1:9-13)

Chapter 23

Fourth Day, Let's Clear the Air

Genesis 1:14-19

I worked for several years in setting up and managing translating centers and though I'm not an expert in any language, I do know about the fundamental challenges that translators face and how they deal with them or fail in them.

Having said that, what we're 'looking at' during the fourth day is (no pun intended) visibility. Let's step through it and I'll explain.

Then God said,

“Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth”; and it was so.

Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also.

God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

So, the evening and the morning were the fourth day.”

— (Genesis 1:14-19)

Most commentators assert that this is when God created the sun and moon and stars, but I vigorously disagree. First, Genesis 1:1 says very clearly that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. This was before Genesis 1:2, before the chaos and ruin on our planet, before the 'tohoo va bohoo'. And it follows with, *“darkness was on the face of the deep”*.

Now, you might ask about the coming of the light and Day in verses three

through five. And, of course, that's astute; yet we all know that we don't get daylight without the sun. So, I submit that in Genesis 1:1, God created and placed the sun, the moon, the earth, and the stars exactly where they needed to be but in Genesis 1:2 the chaos and ruin brought a shroud of darkness over the planet.

In Genesis 1:3, God's restoration begins. He started to clear that darkness and perhaps restarted the earth's rotation on its axis. However, there was more to do to sustain His new creation. God cleared the air so to speak. He wanted His lights in the sky to be clearly visible. You see, in verse 16 we read "*Then God made two great lights:*" and the Hebrew for this action is indeed "made" not "created"—it uses the word pronounced "aw-saw" which means to make from existing materials versus "bara" which means to create out of nothing. Thus, the translators could have justifiably written, "Then God made visible two great lights..." because they were already there but somewhat shrouded just as they will be again during the Tribulation:

"For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine."

— (Isaiah 13:10)

"The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come."

— (Joel 2:31)

"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light,"

— (Mark 13:24)

You see, for His own good purposes, God sometimes brings healing or if you would, light, in stages. Jesus showed us this in Mark 8:22-25.

"Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him and begged Him to touch him.

So, He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything.

And he looked up and said, "I see men like trees, walking."

Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly."

Now, my translation 'beef' is in verse 17 which was translated "God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth..." The word "set"

should have been translated “gave” which is what it is about 10 times more in the scriptures than “set”. I think the verse should read,

“God gave them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth...”

Set implies that He placed them at that time, but I submit He did not. He simply made them visible so that they would shine and dominate the Day and Night skies. They also needed to be seen clearly to serve as, “signs and seasons, and for days and years.”

Of course, God didn’t need it but His creation did—thus on the fourth day, I think He ‘cleared the air’ “and God saw that it was good.”

Chapter 24

The Gap

2 Peter 3:8

It is estimated but the consensus is strong that the time from Abraham until Jesus was about 2000 years. According to Peter's declaration in 2 Peter 3:8¹, this represents two days prophetically:

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

“A just weight and balance are the LORD’S: all the weights of the bag are his work.”

— (Proverbs 16:11)

That is, the prophetic time piece so to speak given in Daniel 9 temporarily stops after the first 69 sevens of the 70 sevens exactly as spoken when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the donkey and was hailed as the Son of David (Monday, March 30, 33 AD exactly) and was crucified just a few days later on Calvary, paying the price for all our sins.

Now, as a people group, the Jews rejected the message and their Messiah. The apostle Paul put this way:

“Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘The word of God needed to be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.’”

— (Acts 13:46)

Thus, for the next 2000 years or so, the focus of God's attention has been to the mostly Gentile church. This was prophesied by Hosea:

“After two days He will revive us (the Jewish people); On the third day He will raise us up, That we may live in His sight.”

— (Hosea 6:2)

And it was displayed in prophetic type (picture) by Jesus:

So, when the Samaritans (non-Jews) had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days.

— (John 4:40)

And of course, there are other Old Testament scriptures that discuss this:

Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!

— (Psalm 117:1)

“And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious.”

— (Isaiah 11:10)

“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.

— (Isaiah 42:1)

“I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles,

— (Isaiah 42:6)

Indeed He says,

‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ”

— (Isaiah 49:6)

For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations,”
Says the LORD of hosts.

— (Malichi 1:11)

And so, we can see that God, with His “just weight and balance” gave His loving attention to His people, the Jews for two prophetic days and then turned His attention to His people among the Gentiles for the same time.

Now, that time is nearly concluded and we will soon witness the fulfillment of the last week, the last seven of Daniel’s prophecy. This will be the seven year long period which Jeremiah 30 refers to as the time of “Jacob’s trouble”. The church will be gone, ensconced to heaven during the rapture, the Jewish Remnant of believers and evangelists will be carrying the baton of Christian witness, and the Satan-ruled world will experience all the judgements described in the book of Revelation.

You can find much more about this last week, the last seven years in my commentary on Revelation (Fire Eyes) and at Gracentruth.net.

1. *“But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.”— (2 Peter 3:8 NASB95)*

Chapter 25

In the End - Part 1

Daniel 9:26-27

Seventy Sevens

Daniel was the first book of the Bible that I studied after giving my heart to the Lord about 53 years ago and I've continued studying it and teaching ever since; but I'm sensing it's time to once again revisit chapter nine. World events are such that I think we should renew our vision of God's omnipotence and omniscience.

Daniel was probably a teen or very young man when the king of Babylon's army conquered Jerusalem and tore it down. He along with many others were taken captive to the foreign land and served the king eventually becoming one of his advisors. Several amazing stories are recorded for us in the first chapters of this book and by the time chapter nine occurs the Medes had conquered Babylon but God wasn't done with Daniel.

As with the kings of Babylon, Daniel continued serving the kings of the Medes and Persians. Chapter nine transpires or rather is recorded during the reign of Darius of the Medes. Daniel writes,

“...in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.”

— (Daniel 9:2)

By this time, Daniel is probably in his eighties. The books he mentions are the Hebrew scriptures and he points specifically to Jeremiah.

“Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.”

— (Daniel 9:3)

During this time of deeply earnest prayer, an angelic messenger, Gabriel, came to him and Daniel records,

“And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, ‘O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision:

Seventy weeks (sevens) are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy.

Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times.

And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined.

Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate.”

— (Daniel 9:23-27)

In this passage, the word translated as ‘weeks’ is literally ‘sevens’ so the prophecy starts with a declaration that 70 sevens have been determined or pre-established in which several awesome things will be accomplished. Note also that these ‘sevens’ are set specifically for the **Jewish people** and **Jerusalem**.

So, what are these awesome things? First, he says, “To finish the transgression” or literally, the rebellion or break away. You see, mankind broke away from God back in the Garden of Eden and the Lord said that within this period, the rift would be healed—mankind (including the Jewish people) would be reconciled with our loving creator—the revolt ended, the rift healed. But for this to happen, the next promised occurrence had to take place—“To make an end of sins” or literally offences and their penalties.

All of man’s offenses before a just and holy God had to be paid for—all past, present and future offences. And furthermore, the slate had to be wiped clean so the true reconciliation of man with God could take place. That is Not only

would all offences and their penalties be satisfied but it would be as if they never occurred in the first place—“to make reconciliation for iniquity.”

Then he added the kicker—not only would the rift be bridged, offences and penalties ended, and reconciliation produced, but then, a perfect future is guaranteed, for he said that “everlasting righteousness” would be brought in—eternal rightness in everyone and everything! Wow!

Finally, he said that vision and prophecy would be sealed or closed up and that the Most Holy would be anointed.

So what was revealed in this passage is clearly the grand and glorious plan of God, and the timepiece so to speak for it is also made obvious—the Jews and Jerusalem—like two hands on a clock. And they’re ticking off 70 sevens or 490, but 490 what? We’ll see that it refers to 490 years. Verse 25 gives more detail.

Specifically, the passage says that from the going forth or issuance of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, and notably the wall of the city, until the coming of Messiah the Prince (i.e. Messiah hailed as royalty, in the line of David) would be total of seven plus 62 or 69 ‘sevens’ or 483 years. Then verse 26 adds that after this period, the Messiah would be cut off or killed but not for Himself.

This prophecy is so explicit in its schedule—only God could pull it off. You see, just as Daniel predicted, the command which allowed the Jews to restore Jerusalem and specifically to rebuild the wall was given March 5, 444 BC by Artaxerxes Longimanus to Nehemiah. (Other similar decrees were given but this one included the rebuilding of the wall, i.e., restoring the city’s defenses as mentioned in the prophecy.) We arrive at this date by looking at Nehemiah 1:1 and 2:1. Then, by knowing that Artaxerxes succeeded his father Xerxes immediately after his death around Dec 17, 465 BC and had a year of accession before his own reign began, we come to Nisan 1, 444 BC (March 5).

Now, we’re going to do a little arithmetic. Although the total period outlined in the passage was 70 sevens or 490 years, the declaring of the Messiah as King was pinpointed as being after the 62 sevens which are listed after the first 7 sevens. Therefore, this put it after $7 + 62$ or 69 sevens. That equals 483 years.

Also, we must use the 360-day calendar for each year. This was the calendar of the day, the calendar originally used as shown in the Genesis account of Noah’s flood—it’s the prophetic year, if you would. So, if each year holds 360 days and we want to measure out a span of 483 years, that is the same as 173,880 days.

Now, beginning with March 5, 444 BC, if we proceed forward 173,880 days, accounting for the 116 leap years, only one year between 1 BC and 1 AD, and a couple other slight imperfections in our own calendar — we come to Monday, March 30, 33 AD exactly. There indeed we find Jesus, riding on the donkey, entering Jerusalem, hailed as the Son of David, that is, Messiah the Prince.

And just as Daniel’s messenger foretold, Messiah was cut off, but not for Himself. Jesus laid down His life freely on the crucifix of Calvary the following Friday, April 3, 33 AD—but not for Himself. You see, He was sinless, the spotless Lamb of God. He was ‘cut off’ for us!

Now, you may be thinking, ‘We’ve explained 69 sevens, but we started with 70. What about the last seven?’ Very astute. The last seven is the seven-year

tribulation period described in Jeremiah (same book as what Daniel was reading) as,

“Alas! For that day (period of time) is great, So that none is like it; And it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, But he shall be saved out of it.”

— (Jeremiah 30:7)

Lord willing, I’ll go more into that in another post; or you can check out my podcasts on the whole book of Revelation available on this website or on www.gracetruth.net or at my rss.com site entitled, “Abundance of Grace” by JReed Dickey.

Chapter 26

In the End - Part 2

Daniel 9:26b—27

In our previous lesson (In the End—Part 1) we explained the exactness of Christ's fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy in Daniel 9:24—26a. He rode into Jerusalem on the back of the donkey 483 years to the day, hailed as the Son of David. Only God could do that.

Following this section of the prophecy, we have Daniel 9:26b—27.

*And the people of the prince who is to come
Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. (26b)
The end of it shall be with a flood,
And till the end of the war desolations are determined. (26c)*

— (Daniel 9:26b,c)

26b was fulfilled in 70AD by the Roman general Titus. The story is recorded:

“Titus succeeded his father Vespasian upon his death, becoming the first Roman emperor to succeed his biological father.

“Before becoming emperor, Titus gained renown as a military commander, serving under his father in Judea during the First Jewish–Roman War. The campaign came to a brief halt with the death of emperor Nero in 68, launching Vespasian's bid for the imperial.”

“When Vespasian was declared Emperor on 1 July 69, Titus, his son, (and ‘prince’) was left in charge of ending the Jewish rebellion. In 70, he besieged and captured Jerusalem, and destroyed the city and the Second Temple. For this achievement Titus was awarded a triumph; the Arch of Titus commemorates his victory to this day and age.”

“Titus surrounded the city with three legions (Vth, XIIth and XVth) on the western side and one (Xth) on the Mount of Olives to the east. He put pressure on the food and water supplies of the inhabitants by allowing pilgrims to enter the city to celebrate Passover and then refusing them egress. Jewish raids continuously harassed the Roman Army, one of which nearly resulted in Titus being captured.”

“After attempts by Josephus to negotiate a surrender had failed, the Romans resumed hostilities and quickly breached the first and second walls of the city. To intimidate the resistance, Titus ordered deserters from the Jewish side to be crucified around the city wall. By that time the Jews had been exhausted by famine, and when the weak third wall was breached, bitter street fighting ensued.”

“The Romans finally captured the Antonia Fortress and began a frontal assault on the gates of the Second Temple. As they breached the gate, the Romans set the upper and lower city aflame, culminating with the destruction of the Temple. When the fires subsided, Titus gave the order to destroy the remainder of the city, allegedly intending that no one would remember the name Jerusalem. The Temple was demolished, Titus’s soldiers proclaimed him imperator in honor of the victory.”

“Jerusalem was sacked and much of the population killed or dispersed. Josephus claims that 1,100,000 people were killed during the siege, most of whom were Jewish.”

And so, the next part of the prophecy is mysterious because we are not clear on what “it” is in 9:26c-1 or the “flood”. I’ll suggest that just as Israel ended with a war in 70 AD, it picked up where is left off in 1948.

The Jewish people were scattered in 70 AD and without a nation until May 14, 1948. “The Israeli Declaration of Independence, formally the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel was proclaimed on 14 May 1948 (5 Iyar 5708) by David Ben-Gurion, the Executive Head of the World Zionist Organization, Chairman of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, and soon to be first Prime Minister of Israel.”

Since its inception, Israel has been involved in a number of wars and large-scale military operations, including:

1948 Arab–Israeli War (November 1947—July 1949)
Palestinian Fedayeen insurgency (1950s–1960s)
Suez Crisis (October 1956)
Six-Day War (June 1967)
War of Attrition (1967–1970)
Yom Kippur War (October 1973)
Palestinian insurgency in South Lebanon (1971–1982)
1982 Lebanon War (1982)
South Lebanon conflict (1985–2000)
First Intifada (1987–1993)
Second Intifada (2000–2005)
2006 Lebanon War (summer 2006)

Gaza War or Operation Cast Lead (December 2008—January 2009)
 2012 Israeli operation in the Gaza Strip or Operation Pillar of Defense
 (November 2012)
 2014 Gaza War or Operation Protective Edge (July–August 2014)
 Syrian Civil War and the Iran–Israel conflict during the Syrian civil war.
 2021 Israel–Palestine crisis or Operation Guardian of the Walls (May 2021)
 Israel– Hamas war (October 2023-). Operation Swords of Iron

However, it's possible that just as Israel thinks it has finally settled their existential dilemma by defeating Hamas, Hezbollah and achieving peace with its neighbors via the Abraham Accords,

“The end of it shall be with a flood,”

— (Daniel 9:26c)

What flood you may ask. The flood of Gog. Let's look at Ezekiel 38:

“After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely. You will ascend, coming like a storm, covering the land like a cloud, you and all your troops and many peoples with you.”

— (Ezekiel 38:8-9)

You see, “flood” in Daniel 9:26, according to Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon is used of an overflowing army as in Daniel 11:22 and “storm” in Ezekiel 38 is “from an unused root meaning to rush over; a tempest; by implication, devastation:—desolate(-ion), destroy, destruction, storm, wasteness.

And so, I suggest that the Gog-Magog invasion of Israel, with all its hoards will indeed be the “flood” and will end “it”, that is Israel's warfare with its neighbors. (Refer to our lesson entitled, “You Can't Fight God and Win” on our website, Gracentruth.net)

But the real war for Israel will continue. That's the war with God. That's the war they initiated when they rejected their Messiah and cried out,

“His blood be on us, and on our children.” (Matthew 27:25)

So, Daniel finished his prophetic verse 9:26 with

“And till the end of the war desolations are determined.”

That literally means that the desolations are decreed. They are foretold; they

are the 70th seven in Daniel's 70 sevens. It's called the Tribulation, the time of Jacob's Trouble (Jeremiah 30:7)

And Daniel continues:

“Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week (i.e. seven years); But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate.”

— (Daniel 9:27)

Refer to our verse by verse commentary on Revelation entitled Fire Eyes available on Amazon.com or the individual chapters on our website Gracetruth.net for much more detail.

In verse 27 of Daniel chapter 9, we read, speaking of the Antichrist, “Then he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week.” Recent events have given me the goose-bumps. To register their significance, we need to consider the covenant—what covenant? Glad you asked!

Now, if you do a careful study upon this sentence in the original language, you will appreciate this translation (the KJV and Young's also.) This may be the Abraham Accords.

“Confirm” in the Hebrew is the word pronounced “ga-bar” and it means a continuation of something with an increase or strengthening of it sufficient to prevail or overcome. It's first mention is in Genesis 7:18 and it is used 25 times in the Bible all with the same basic meaning.

So what we're reading in Daniel 9:27 is that he, the Antichrist, will take an existing covenant or treaty and “confirm” it with “many”. That is, this verse is not saying that he will create the treaty as some people have been expecting but rather that he will confirm or strengthen it. But why “many” and who are they?

That's a great question!

I'll suggest for your consideration that this may be referring to the UN General Assembly—all 190 nations—the whole world if you would. It is the UN that voted to give Israel a homeland back in May of 1948 and coincidentally, its Security Council now wants to divide up the land to create the Palestinian state. (Of course, they are unjustly referring to it as liberating ‘occupied territories’.) This is potentially very significant because Daniel 11:39 says, speaking of the Antichrist, (note: the same guy who will confirm/strengthen the covenant with the “many”) that he will also “divide the land for gain (or literally, for “a price”).

Could it be that this refers to the land of Israel being divided or apportioned to the Jews and the Palestinians for the price of peace and perhaps the right to re-establish a temple? Could it be that in getting this covenant confirmed by the “many” of the whole UN General Assembly, Israel will think that, at last, they have a peace, a temple and a messiah (all of which will be false)?

Be that as it may, the false messiah, the AC will betray Israel: But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.

— (Daniel 9:27a)

I suggest that this betrayal will coincide with the beginning of God's wrath being poured out as in Revelation 16:1-

And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.

That's because, as we saw in Daniel 9:27b:

*And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate (the AC),
Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate.”*

So, there you have it, Daniel's prophecy ties in both Ezekiel's and the Revelation. And it is about to happen before our very eyes.

Chapter 27

In the Light

1 John 1:5

You know, there are several “messages” in the scriptures. For instance, the message of the cross-

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”¹

And the message of love-

“For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.”²

Of course, most of us, if not all, are familiar with these because Jesus did and spoke of them. But there is one message which the disciples heard but which was not passed to us in any of the Gospels; in fact, it’s nowhere else explicitly in the Bible except possibly Revelation 21:23. Now this specific message is implied strongly throughout the Word but in only one verse do we receive explicitly this glorious nugget of eternal truth:

“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”

— (1 John 1:5)

So why, I wonder, and maybe so do you, did no other disciple present this to us and why did it take John most of his life to get around to it? Possibly because

it presents a radical truth that even the post-Calvary church back then and today struggles with and stumbles over—the ‘stink’ of sin.

Oh, theologically we can easily get on board with this message, but hold on, the message continues:

“If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses (is continually cleansing) us from all sin.”

— (1 John 1:6-7)

And here is where we as the church can get on a tangent—because of the blood of Christ, God sees us as sinless, after all, we are IN Christ and He in us. But we also have a flesh body that is dead in sin and is constantly trying to influence us.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

— (1 John 1:8)

John introduced the ideas of walking in the light and being cleansed from sin. But he did not for a moment believe that a Christian can become sinlessly perfect. To say that we have no sin puts us in a dangerous place because God’s grace and mercy is extended to sinners. Not to “those who [just] make mistakes” or “I’m only human” or “no one is perfect” people, but sinners. We need to realize the victory and forgiveness that comes from saying, “I am a sinner— even a great sinner— but I have a Savior who cleanses me from all sin.” — *Guzik*

Check out the Apostle Paul’s admission:

*“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I **am** chief.”*

— (1 Timothy 1:15 emphasis mine—note the present Tense)

Yes, our dead flesh has sin in it all the time. It’s not free from sin and then sinful and then free from sin and then sinful—back and forth endlessly. It’s full of sin all the time; but it is DEAD. YOU however, are alive IN Christ. YOU have been freed from that body of sin by faith and one day soon you will have a completely NEW body that is also sinless—a gift from God.

“Our sins are not forgiven because we confess. If this were the case— if forgiveness for a sin could only come where there was confession— then we would all be damned because it would be impossible for us to confess every sin we ever commit. We are forgiven because our punishment was put upon Jesus, we are cleansed by His blood.”

“However, confession is still vital to maintain relationship with God, and this is the context John speaks from. As God convicts us of sin that is hindering our fellowship with Him, we must confess it and receive forgiveness and cleansing for our relationship with God to continue without hindrance.” — Guzik

Yes, the body of flesh is effectively already dead because of sin but we can allow it's putrifaction, so to speak, to get it's stink on us and hinder our fellowship with God. (That's when we let the flesh lead us). Oh, we are saved still because our debt is forever paid but with confession comes a fresh trust of His forgiveness and a cleansing from all that 'stink'. You can think of it this way—the Blood of Christ cleansed and cleanses (past, present and future) us from sin. It's a done deal, forever. And as needed, confession when we fall short (including repentance) cleanses us from the 'stink' so we can enjoy our relationship with God even now that Christ's blood provided.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (i.e. ‘stink’)

— (1 John 1:9)

Don't let that dead stinking flesh guide you. Be freed from sin, be cleansed as needed and learn to a greater and greater degree, to walk in the LIGHT.

“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”

— (1 John 1:5)

1. *“For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”— (1 Corinthians 1:18 NASB95)*
2. *“For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another;”— (1 John 3:11 NASB95)*

Chapter 28

Don't Drift

Hebrews 2:1

“You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail.”

— (Hebrews 1:10-12)

The writer of Hebrews basically begins the epistle with a tribute to the greatness and immutability of God, specifically, God the Son or as John the Apostle wrote, the Word Who made all things. And then follows with a dire warning to all of us who have heard Him:

“Therefore, we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.”

— (Hebrews 2:1)

“Isaiah the prophet tells us why this warning is important: For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, And deep darkness the people;”

— (Isaiah 60:2a)

In my lifetime I have seen increasingly rapid darkening and demonizing of our world's societies and God is not preventing it—as a matter of fact, He foretold it. However, if you're a sincere believer in Jesus Christ, you (and I) are told to stand fast and hold on to our trust in God, to continue to speak and live

out the truth in love. To look for His return. To remember His promises to His children:

“But the LORD will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon you.”

— (Isaiah 60:2b)

I'm presenting this message because the days are coming, in fact they are upon us, wherein many or even most people will not listen to the truth because all they know are lies, hatred, violence and thus they cling to darkness. At this point, they don't even recognize darkness because it's just part of their DNA and instead they want to destroy light.

“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”

— (Isaiah 5:20)

So, of course, we cannot afford to “drift”. That word can mean to let something drift away from us or allow ourselves to drift away from something. In either event, we cannot afford the separation.

Christ's message to the Church in Philadelphia is:

“Behold, I am coming quickly(suddenly)! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.”

— (Revelation 3:11)

In these last days, with darkness spreading and increasing, with lies and deception spreading and increasing, with wars, perversity and butchering of innocents spreading and increasing, hold fast to your trust and faith in Christ's promises and Father God's plan. His end game is wonderful and cannot be stopped. Don't drift. Hold fast.

Chapter 29

Warning From Prison

2 Timothy 3:1-5

As Paul was in prison, he looked to the future and sent to his young protégé, Timothy, the following admonition:

“But know this, that in the last days perilous (used in describing wild animals, raging sea, and the Gadarene demoniacs) times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!”

— (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

Doesn't sound very uplifting, does it? It's a list of spiritual failures and there is a stern warning at the end. This is what I think is important for us to understand. You see, many commentators have treated this prophecy/prediction as speaking of the degenerating of the entire human race but I don't think that is the point. Now, I can heartily agree that the societies of man are in a downward spiral, and they do exhibit these negative traits more and more but the last three statements make it clear that he's not referring to people in general but rather specific people within the Church.

“lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,” clearly indicates people with a choice—that “rather” is very telling. Those outside the Church are not instructed to love God.

“having a form of godliness but denying its power” cannot be referring to

the world so to speak as they have no “form of godliness” but those in the Church indeed practice every Sunday (indeed every day) having a “form of godliness” and we have often seen it. I suggest that the power of godliness is godly love which is sometimes in short supply.

“And from such people turn away!” cannot be talking about the people of the world otherwise we would have to terminate the Great Commission. Jesus said,

“But go and learn what [this] means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

— (Matthew 9:13)

and,

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call [the] righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

— (Mark 2:17)

Paul speaks to this in another letter:

“I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.”

— (1 Corinthians 5:9-13)

With that being said, I’m convinced that this “last days” passage is warning us about certain segments of the Church. And when you consider what Jesus said to the last days Laodicean Church in the Revelation, it makes sense:

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:

I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.

So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—”

— (Revelation 3:14-17)

With this all in mind, let’s consider the list of failures in the last days church above.

“lovers of themselves”—many churches today engage in many different ways in trying to satisfy the insatiable self-centered appetite. In fact, you can consider this as the underlying characteristic of the whole list as it is the driving motivation behind the flesh or the ‘fruit of the flesh’.

Of course, it is the complete opposite of the fruit of the Spirit which we find in Galatians 5:22-23

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,—gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

— (Galatians 5:22-23 NASB95)

Notice, Spiritual love heads this list just as self-love heads the failure list. Thus, it is clear that the last days church is basically going through the Christian motions in the flesh—they have left Christ outside. So, if the warning is to turn away from those within the Church having the characteristics of spiritual failure, where do we turn in these last days? In closing, I’ll quote Jesus as He finished speaking to the ‘Church Age’:

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

— (Revelation 3:20-22)

TURN TO JESUS, TRUST IN JESUS

Chapter 30

Broken

Romans 8:18

“...and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”

— (1 Corinthians 11:24)

There are a lot of people in our societies who are truly broken and then there are many who, absorbed within their own self obsession are always playing ‘the victim card’ for everyone to pity them. Of course, broken people often are the victims of a terrible event or circumstance.

And there are so many kinds of brokenness partly because our societies, our faith, our relationships are themselves so broken. Often, it tends to isolate us emotionally.

Jesus knew that in His own brokenness He was truly alone among men; He was forsaken for us. The Psalmist spoke prophetically of Him –

Reproach has broken my heart, And I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; And for comforters, but I found none.

— (Psalm 69:20)

But Christ also said,

“... He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.”

— (John 8:29)

So while men rejected Him, Jesus took comfort in the Father’s presence which was continuous until the cross where He carried all our sins and as a result was alienated from the Father, temporarily. There, He cried out—And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying,

“‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ ”

— (Matthew 27:46)

That’s meaningful for us because we know that His ultimate brokenness—being forsaken by the Father was swallowed up in victorious resurrection from the grave. He busted the chains of death and depression and defeat for us all.

“And as a result, we have such wonderful promises as: The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart and saves such as have a contrite spirit.”

— (Psalm 34:18)

*“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise.”*

— (Psalm 51:17)

He knows the pain of brokenness and He knows you. If you will believe in Him, what He did for all of us on Calvary and that He rose again, He will live within you and sustain you. In fact, it is in your brokenness that He will shine through.

As a matter of fact, there’s a story in the OT in Judges chapters six and seven that pictures this beautifully; it’s all about Gideon and I’ll paraphrase. While hiding in a winepress, the Angel of the Lord approached him and commissioned him to lead the army of Israel to defeat the hordes of Midianites and Amalekites who were invading. Gideon swallowed hard so to speak but obeyed. He amazingly gathered together 32,000 soldiers but God told him they were too many. Gideon ‘swallowed hard’ again (and again) until finally after sending most of the troops home, he was left with just 300 men.

All the masses of enemy troops were in the valley, like the sand by the sea, virtually innumerable. Well during the night, Gideon gave clay pots to all of his men which each held lit torches inside, he divided them into three groups of 100 and instructed them to surround the valley on the hills and upon his signal, break those pots and hold them high, sound their trumpets and shout ‘The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!’

Well, this crazy battle tactic worked as when they did this the hordes of the enemy in terrifying fear turned on each other and then fled wildly with the whole army of Israel in pursuit. The battle was won. The punch line here is that when the pots were broken, the light shined forth.

And that's what can happen with us as well in our own brokenness—Jesus in us can shine forth if we let Him.

But that's not the whole story. Brokenness can be a blessing, but brokenness is not the end. In the Gospel of John we read:

“Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he said unto him, ‘Wilt thou be made whole?’ The impotent man answered him, ‘Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steps down before me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Rise, take up your bed, and walk.’ And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.”

— (John 5:2-9)

You see, we are all broken. We are born broken—we are born in sin and born to die. Of course, we also experience things in life that can break us physically, mentally, emotionally and even spiritually. But God's plan of redemption is to make us whole—not just better Not just repaired Not just refreshed, but whole New, wonderfully new. And the kicker is that this redemption is not just for us, for mankind. It's for the entirety of creation, seen and unseen, heaven and earth. The Bible says:

And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death. Nor sorrow. Nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ And He said to me, ‘Write, for these words are true and faithful.’”

— (Revelation 21:3-5)

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.”

— (Isaiah 65:17)

“Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

— (2 Peter 3:13)

“For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility. Not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.”

— (Romans 8:19-22)

You see, the whole story is the story of everything being made whole—in Christ. After turning away from the Promised Land in cowardice, the Hebrew nation wandered in the wilderness for 38 years and it was then Joshua (same name as Jesus) who led them in. Not coincidentally, that’s the same time that the lame man above had been sitting by the pool of Bethesda helplessly. In like manner, we are helpless to make ourselves whole, but brokenness is not our end, wholeness is, forever.

So be hopeful for you can trust Jesus and Father God and His Holy Spirit to do what they have promised to do—to make everything new and whole—all of creation, heaven and earth and all of us who live with Him (and IN Him!) It won’t be long. As Paul said,

“For I consider that the sufferings (brokenness) of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

— (Romans 8:18)

Chapter 31

Like Him

Romans 8:28-30

From the earliest days of mankind's presence on earth, Satan has been working to convince us that God is withholding something from us.

“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which [is] in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it Nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ ”

— (Genesis 3:1-5)

The clear implication was that God did not want us to be like Him. A lie. Possibly born out of jealousy. For Satan himself pridefully wanted to be like God and it cost him.

*“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! [How] you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, **I will be like the Most High.**’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit.”*

— (Isaiah 14:12-15)

But God has always intended just the opposite. We can see that in how He dealt with Adam and Eve as well as what He says about us who believe in His Son:

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to [His] purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined [to be] conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

— (Romans 8:28-30)

Notice the past tense above. God knew the outcome from before the beginning. Of course, we didn’t. Adam may have thought, ‘This is tough, having to work so hard just to live.’ That’s because God cursed the ground for his sake. But as we all know, working hard was what Adam and many (if not all) of us need, to develop character and help us appreciate what we receive from the loving hand of God.

Eve learned to invest in her children, teaching them to reverence God and she learned the value of humility. When she was wanting to be like God initially, it may have been for different reasons but she was indeed, as a result of God’s judgement, learning godliness from her Maker.

In fact, most believers, if they were to list God’s character attributes would say—Holiness, perfection, kindness, forgiveness, and mercy and these very attributes are those He calls on us to embrace and manifest:

“For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”

— (Leviticus 11:45)

“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

— (Ephesians 4:32)

“Therefore, be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.”

— (Luke 6:36)

That is, He’s telling us to be like Him. Unfortunately, even as believers we often still don’t ‘get’ Him—we get hung up on the power, the miracles, the radiant glory and we forget the most excellent things—the love, the mercy, the graciousness, that is the ‘Who attributes’ of His character as opposed to the ‘What’ attributes.

But that’s going to change because we have this promise:

Beloved Now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

— (1 John 3:2)

There are some who desire godliness or who try to manifest godliness out of pride—to be seen of men. But God wants us to be like Him in love, in mercy, in grace, in humility and so on. This is Who we will see then.

Sin-filled hearts of prideful men can only be impressed with power, radiant glory—that’s what knocked down the madman Saul who was seeking to persecute believers.

As he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him,

“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ ”

— (Acts 9:3-5)

But humble, broken sinners like Mary are impressed with Who He is.

“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to Him, ‘Rabboni!’ (which is to say, Teacher). Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, “I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.””

— (John 20:16-17)

You see, He is the radiant glory and the power but He is also the grace and mercy and love because He’s complete, He’s perfect and He calls us to be the same:

“Therefore, you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

— (Matthew 5:48)

And for that to be possible, He had to put on flesh, become one of us, experience the totality of being human and do so perfectly, completely without sin:

“Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

— (Hebrews 2:17)

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

— (Hebrews 4:15)

Yes, contrary to the devil’s lies, God does want us to be like Him, like His Son, and that is a complete, i.e. perfect package deal.

Chapter 32

Challenged

Job 1:12

“Though these three men Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD.”

— (Ezekiel 14:14)

This verse along with its companion, Ezekiel 14:20, identify three notably righteous men in the Old Testament. For me, one of them is particularly interesting—Job. He is the only man in the Bible for whom we have a recorded challenge by Satan to God.

Then the LORD said to Satan,

“Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? So, Satan answered the LORD and said, ‘Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!’ ”

— (Job 1:8-11)

And amazingly, God accepted the challenge.
And the LORD said to Satan,

“Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.’ So, Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.”

— (Job 1:12)

Why? I’ll get to that, but first—

“Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house; and a messenger came to Job and said, ‘The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, when the Sabeans raided them and took them away—indeed they have killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!’

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, ‘The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them; and I alone have escaped to tell you!’

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, ‘The Chaldeans formed three bands, raided the camels and took them away, yes, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!’

While he was still speaking, another also came and said, ‘Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, and suddenly a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you!’ ”

— (Job 1:13-19)

In a single day, Job was devastated. Everything was taken from him including his beloved children. But Satan lost the challenge because:

“Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshipped. And he said: ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD.’ In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.”

— (Job 1:20-22)

But Satan wasn’t done with Job, and neither was God. Once again, he came before the Lord:

“Then the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause.’

So, Satan answered the LORD and said, ‘Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!’ ”

— (Job 2:3-5)

Challenge number two; and once again, God accepted:

“And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life.’ ”

— (Job 2:6)

And for the next 37 chapters, poor Job suffers intensely. But before it all his wife said to him,

“Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9)

His pain was so great that he cursed the day of his birth. On top of that, he was counselled by three ‘friends’ that his suffering was because of his abundant sin.

One of Job’s responses to them concerning God was,

“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him:”

which is a wonderful display of trust but then he added,

“Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him.”

— (Job 13:15)

which was a display of why God accepted Satan’s challenge.

As righteous as Job was, God knew that there was something at work inside that needed to change. Not only that, but his trials produced a wonderful hope:

“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”

— (Job 19:25-27)

Repeatedly, Job groaned and moaned and yet he defended himself and his righteousness to his friends. Then finally, in chapter 38, God spoke directly to him:

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said:

“Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding.”

— (Job 38:1-4)

After this God gave him an additional 52 questions that really put Job on the spot and to which he remained silent. Then God finished:

Moreover, the LORD answered Job, and said:

“Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it.”

— (Job 40:1-2)

Dutifully, Job answered:

“Behold, I am vile; What shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further.”

— (Job 40:4-5)

But God wasn't not done:

“Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: ‘Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me: Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His?’ ”

— (Job 40:6-9)

And He followed with 18 more questions to Job as well as a short lecture on His power.

Job was overwhelmed and saw both God and himself in a new light. He meekly replied:

“I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, ‘Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, ‘I will question you, and you shall answer Me.’ I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

— (Job 42:2-6)

“And so it was, after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, ‘My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has. Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, go to My servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and My servant Job shall pray for you. For I will accept him, lest I deal with you according to your folly; because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.’ ”

— (Job 42:7-8)

“So, Job’s friends did as God commanded. And the LORD restored Job’s losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed, the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.”

— (Job 42:10)

What a story! So why did God accept the challenges and allow Job to suffer such anguish? Now, I don’t want to say I know because no one truly knows the mind of the Almighty. So, I’ll offer an observation.

It would appear like Job felt that he lived a righteous life and so he viewed his tragedy with some humility and some indignation. It also appeared that his indignation grew to the point of declaring, “Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him.”

But in the end, his ultimate declaration was,

“‘I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.’ And, ‘I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.’ ”

So, in the end, Job came to the place of sincere humility and thus the true righteousness that God knew would come forth. So, once again, we have learned through blessed Job, the true nature of our Father—He loves us and is FOR us even when it seems convincingly that He’s not. As believers, we all have a mortal enemy who seeks to demean and destroy us and turn us against the Lord. But God knows us and knows what He’s doing in our lives, for this is true:

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

— (Romans 8:28)

Chapter 33

Third Day

Have you ever wondered why Jesus rose from the grave on the third day? Of course, the easy answer is because it was prophesied. But why did God choose three? Is it symbolic of the Trinity's victory over evil, over death? I do think it has something to do with God Himself.

Let's look at the mentions of "third day" in the scripture and see what we can glean:

"So the evening and the morning were the third day."

— (Genesis 1:13 NKJV)

This is the first mention and if you look at what happened on the third day of creation, it clearly points to LIFE.

*"Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off."
(Genesis 22:4 NKJV)*

Abraham was told by God to go to Mt Moriah and there to sacrifice his son, his beloved son to the Lord. Abraham journeyed there and attempted to fulfill God's command but was stopped by God's Angel at the last instant. This mention then speaks to OBEDIANCE.

"And Laban was told on the third day that Jacob had fled."

— (Genesis 31:22 NKJV)

Jacob had spent many years in the deceitful, oppressive world of Laban.

Then he decided to go home to his father's house in the promised land. This mention then speaks to ESCAPE FROM BONDAGE.

“Now it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males.”

— (Genesis 34:25 NKJV)

Dinah had been taken captive, raped and then her brothers brought VENGEANCE UPON THE EVIL.

“Now it came to pass on the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants.”

— (Genesis 40:20 NKJV)

Joseph, who is a prophetic type of Christ, was imprisoned in Egypt, the prophetic type of the world. During that time, two of Pharaoh's servants were imprisoned with him. Soon, they both had dreams that Joseph interpreted for them—the butler was to be released but the baker got death. This speaks to divine JUDGEMENT (symbolically) that happened on the third day.

“Now Joseph said to them on the third day, “Do this and live, for I fear God:”

— (Genesis 42:18 NASB95)

If you remember the story of Joseph, you know that his brothers heartlessly sold him into bondage and slavery, and he was taken to Egypt. After his miraculous rise to virtually supreme power, his family was forced to journey as well to Egypt to obtain food due to a severe famine. He recognized them but they were clueless about him. In their eyes, he was the PM of all Egypt second only to Pharaoh. Now, Joseph wanted to test them, so he was tough on them and threw them in prison for three days, then on the third day he brought them out and let them all go except the most violent brother Simeon. He told them to bring back their youngest brother. This mention speaks to TESTING AND MERCY.

Now, there are other mentions which speak to AWESOMENESS OF THE ALMIGHTY, HOLINESS, PURIFICATION, A COVENANT OF PEACE, AND REDEMPTION. But this last verse is a powerful prophecy:

“After two days He will revive us; On the third day He will raise us up, That we may live in His sight.”

— (Hosea 6:2 NKJV)

Clearly, this speaks to the RESURRECTION and note that it is in the plural. Hosea was praying for Israel, so this speaks to Christ, His church and the Jewish people as well.

So, you can see that “third day” has some powerful linkage to the overall plan of God. As such I think Christ rose on the third day because that is in total harmony with the rest of scripture and proclaims loudly Almighty God, Lord of All, Three in One, Holy, Holy, Holy.

Chapter 34

Days of Noah

When asked about His return, Jesus said,

“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.”

— (Matthew 24:37)

In other words, the conditions of the world before the coming of Jesus will be like the conditions of the world before the flood:

Exploding population .

“Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them,”

— (Genesis 6:1 NKJV)

Sexual perversion and demonic activity.

“that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose.”

— (Genesis 6:2 NKJV)

Constant evil in the heart of man.

“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

— (Genesis 6:5 NKJV)

Widespread corruption and violence.

“The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.”

— (Genesis 6:11 NKJV)

(Thanks to David Guzik)

As many forms of perversion are pressed upon us from the media and the government, in schools, from ‘doctors’, even in some churches, we must remember that we were told it would happen. So what about those days of Noah? Let’s take a closer look at Genesis.

Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose.

“There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.”

— (Genesis 6:1-3)

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

“The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So, God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.”

— (Genesis 6:5, 11-12)

The phrase sons of God clearly refers to angelic creatures when it is used the three other times in the Old Testament¹. The translators of the Septuagint translated sons of God as angels. Those ancient translators clearly thought sons of God referred to angelic beings Not to people descended from Seth.

Jude 6 tells us of the angels who did not keep their proper domain but left their own habitation. Jude goes on in Jude 7 to tell us they sinned in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone

after strange flesh². Here in Genesis 6, as in Sodom and Gomorrah, there was an unnatural sexual union.

We can deduce why Satan sent his angels to intermarry (either directly or indirectly) with human women. Satan tried to pollute the genetic pool of mankind with a satanic corruption, to put something like a genetic virus to make the human race unfit for bringing forth the Seed of the woman—the Messiah—promised in Genesis 3:15³.

Every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually: This says a lot. It means there was no aspect of man's nature not corrupted by sin. If you look at crimes per 100k, it would appear that it is relatively stable but that's an intentional deception as the total crimes have tracked with the total population which has more than tripled worldwide in the last 70 years.

Moral depravity: According to a recent Gallup poll, 54% of Americans say the state of moral values in the country is "poor"—a record number. Some 83% say they believe morals are in decline. They aren't alone: Survey data from a study published this week in *Nature* suggest that people in more than 60 nations share a general sense that people are less moral now than they used to be. The study, based on more than 12 million surveys administered to people around the world between 1949 and 2021, argues that people have felt this way for at least 70 years.

Evil thoughts continually: Overall, recent data shows that the U.S. experienced its largest-ever recorded annual increase in homicides in 2020, compared to 2019, according to statistics from the FBI. The homicide rate rose nearly 30% in 2020 and increased again by 5% in 2021.

Now, I could go on and on, but we all know that these stats are only the tip of the iceberg. We have all seen how addiction to technology produced tools and media have isolated us and mutated our thinking. We are all revved up, angry and impatient, utterly and totally self-absorbed.

I've lived, worked and or traveled in almost 40 countries and I can tell you, these things are more or less ubiquitous. Our societies do resemble those described in scripture as being in Noah's day.

1. *"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them."*—(Job 1:6 NKJV)

"Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord."—(Job 2:1 NKJV)

"When the morning stars sang together, And all the sons of God shouted for joy?"—(Job 38:7 NKJV)

2. *"And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."*—(Jude 6–7 NKJV)

3. *"And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."*—(Genesis 3:15 NKJV)

Chapter 35

Timing

“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.”

— (John 11:5,6 NKJV)

Then Jesus said to them plainly, *“Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless, let us go to him.”*

Now, most of you know this story. Jesus knew this little family of two sisters and a brother, and He cared deeply for them. The incident is the seventh miracle of John’s Gospel.

Why did He wait? There’s a theory out there; it goes possibly, Jesus waited four days because He knew the Jewish superstition of that day that said a soul stayed near the grave for three days, hoping to return to the body. Therefore, it was accepted that after four days there was absolutely no hope of resuscitation. Clearly, this theory is conjecture—it comes from the ‘tradition of Ben Kaphra’ which is traced to about 200 years after Calvary and could easily have been invented by the Jews in response to their inability to explain Christ’s resurrection —i.e. that He wasn’t really dead.

So, I’m definitely not inclined to buy into the Ben Kaphra theory but it is obvious that Jesus was attuned to the timing of this miracle. He specifically waited two days after He heard the news and arrived on the fourth day after Lazarus died. The text makes it clear that He cared intensely. The delay was not the result of apathy.

In fact, He was definitely not apathetic -He cared so much,

“He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.”

— (John 11:33)

“The verb rendered ‘groaned’ is an unusual one. It signifies a loud inarticulate noise, and its proper use appears to be for the snorting of horses. When used of men it usually denotes anger.” (Morris)

It means that Jesus wasn’t so much sad at the scene surrounding the tomb of Lazarus. It’s more accurate to say that Jesus was angry. (Gusik)

So, He cared and He arrived exactly when He intended. In John’s Gospel there are three times when someone dear to Jesus asked Him to do something (see also John 2:1-11 and 7:1-10)¹. In each of these three cases, Jesus responded in the same way—He waited. But this is the time He waited a specific amount of time.

Why the wait?

Clearly, the Lord does things on His schedule Not ours. He rode into Jerusalem on the donkey, hailed as King exactly on time, on “this your day” (see our lesson of that name.) When he knew Lazarus was dead, He waited two days and when He raised him from the grave, it had been four days.

Now, as I prayed about this and asked the Lord for insight, He reminded me of the verse,

“But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”

— (2 Peter 3:8)

And thus, I wondered if the reason for the delay was a picture, a prophetic picture. I’ll explain and you can decide if you agree or not.

Jesus waited two days after He knew in the Spirit that Lazarus had died. Now Laz was someone Jesus loved but He waited two days before responding. Now, the name Lazarus means “who is helped by God” and this is amplified by the following verses:

Psalm 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Psalm 70:1 Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O LORD.

Psalm 71:12 O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help.

Psalm 109:26 Help me, O LORD my God: O save me according to thy mercy:

Psalm 146:5 Happy is he that has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God:

Isaiah 41:10, 13 Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. ... For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.

Could this be a picture of Christ waiting for about 2000 years to help Israel? To raise them from the dead so to speak as in Ezekiel 37? Of course that passage portrays the rebirth of the nation as a whole so what about their resurrection at the “end of days” as spoken in Daniel 12?

If you consider the Jewish or Hebrew people beginning with Abram and accounting for the time until the present day you have around 4000 years or four prophetic days. That is you can link both the two days and the four days to the raising of Lazarus which could picture the raising of the Jewish people—see Daniel 12:2-3, 9-10, 13.²

So I suggest that if indeed we see the second coming of Christ in the not too distant future, it could be that He waited to help Lazarus in order to picture and to fulfill prophecy concerning God’s good will for Israel. What do you think?

1. *“On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “They have no wine.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Whatever He says to you, do it.” Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, “Fill the waterpots with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, “Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.” And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, “Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!” This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.”—(John 2:1–11 NKJV)*

“After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him. Now the Jews’ Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. His brothers therefore said to Him, “Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.” For even His brothers did not believe in Him. Then Jesus said to them, “My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come.” When He had said these things to them, He remained in Galilee. But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast. Not openly, but as it were in secret.”—(John 7:1–10 NKJV)

2. *“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.”—(Daniel 12:2 NKJV)*

“Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever.”—(Daniel 12:3 NKJV)

“And he said, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.”—(Daniel 12:9 NKJV)

“Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.”—(Daniel 12:10 NKJV)

“But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days.”—(Daniel 12:13 NKJV)

Chapter 36

The Fellowship

Philippians 3:10

I've been leading a small group of newer believers and we're going over foundational lessons on our mutual faith. The other day, one of them posed an honest question. I'll tell you what it was and how I answered. We were discussing why Jesus and only Jesus could pay the debt for all our sins. I've written about that in another posting entitled One Perfect Man. Anyway, he asked, "Why didn't God the Father just come Himself?" Good question.

I answered, "He did," and talked about the wonderful mystery of the Trinity, three in one and I also mentioned how Jesus responded to the disciple Philip when he said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us."

Jesus said to him,

"Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father?'"

— (John 14:8)

But something happened yesterday, when I was 'at the altar' so to speak. I was contemplating the love of God and He reminded me of something very, very special to me personally because He shared it with me not long after my youngest son went home to be with Him just two days after his 17th birthday. In the depths of grief, I heard Him say to me, "Now we share a very special fellowship—the fellowship of suffering."

Paul wrote something similar, speaking of Christ,

“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;”

— (Philippians 3:10)

But I knew that it was God the Father, Abba, Who had spoken to me. And, it struck me yesterday that sending His Son was a demonstration of the greatest love ever.

I remembered that when Gabriel was on the verge of passing that I earnestly asked God that if possible, could He take me instead and Abba showed me that knows that sentiment.

So yes, God was present in the Son—it’s called the Incarnation—so He did come Himself. Jesus was fully God and fully man. But all the cosmos knows that in sending Jesus, His beloved Son to suffer and die for us, God demonstrated a love for us that was only equaled by Christ’s love for Him. It is a love above all loves indescribable and eternal.

If you have lost a child, you may relate to this and if not, I hope you’ll believe me when I tell you that God loves us more than we can ever imagine not because of us but simply because it’s Who He is.

Chapter 37

The Scars

You know, Jesus, after His resurrection, kept His scars, the piercings in His body. We know that because of what He said to Thomas who at first doubted His resurrection.

*“Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.
The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” So he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”
And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!”
Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving but believing.”
And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ ”*

— (John 20:24-28)

Of course, we know He didn't have to keep those scars. He chose to do so. Clearly, we see in the scriptures that after His resurrection, He had the ability to appear any way He chose. For instance, on the road to Emmaus or on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

But why? What's the purpose or picture?
The Old Testament spoke of them:

“For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet;”

— (Psalm 22:16)

“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.”

— (Zechariah 12:10)

These and other scriptures pictured that Christ would be crucified but why keep the scars?

To answer this, we need to dig some more into the OT law and history. First, we need to review the story of Passover. You remember that as the Hebrew people were about to be delivered out of Egyptian bondage and slavery, they were instructed by the Lord through Moses and Aaron to kill a lamb—to each family a lamb—and to place its blood on the two door posts and the cross beam above.

Of course, most of us are aware that this preceded the judgement of death of the firstborn that came on all of Egypt and where the blood was placed and the fact that it was from a spotless lamb pictured the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary Who saved us all from eternal death. The blood was placed on the doorposts as a picture of the Cross—where His body was pierced. Go ahead and read Exodus 12 for the details.

Then turn to Exodus 21.

“If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out by himself.

But if the servant plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.”

— (Exodus 21:2-6)

What this shows is that the servant who paid the debt owed to his master, if he chose to remain connected to his family and in service to his master would choose to be pierced and to make that linkage crystal clear, that piercing took place in the same place as the Passover lamb’s blood—on the doorpost. And it was a scar that he kept as a sign of his commitment.

In the same way, Jesus, who said he came in the form of a servant¹, paid our debt of sin. Being pierced for us because He chose to remain connected to us and to forever be in relationship/service to our Father, thus He sits at the right hand of the Almighty. And He kept those scars as a sign of His commitment, an eternal commitment. Hallelujah!

1. *“For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.”*—(Luke 22:27 NKJV)

Chapter 38

Discipleship

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

— (Matthew 7:13-14)

We need to understand that this life as a sincere Christian disciple has two parts outlined clearly by Jesus; first, we are saved by faith in Jesus, that is, His death on the cross that paid for our sins, His resurrection from the grave that proved His sacrifice was acceptable to Almighty God and His ascension to the throne of God where He is seated at the right hand. Second, we then live by faith in Him; following and thus learning and learning and still learning to look to Him at all times—to develop increasing trust in Him in all circumstances.

The first part secures our salvation forever; the second results in greater degrees of fruit, greater love, greater relationship... In this, in the Gospel, the rightness of God is revealed as we go from faith to faith. Paul put it this way,

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”

— (Romans 1:16-17)

The gate is narrow because there is only one way to enter, faith in Christ. This is not the same gate as the ‘pearly’ gates into the heavenly city, but it does lead to them. This is the gate of **discipleship**. The consequent path or way on

the other side of this gate is characterized as difficult. The Greek word literally means to press as in pressing grapes and is a metaphor for trouble, affliction and distress. It's difficult because that's what God uses to shape and develop our eternal character, our glorious resemblance to our Lord Jesus-

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

— (2 Corinthians 3:18)

It's a difficult life, a difficult path or way, because it involves denial of selfishness.

“When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, ‘Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.’”

— (Mark 8:34)

It's on this path that, though it is difficult, teaches us obedience. If you will follow Jesus, that is believe AND follow, go through the gate and walk the path, you will learn as He learned—

“...though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

— (Hebrews 5:8)

Now, Jesus said that few would find it. I encourage you, be one of the few. Enter the gate and walk the path; believe and follow—all by faith.

Chapter 39

The Joy of Your Lord

“...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

— (Hebrews 12:2)

What was that joy? I’ve heard a lot of preaching and theories on it and they sound good but I still want the full assurance of understanding because that joy, THAT joy, gave Christ the will to go through the cross, the shame and rise absolutely victorious over death and the devil.

Let’s see if we can learn more from the scriptures about this wonderful thing called joy:

- Clearly, it’s not the temporary happiness that can come from the human heart; it’s supernatural, entirely spiritual and is a product (fruit) of the Holy Spirit—

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

— (GAL 5:22-23a)

- If for no other reason, Jesus was filled with this joy because He was filled with God’s Spirit and He claimed it as His own and something He could share

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”

— (John 15:11)

• And you can see that He was not ‘stingy’ with it. He wanted His joy in His followers to be full—that is, to the max which could mean that it will continue to increase throughout eternity; He even spoke to Father God about it —

“But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.”

— (John 17:13)

• And knowing our propensity to view all His promises as fleshly rather than heavenly, Paul said, —

“the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

— (Romans 14:17)

• And this joy is not just for His Bride, the mostly gentile Church, but for Jewish believers as well for we see these promises for them (and presumably all believers) during the millennial reign of Christ —

*“Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; ‘For YAH, the LORD, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.’
Therefore, with joy you will draw water From the wells of salvation.”*

— (Isaiah 12:2-3)

“And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, And come to Zion with singing, With everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

— (Isaiah 35:10)

“For you shall go out with joy, And be led out with peace; The mountains and the hills Shall break forth into singing before you, And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

— (Isaiah 55:12)

Eternal joy is what heaven, God’s presence, is all about. It’s a wonderful promise. All He wants is for us to be faithful to Him, to continue believing and

thus producing His spiritual fruit in our own lives and the lives of those around us. Christ spoke a parable and summed it up this way,

“His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”

— (Matthew 25:21)

You can have this joy now, like a sapling that will grow and grow and grow. Open your heart to Christ, ask for His forgiveness for your misdeeds and trust in Him.

Chapter 40

Never Stop Trusting

*“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life Nor angels nor principalities
nor powers Nor things present nor things to come Nor height nor depth
Nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of
God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

— (Romans 8:38-39)

This verse points out that there are many entities engaged in attempting to “separate us from the love of God” so it behooves us to understand this term separate. It means to depart as when a man or woman departs from their spouse. Of course, there’s only one reason anyone would depart from the perfect loving spouse Jesus, that’s doubting His love.

You see, this potential departing or separation is not a matter of distance but a matter of relationship. To get mankind to doubt God and specifically to doubt His love has been the goal of Satan and all these evil entities ever since man was created. And he knows that until Jesus, it was an effective weapon against God’s children. Apart from the power of faith and trust given by the Holy Spirit No one can honestly believe that God loves them. Before salvation, all we can see is our sin, our flesh, and it stinks.

When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”

But Simon answered and said to Him,

“Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.’ And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!’ ”

— (Luke 5:4-8)

It’s evident that Peter typified this struggle from here in the beginning of his relationship with Christ all the way to the shores of Galilee after the resurrection. (See *John 21*)

But God’s love for you is because of Christ and when you are saved, you are IN Christ. God no longer regards your sin, your failures. They are paid for in full and His love is unwavering; it’s eternal.

So when you fail, and you will fail; you will fall short, don’t listen to the enemy’s sniveling lies that you’ve alienated God or that He’s disappointed in you because you’re just so bad. He wants only to get you to doubt God’s love for you. Don’t you buy it! Even when you blow it. Confess your failure, your sin, change your mind, your direction (i.e. repent) and focus on God’s grace, goodness, and promise of forgiveness. Christ is totally committed to you!

For He Himself has said,

“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

— (Hebrews 13:5)

and..

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.”

— (John 6:37)

Chapter 41

At Home

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

— (Romans 8:28-30)

“Now here God is speaking of things concerning me that are not yet fulfilled. For you do not yet see the glorified Chuck. I am not yet in my glorified state. That is a yet future experience that I am to have. But yet, God puts it in the past tense, which to me is quite interesting. But even as He spoke to Abraham concerning his seed in the past tense, because He knew that Abraham was going to have a son whom He did foreknow. And because God has the foreknowledge, He can speak as Paul said of things as existing even though as yet they do not exist, because He knows they are going to exist. And so God speaks, and this is what thrills me, He speaks of my being glorified, because God knows He is going to do it. He is going to complete that work in me. He which has begun a good work in me shall surely continue to perform it. And so I rest in the fact that God has already spoken in the past tense of my future state of glorified together with Jesus Christ. I have got it made.”—*Chuck Smith*

I love what Chuck said here, but I'll take it a step further—I'll suggest that not only does God have foreknowledge to speak of seemingly future events in the

past tense but in the eternal realm, time exists in a different fashion—it’s a “heavenly thing” that Jesus gave Nicodemus a taste of when he told him,

“If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”

— (John 3:12-13)

In other words, I don’t think Romans 8:28–30 speaks of our predestination, our call, our justification and our glorification in the past tense only because of His foreknowledge but because sometime “before time began”. He accomplished it and in heaven it is settled; somehow, it’s actually done. Of course, in this life, in our realm of time and space, He is always at work in us “to complete” what¹ he has begun².

Sir Isaac Newton said of God, “He is eternal and infinite, omnipotent and omniscient; that is, his duration reaches from eternity to eternity; his presence from infinity to infinity.” God is the one “who inhabits eternity”³. Creatures inhabit time. Jesus, as the God-man, inhabits both.—C.S. Lewis *Institute*

Jesus said concerning the believer,

“My father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him”.

— (John 14:23)

Now one author wrote that this is indicative of the heavenly city descending out of heaven and remaining with mankind on the new earth. That’s a nice thought but this verse specifies an individual believer Not the whole planet. I recall that Jesus also said,

“A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.”

— (John 14:19-20)

and...

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

— (John 17:20-23)

This oneness, this unity with Christ and the Father and the Spirit, this is our home and it’s right now if you’re born again. You see, when you are born again, you are thenceforth a spiritual creature—a new creation, and your home is of course, a spiritual home. Did you get that? When you are born again, you are IN God and He is IN you—it’s an eternal unity, a home unconstrained by time or space—eternal and infinite just as God.

Will you have a physical body? Yes, Christ did after He rose from the grave, but it was a spiritual body as well. Remember, we will be “conformed to the image of His Son.”

We have so much to be thankful for now and so much to look forward to as well, forever!

-
1. *“who has saved us and called us with a holy calling Not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,”*—(2 Timothy 1:9 NKJV)
 2. *“who has saved us and called us with a holy calling Not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,”*—(2 Timothy 1:9 NKJV)
 3. (Isaiah 57:15 NKJV)

Chapter 42

Dead Body Walking, Live Spirit Waiting

“For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God Nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.”

— (Romans 8:6-10)

Man classifies death as the separation of man’s consciousness from his body. But the Bible says that if your consciousness is separated from God, that is, you don’t have a real consciousness of God, (and Paul goes even further by saying that this condition is actual enmity against God) then of course you are truly dead. The mind of the flesh is death, because it is a consciousness that being separated from God is absorbed simply with the things of the body and its needs.

And let’s take this a step further—he writes “you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit...” That is, you, the real you, your soul, is not contained by your body. Not when you’re born again, but is rather in the Holy Spirit such that when the flesh gives up and dies, you, being in the Spirit are instantly in the ‘face to face’ presence of God. Further, when you are in the Spirit, the Spirit is also in you—take your time to wrap your mind around that. Your spiritual ‘container’, if you would, the Spirit of God simply waits for that sin-filled disaster called your flesh to kick off.

I know first-hand what it’s like to hold the hand of someone you love when physical death comes and I can tell you, you know instantly when they are gone, finally free. They are no longer in that body but fully alive.

And notice how he concludes—the body is dead, present tense, because of

sin, but the Spirit, which holds you, is living. In fact, it is itself life. And that's present tense also. How does it feel to be in life?

So don't get all bummed out by your tendency to stumble and err. It's that dead flesh. As Paul wrote,

*“I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind (soul)
I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.”*

— (Romans 7:25)

Your salvation is present tense!

Chapter 43

One Perfect Man

John 3:36

What does it mean to be a Christian? Of course, there's an answer well worded and 'tuned' by knowledgeable theologians that many if not most believers may agree on but not everyone. Then there's an answer that sounds like it was developed for a Christian men's or women's retreat—simple and well-polished. Then there's the answer you'd get from a street corner philosopher—really off but sounds interesting. Many answers, many points of view.

Each denomination or movement has its own version of the answer—what to believe, how to behave. Someone looking for the answer could get really confused.

To better understand the truth of the matter, we need to go back to the beginning to establish a foundation for it. Beginning in Genesis, scripture tells us that the first man, Adam, a perfect man, in that he was originally sinless, rebelled against God's command not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Now, Eve, his spouse indeed ate first but she was deceived by the serpent. Adam did not have that excuse. He chose on his own.

When he did that, sin along with its wages-death, entered into the human experience, into our most basic element, our genome if you would. It became a fundamental part of our fleshly existence just as it is with the devil and his existence. With that came a shift in our allegiance or subservience. Satan then moved and motivated mankind spiritually and physically. And, because God said we would die if we ate that fruit, that's exactly what has since transpired ever since until another perfect Man showed up, Jesus Christ. Consequently, He changed everything. The Bible records:

“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life;”

— (John 3:36)

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.”

— (John 6:47)

“To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.”

— (Acts 10:43)

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

— (Romans 10:4)

“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God,”

— (1 John 5:1)

As you can see from these and many other verses, belief in Christ is the key to eternal life. So being a Christian is first and foremost a matter of sincere belief. However, as we all know, someone can say they believe but in sincerity, they don't. So, we look to other verses which say:

“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”

— (John 7:38)

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also;”

— (John 14:12)

“But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.”

— (Luke 8:13)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

— (Galatians 5:22-23)

From these and many other verses, we see that true belief leads to outward evidence of that belief.

OK, but why Jesus? Why not belief in Moses or Elijah or David or Peter or John or anyone else? The answer is quite simple actually. You see, the debt or the wages of that original sin was initiated by one perfect man, Adam. The consequences of that was an ensuing immeasurable weight of countless sins, iniquities and trespasses by the whole human race. This was a debt or penalty no human could pay off because no human after Adam was sinless—no one since that time has ever had the base requirement of perfection, of sinlessness.

Now, God knew this from before the beginning of time and so at the appointed time God came in the form of a man—the God-Man, Jesus Christ. He was entirely perfect and sinless and He paid the debt owed for all our sin, all our rebellion against God, for all time. Too good to believe? No, indeed belief based on trust or faith in God's Son, faith in His goodness, His pure and unwavering character—that's it.

One perfect Man showed up from heaven and our devotion, our faith in Him and what that produces in our lives is what makes us Christian.

Chapter 44

Thoughts Along a Shady Country Lane

No words can sufficiently laud the infinite beauty, glory, power, majesty of Almighty God—God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit. Perfect in unity, perfect good, perfect wisdom, perfect plans, perfect perspective. Amazing mercy, love, kindness, ...

“And when we see Him, we shall be like Him for we shall behold Him as He is.”

— (1 John 3:2)

“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”

— (1 John 1:5)

“...if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

— (1 John 1:7)

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

— (1 John 1:9)

“He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.”

— (1 John 2:10)

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

— (1 John 2:15)

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.”

— (1 John 3:1)

“And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

— (1 John 3:3)

Something to understand here. This is not encouraging a self-improvement program. No sprinkling of hyssop No ten steps to purity. The translation is accurate, but it makes all the difference how you read it. This is **not** an if/then statement; it is not an action that is initiated by the believer driven by his/her hope. Rather, it is the **hope itself** that purifies the believer.

“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil,”

— (Hebrews 6:19)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,”

— (1 Peter 1:3)

Isn't He Wonderful!!

Chapter 45

The Ugly ‘P’

There’s this great group of guys I meet with to talk about the things we’re learning from the Lord. A few days ago, we got on the topic of pride and I mentioned C S Lewis’ statement on it:

“The vice I am talking of is Pride or Self-Conceit: and the virtue opposite to it, in Christian morals, is called Humility... According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.” — *C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity*

Well, one of the guys who is especially frank and honest (which I love) blurted out, “But God gave me pride and I can’t get rid of it.” And if we consider what the Bible has to say concerning this, you can understand his frustration:

“Therefore pride serves as their necklace; Violence covers them like a garment.”

— (Psalm 73:6)

Lesson: Pride is associated with violence—

*“The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way
And the perverse mouth I hate.”*

— (Proverbs 8:13)

Lesson: If we reverence the Lord, we will hate pride—

“When pride comes, then comes shame; But with the humble is wisdom.”

— (Proverbs 11:2)

Lesson: Pride leads to shame—

“Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.”

— (Proverbs 16:18)

Lesson: Pride precedes destruction—

*“A man’s pride will bring him low, But the humble in spirit will retain
honor.”*

— (Proverbs 29:23)

Lesson: Pride brings dishonor—

“The pride of your heart has deceived you,”

— (Obadiah 1:3)

Lesson: Pride leads to self-deception—

*“...not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same
condemnation as the devil.”*

— (1 Timothy 3:6)

Lesson: Pride caused the fall into condemnation of Satan—

*“when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who
brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage;”*

— (Deuteronomy 8:14)

Lesson: Pride will cause you to forget the Lord—

“Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, That they might gaze at you.”

— (Ezekiel 28:17)

Lesson: God cast Satan to the ground because of pride—

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit.”

— (Isaiah 14:12-15)

Lesson: Pride deceived Satan into thinking he was greater than he was and led to his downfall—

“Though the LORD is on high, Yet He regards the lowly; But the proud He knows from afar.”

— (Psalm 138:6)

Lesson: God distances Himself from the prideful—

“Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Though they join forces None will go unpunished.”

— (Proverbs 16:5)

Lesson: A prideful heart is an abomination—

“Hear and give ear: Do not be proud, For the LORD has spoken.”

— (Jeremiah 13:15)

Lesson: The prideful don't hear the Lord—

“Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.”

— (Habakuk 2:4)

Lesson: The prideful are not upright—

“So now we call the proud blessed, For those who do wickedness are raised up; They even tempt God and go free.”

— (Malachi 3:15)

Lesson: This is when we just look at the flesh, the outward appearance—

“God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.”

— (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5)

Lesson: Grace goes to the humble—

So why does God save us and then still leave us with this and other ugly flesh characteristics to deal with? The Apostle Paul agonized,

“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

— (Romans 7:24)

and said,

“For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.”

— (Romans 7:19)

Well, I'll suggest that it has to do with helping us to grow in **trust** of God's grace and learning to walk **humbly**. Let me illustrate:

The Bible says that the firmament, that is nature, shows His handiwork¹. This is clearly evident in its beauty, its majesty and its intricacy, but also in the spiritual lessons God displays if we'll pay attention.

In nature, there's a wonderful parallel to observe—the lowly caterpillar. Here he goes, inching slowly towards a tasty leaf. And when he finally gets there, he just eats and eats—feeding himself seems to be the only goal in his pitifully limited life. From one leaf-binge to another, he slowly creeps.

But then, suddenly, he gets it into his little caterpillar mind that there's more to life than chlorophyll and he puts himself in a real predicament—dangling by a thread so to speak. You see, he realizes he's 'out on a limb' and it's time to 'turn over a new leaf', to 'branch out' (sorry). Anyway, he takes this whole new course, this leap of faith—and there's a radical change.

Yet to those watching, it's a conundrum, a mystery, a seeming blunder because he's now living in a chrysalis—a very 'limited' life in the world's eyes—no leaf parties No upward mobility. I mean, life is over, right?

Still, while his fat-cat(erpillar) buddies scorn or laugh or scratch their little

caterpillar heads, a metamorphosis is taking place—a dramatic transformation. Within that shell, a whole new creature is being formed². And when the time is right, a struggle begins inside.

At first, the shell—what's left of the old caterpillar resists. But then, there's a crack ... then another. Slowly, and with tremendous effort, this beautiful new creature emerges—fighting and struggling, then resting, then fighting and struggling. You almost feel sorry for him.

Finally, as he breaks free of the old caterpillar shell, he spreads forth his beautiful new wings. Drinking in the sunlight of a new world, he flies over the old world of leaves and twigs. On the breath of God's Spirit, so to speak, in the light of His Son, he now looks for flowers—a whole new diet, a new life, a new freedom—completely unimaginable to the old caterpillar. But the struggle to emerge was very important.

A scientist studying this phenomenon cut open the chrysalis just as the butterfly began to emerge, and guess what happened? Instead of helping it, he actually impaired its ability to fly. He found that in the course of the struggle, the breaking loose (that is, dealing with the old caterpillar), the veins of the new butterfly's wings were filled with the fluid that causes them to stiffen and expand. No struggle No flight—a new creature but no lift-off.

And so, it is with us who believe in Christ. Upon getting saved, we indeed change. Christ is in us and we are in Christ! Though the world perceives us as 'constrained', we are constrained by love³ and an inward transformation now begins. As we grow in the Lord, we start to sense the hardness of the old man and the closer we come, by relationship, to the Lord, the more we detest its influence. We want to be free from it.

But the struggle is vital for in it we learn to make good choices—to resist evil and to cling to good and when we fail, to confess it to the Lord and trust in His promises—to walk humbly with Him, sharing His 'yoke'⁴. Thus, our eternal character is shaped. We are humbled by the honest assessment of our old flesh, and we are strengthened as the living waters of God's Spirit course through our spiritual 'veins', preparing us to fly. And fly we will!

So, don't be discouraged when the 'old man' rears its ugly head. Fight the good fight⁵. You will emerge one day soon into a whole new world with a new body, a new perspective, a new life—that for which you were born!

-
1. *"The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork."*—(Psalm 19:1 NKJV)
 2. *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."*—(2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV)
 3. *"For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;"*—(2 Corinthians 5:14 NKJV)
 4. *"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."*—(Matthew 11:29 NKJV)
 5. *"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."*—(1 Timothy 6:12 NKJV)
"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."—(2 Timothy 4:7 NKJV)

Chapter 46

God of Peace - Part 1

Enormous winds had erupted suddenly upon the sea and in a matter of minutes the once calm water became a roiling vortex of deadly waves breaking over every side of the ship. The men on board were losing their minds in fear for their lives. They were convinced they would not survive this raging storm. Screaming, yelling, bailing wildly; the waves were winning. It was like they were under some supernatural attack and they were freaking out.

All except one man, lying on a pillow in the stern, sleeping. And they awoke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?”

Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace, be still!” And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.

Only a few minutes previously, peace didn’t mean much to them. They probably didn’t even think about it. But when storms rage around you, storms of any kind, peace suddenly becomes critically important and valued highly, really highly. It’s true for all of us.

Of course, the peace that is opposite to the raging storm is easy for us to comprehend but there is a much more needful peace that most people do not sense or understand. I’ll try to explain.

When mankind first sinned, he in effect rebelled against God and unwittingly took the side of Satan in his cosmic battle against the Most High. Yes, good and evil are at war all the time. And mankind, ever since Eden, has been on the losing side, fighting against the God and Father who loves us.

Now Jesus came to redeem our souls and thus resolve the conflict between us and the Almighty. Most people don’t even know they’ve been in conflict along with Satan, against God. Many would say, “I don’t even know if I believe in God.” Which is exactly the point.

You see, it’s a spiritual war which manifests itself in our world through, disbelief, and the consequences of Satan’s weapon—sin. Hatred, pride, lust, deceit, and so on that lead to conflicts of all sorts and of course, war. But Christ’s

sacrifice paid the debt we all owed for all time and settled the issue for those who believe. Paul wrote,

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,”

— (Romans 5:1)

You see, calming the storm on Galilee was a visual aid for all of us of His peace. In Him we have this peace, an eternal peace that cannot be disrupted or destroyed. Jesus told us,

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

— (John 16:33)

Yes, you’ll have peace with God but now you will get tribulation from the dark side—the world, and of course, Satan. But there’s reason for joy because Jesus vanquished evil, and His peace is forever. He said,

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled. Neither let it be afraid.”

— (John 14:27)

If you’re in this battle, if you’ve recognized the raging storm, then you value the peace that comes only from the God of peace. If you’re blind to the battle, you’re living on death row blind to your prison and deaf to the screams of the gallows, following your doomed commander into hell.

Wake up and walk in the Light where rightness and peace are in perfect harmony. In Christ-Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.¹

1. *“Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.”*— (Psalm 85:10 NKJV)

Chapter 47

God of Peace - Part 2

I think we fail to recognize the importance God places upon peace. Oh, peace between nations—sure; peace between individuals—naturally. But the big one, the most critical one, is peace with God Himself. Now, Jesus shed some light on this when He said,

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled Neither let it be afraid.”

— (John 14:27)

That is, He distinguished between the peace the world gives and the peace He gives.

You see, worldly peace can be broken in a day and often is. The peace between nations and people is tenuous at best. It doesn't last because the people who contrive it are themselves broken. But Christ's peace, that which we have through the Prince of Peace, is unbreakable because it is based upon His righteousness. In fact, the Psalmist tells us,

“Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”

— (Psalm 85:10)

And what's more, the quality of His peace is far greater than the world's: His peace brings a true sense of safety—

“I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.”

— (Psalm 4:8)

His peace brings a wonderful sense of contentment—

“And you will go to thy fathers in peace; you will be buried in a good old age.”

— (Genesis 15:15)

Christ’s peace also means relationship and unity with God Almighty—

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:”

— (Romans 5:1)

In fact, much of the OT law was dedicated to expounding on the Peace Offering (see Leviticus) which was also called the Fellowship Offering because it was the only offering that included the worshiper partaking of the sacrifice along with the priests. It symbolized and celebrated the fellowship God desires with us when sins have been atoned for.

You see Christ’s peace that He gives freely to us is actually code for unity with the Father. And He loves this unity so much, the scriptures call Him the “God of Peace” five times. Far more than any other descriptor.

You can also think of peace as the polar opposite of evil, just as light and darkness are opposites—

“I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.”

— (Isaiah 45:7)

And as God thinks on you, He looks forward to being united with you—

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

— (Jeremiah 29:11)

So of course, Jesus wanted to give us this peace, His peace Not the world’s. But speaking of the world, the Psalmist wrote,

“But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”

— (Psalm 37:11)

Yes, abundant peace, because—

“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

— (Isaiah 9:6 NKJV)

Praise God!

“The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.”

— (Numbers 6:26)

Chapter 48

Know God

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

— (John 17:3)

Now Jesus never told us that there are seven steps to eternal life or a minimum donation needed or a portion of the Law that we must follow or some specific traditions. It's recorded in the New Testament that several times people approached Him asking, “What good deed must I do?” or “What do I have to do?” because our first reaction to the offer of eternal life is that we think we have to earn or merit it somehow; and sadly, even after having surrendered our will, our heart to Christ, we often get caught up in trying to be holy or righteous by embracing a personal moral code (based on scripture of course)—we still don't get it. Christianity is NOT a self-improvement program.

Jesus was blunt, and to the point about eternal life—you simply have to KNOW father God and His Son, Jesus Christ. So, this begs the question, how does one know God? Is there a special phrase to say or a church membership or some tests to pass?

Think about it. How do you know, really know anyone? We're not talking about a casual acquaintance like your buddy that you wave to once in a while. This isn't a trick question. Who do you really know? I mean, who knows you, knows how you think, what's important to you, all your 'secrets'? Many if not most of you are thinking, 'I'm not sure I know anyone quite that well, at least not since I grew up.' That's usually because most if not all of the people we know in life are not unconditionally trusted.

But God can be trusted unconditionally and the first step in that trust relationship is accepting the fact that He sent His only begotten Son to take the pain, guilt and punishment for all, yep, ALL our misdeeds. When you truly

accept and believe that, you've opened the door to knowing God and knowing Jesus. Just as you would expect, knowing comes from spending time in relationship, time spent listening to Him, talking with Him, doing what He says in His word both written and spoken. Knowing comes when you finally realize that He's IN you and you exist IN Him. Knowing comes from many, many, many hours of sincere prayer.

If you've ever been under fire with your squad or pounded by an IED or spent weeks in rehab you begin to know those closest to you much better than your other buddies. And this is good news because knowing happens pretty naturally when the stage is set for it. The stage being set for knowing God is by believing what He did for you on Calvary's cross. Knowing starts with believing, it's developed by trusting and obeying.

And the consequence of knowing God, knowing Jesus—that's eternal life, right now, present tense. Jesus didn't say "This will be eternal life..." He said "This IS eternal life..."

Chapter 49

THE Promise

“Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began,”

— (Titus 1:1-2 NKJV)

Now, eternal life is referred to in the scriptures as a gift¹ as an inheritance² and here as a hope and as a promise. The term eternal life is a new testament thing but in the old testament we find everlasting life³ or live forever⁴ or life evermore⁵ and a few other terms.

But, the interest I have in our verse is that it says that God promised it before the world or time began. This is intriguing because it begs the question—who did he promise it to? The angels and of course the Godhead are already eternal beings so I suppose (and yes, I know that’s not a very good thing to do) He was making a future promise or commitment to mankind.

Clearly, man was not created yet but what this demonstrates is God’s foreknowledge and graciousness. It is reasonable to postulate that this wonderful promise was made before He created the physical cosmos which exists in the realm of time and space. It is also reasonable to conclude that since this promise is recorded in our scriptures, that God’s intended recipients of eternal life is mankind.

Now, Jesus told us,

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

— (John 17:3)

And,

“Jesus said unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father, but by me.”

— (John 14:6)

In other words, eternal life means you must know God and you can only know God, that is come to Him, through Jesus.

All that is to say that it seems that not only did God plan to give mankind eternal life before time began but He also knew before time began how He would deliver this gracious gift. In fact, in Christ’s revelation, it speaks of,

“...the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”

— (Revelation 13:8)

That is, because eternal life was promised before “times eternal”, this whole drama we mistakenly call life is really the setting for God to demonstrate to all creation who He is—His ability, His trustworthiness, His desire to bless, His goodness and rightness, His faithful promise. You see, all Satan’s toilet bowl propaganda will ultimately be shown to be utter lies and one day they will be gone forever.

-
1. *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*— (Romans 6:23 NKJV)
 2. *“Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?”*— (Mark 10:17 NKJV)
 3. *“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.”*— (Daniel 12:2 NKJV)
 4. *“Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”*— (Genesis 3:22 NKJV)
 5. *“It is like the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the Lord commanded the blessing— Life forevermore.”*— (Psalm 133:3 NKJV)

Chapter 50

Rest

Then Yáhweh God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and so, the man became a living being (soul).

— (Genesis 2:7)

In the beginning, God made man in His image and so, among other things, he was triune like the Lord. The dust, which became flesh, the breath or Spirit of God which became man's spiritual link to God and the consequent soul of man which came about from the first two.

Then when man sinned, and his own spirit died; his sinful flesh ruled his soul—he became a prisoner of sin. However, by being born again through faith in the risen Christ, God's Holy Spirit takes up residence once again in men and women and we are freed from the prison of sin.

There remains though throughout our lives a new dynamic—a conflict:

“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.”

— (Galatians 5:17)

This battle is for influence over the freed soul of man. The good news is that Christ paid the price for all sin and the flesh is doomed to die. But in this life, there is a consequent tension of conflict that can give the soul unrest. Paul expressed it this way:

“I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.”

— (Romans 7:21-25)

And so, like Paul, as we seek to know, to follow and to serve our Lord, this tension of the soul can result in a sense of “wretchedness” and/or an elation of thankful confidence in Jesus. That latter sense is a rest Not for the body necessarily, but for the soul. That rest is what we learn from ‘plowing’ with Jesus. Notice I did not say plowing (ministering, or laboring) for Jesus. Big difference. When we are yoked with Him, plowing with Him, side by side, we learn this heavenly rest of complete confidence in Him. We learn to do it all just as He does—with lowliness, gentleness and true humility.

“Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”

— (Matthew 11:28-30)

When we fail, when we sin, that sense of wretchedness is the natural outcome because we are inhabited by the divine Spirit of God but that wretchedness is useful. Now Satan wants to use it to get us to stop plowing because of prideful shame but God will use it to remind us to abide in Christ’s gentle and lowly heart knowing our only hope is in him—He will deliver us from “this body of death”. That’s where we find rest for our souls.

**Eternal rest.
Hallelujah!**

Chapter 51

The Twin

“And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ ”

— (John 20:28)

Why did this verse hit me so hard this morning? I’ve read it many hundreds of times before but this time it just grabbed me. I teared up.

Jesus told Thomas to stop doubting and believe. You see, just after His resurrection Christ miraculously rose from the dead and appeared to the ten disciples who were apparently hiding behind closed doors. But Thomas wasn’t there. The only one not present and we don’t know why. Perhaps he was depressed or confused. None of the disciples believed Mary when she told them of meeting the risen Lord, so Thomas wasn’t alone in his doubting.

But there was something more to it, I think. Whether or not the other disciples had believed Mary, they were ecstatic and told Thomas joyfully, “We have seen the Lord.” So, he said to them,

“Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

— (John 20:25)

This wasn’t just disbelief, it was a defiant posture, seemingly rooted in a hurting heart.

Now, everyone among them had been hurt; they all loved Jesus. So why did Thomas act the way he did. Earlier, he had voiced his devotion-

“Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”

— (John 11:16)

Like Peter, it seems that Thomas was a passionate man, passionate in devotion, passionate in bitterness. So, for Jesus to show up to everyone EXCEPT him, it may be that he was also passionate in disappointment.

Have you ever been forsaken, left alone? When people do that to us, we hurt. When people we have loved do that, we hurt profoundly. But when our Lord appears to have done that... that's when our hearts can be crushed, and it could be that this kind of pain was weighing on Thomas. Nevertheless, he desperately desired to be restored in his heart.

“And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘Peace to you!’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving but believing.’

And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ ”

— (John 20:26-28)

His sudden realization of truth made Thomas the first person to explicitly acknowledge Jesus' divinity. And church history tells us that Thomas went on to be an absolutely devoted apostle, carrying the Gospel as far as India and dying a martyr's death. So, with Thomas, maybe you relate to his pain and his passion. Jesus does, and so do I.

Chapter 52

In One Another

Jesus said to him,

“Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’”

— (John 14:9)

“At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.”

— (John 14:20)

“that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”

— (John 17:21)

“I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

— (John 17:23)

The four verses above characterize the tone of what Jesus emphasized to His disciples as He headed to the cross. During this time, it seems that His heart was deeply concerned that they would understand the oneness He came to impart to us from God the Father.

Many if not most believers have never recognized this, just like Philip, that if you are truly born anew, Christ is IN YOU and YOU are IN CHRIST via the presence of His Holy Spirit. You're not just believing in Him, you actually are living in Him and He in you.

That disgusting ‘body of death’ that you’re dragging around is indeed dead because of sin. It’s filled with it. But YOU, the born anew you is already alive in Christ. You’re in that body to learn to walk humbly, aware of your faults, to learn to truly trust in God’s

Word, His love, grace and mercy, and to prepare you to appreciate the new body Christ will give you at His revealing. Paul wrote that it is,

“...God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (or down payment).”

— (2 Corinthians 1:22)

Oneness, perfect or complete unity. Not a loss of identity but rather a fuller identity—kind of like when you’re in a really good marital relationship—a fuller identity, just as with Christ and the church. Ultimately, it will be a oneness that brings the fullest identity, all the parts living together perfectly again in our Creator.

“that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”

— (Ephesians 1:10)

Chapter 53

Several Amazing Things

“Seventy weeks (sevens) are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy.”

— (Daniel 9:24 KJV)

“So, you are to know and have insight that from the going out of a word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks (i.e. 69); it will be restored and rebuilt, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.

Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are decreed.

And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will make sacrifice and grain offering cease; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”

— (Daniel 9:25-27 LSB)

In this passage, the word translated as ‘weeks’ is literally ‘sevens’ so the prophecy starts with a declaration that 70 sevens have been determined or pre-established and in the first 69 sevens several awesome things will be accomplished.

First, he says, “To finish the transgression” or literally, the rebellion or break away. You see, mankind broke away from God back in the Garden of Eden and

the Lord said that within this period, the rift would be healed—mankind (including the Jewish people) would be reconciled with our loving creator—the revolt ended, the rift healed.

But for this to happen, the next promised occurrence had to take place—“To make an end of sins” or literally offences and their penalties. All of man’s offenses before a just and holy God had to be paid for—all past, present and future offences. And furthermore, the slate had to be wiped clean so the true reconciliation of man with God could take place.

That is Not only would all offences and their penalties be satisfied but it would be as if they never occurred in the first place— “to make reconciliation for iniquity.”

Then he added the kicker—not only would the rift be bridged, offences and penalties ended, and reconciliation produced, but then, a perfect future is guaranteed, for he said that “everlasting righteousness” would be brought in— eternal rightness in everyone and everything! Wow!

Now, there was a realization of these things when Jesus went to the cross, died for our sins and then rose again. However, there will be a second fuller realization at the conclusion of the church age, that is at the rapture. Then there will be a third even fuller realization when “all Israel will be saved” upon Christ’s second coming. And finally, there will be a final and complete realization after the millennium when God makes all things new.

So, what about when he said that vision and prophecy would be sealed or locked up and that the Most Holy would be anointed?

Well, the last prophecy in the Bible chronologically is the entire book of Revelation. At the conclusion it says,

“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

— (Revelation 22:18-19)

Therefore, it is clear that the book was sealed and locked—nothing to be added and nothing to be taken away and since it is mostly about the Jewish people and the holy city (the NEW Jerusalem) just as in Daniel 9:24, it seems that the verses in Revelation fulfill that part of Daniel’s prophecy.

Finally, throughout scripture, some things are described as holy and some even as most holy but only one thing is termed “the Most Holy” and that is the Holy of Holies—the most inner sanctum of the temple where the High Priest would enter just once a year. This is how the LSB version of the Bible translates “the Most Holy”.

It contained the Ark of the Covenant underneath the Mercy Seat, both of which are perfect representations of Jesus. So how was the Most Holy anointed?

The earthly was anointed yearly with sacrificial blood of bulls and goats but the reason the prophecy is special is because the heavenly 'Holy of Holies' or THE Most Holy was once and for all time anointed with the blood of Jesus Christ.

“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”

— (Hebrews 9:12)

A final note: a careful study of Daniel 9:24-27 reveals that Christ rode into Jerusalem on the donkey's back after 69 of the 70 sevens **TO THE DAY**. The 70th seven is the up coming seven year tribulation. God's Word is perfect and trustworthy!

Chapter 54

Curling with Faith

You know, it may be that Peter recalled needing a helping hand. Here's the story:

“And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.’ And Peter answered Him and said, ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.’ So He said, “Come.” And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’ And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’ And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God.’”

— (Matthew 14:26-33)

Eager to display his faith in the Lord, Peter stepped out of that boat and indeed walked on the water but then he saw the wind and waves and fear stifled his faith. He knew he didn't have the spiritual strength he needed and he began to sink. There was no way for him to rise up himself. In mercy, Jesus responded to his desperate need, reached out, caught his hand and lifted him up. Like a one-arm curl.

Sometime later, after Jesus Himself rose up from the grave, Peter and John witnessed another certain man in desperate need of help. He had been sinking

under the waves of brokenness his whole life and now sat or laid, at the main gate of the temple in Jerusalem. There were people everywhere, but few if any paid any heed to his pitiful plight. He had been born lame.

The man saw the two disciples and asked for a coin or two. He never expected what he got:

“Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.

And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms.

And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said,

Look at us. So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.

Then Peter said, ‘Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you:

In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’

And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them— walking, leaping, and praising God.”

— (Acts 3:1-8)

Now, Peter was an ‘expressive’ guy—he ran past John into Christ’s empty tomb; he jumped into the sea to meet Jesus on the shore after the resurrection; he felt things deeply. He was just wired like that. So it’s easy for me to think of him ‘leaping and praising God’ in his heart right along with this healed beggar. He absolutely knew the power of God and with this he had experienced it ‘on both ends’ so to speak.

And in that power, seeing the amazed crowds gathering, he spoke.

So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people:

“Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.”

— (Acts 3:12—16)

He made it clear right up front that he didn't heal the lame man, it was faith in the name of Christ—the one who lifted Peter up lifted the beggar up too. Faith in Him will lift you up as well.

Chapter 55

Try or Trust

“Beloved Now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

— (1 John 3:2-3)

To “be like Him” is indeed a glorious promise for every sincere Christian. But the second part of this verse can be for some a mystery. That is, just how do we purify ourselves just as He is pure. Misunderstanding this led some desperate folks in the Middle Ages to beat themselves supposedly into submission to the spirit. They tried very hard to be pure in this way even if they had to ‘help God out’. If you’ve studied church history, you may recall that even Martin Luther got caught in this practice.

Now, purifying means cleansing and refers to the spiritual cleansing of the heart by faith. When the early church leaders were concerned about all the Gentiles coming into the assembly, Peter stood to address them and reminded them that God ...

“...made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.”

— (Acts 15:9)

And James wrote,

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

— (James 4:8)

In other words, do not doubt. Have unwavering faith.

So, purification, for the Christian, is a matter of faith. And then, there's the notion of sanctification which is closely related. Fundamentally, this latter term means to set apart to special (usually “godly”) use; in the OT it especially pertained in this way to the priests or items in the temple. For example:

“They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God. For they offer the Lord's food offerings, the bread of their God; therefore, they shall be holy. You shall sanctify him, for he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you, for I, the Lord, who sanctify you, am holy.”

— (Leviticus 21:6-8)

In the New Testament-the word sanctify is the verb form of the word for “holy”; “to make holy” gives the idea; something that is “holy” is set apart from common use; it is the idea of becoming more like God who is holy. For example:

“And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”

— (Revelation 4:8)

Now, sanctification is a wonderful principle but like purification, it can be misunderstood. Let me explain:

The Bible speaks of sanctification in three ways, and it is important you know which way it is being spoken of in which passage! These have been described as past, present and future sanctification or as initial, progressive and ultimate sanctification or other terms like these.

Sanctification has a definite beginning the moment someone has been born anew in Christ. You can refer to:

“And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

— (Acts 20:32)

“And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

— (1 Corinthians 6:11)

Next, sanctification increases as we mature in our Christian life. You can refer to:

“We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. So, you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for [weapons of] righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you.”

— (Romans 6:6-7, 11-14)

“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

— (John 17:17-19)

“Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”

— (1 Peter 1:13-16)

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

— (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Next, sanctification is never complete in this life. Sanctification of our souls is complete at death. Refer to the following:

Though God sees only His Son in us, we experience the problem of sin through our life. It’s like the “hangover” of our fallenness:

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

— (1 John 1:8)

Yet, at death our souls are instantly in heaven with

“the spirits of the righteous [people] made perfect”

— (Hebrews 12:23)

Our souls are fully sanctified in the presence of God since nothing unclean (not even mostly clean) can ever stand before Him.

Sanctification of our bodies takes place at the Lord's Return.

“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

— (Philippians 3:20-21)

At His coming, every Christian will be given their resurrection body that shall fully “bear the image of the man of heaven”

— (1 Corinthians 15:49)

Now, here's the stumbling many believers need to understand. God (especially the Holy Spirit) is the one who sanctifies us.

“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it.”

— (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”

— (Ephesians 5:25-27)

Unfortunately, many of us think that as with the Jews trying to keep the Law, the onus of sanctification falls on us and so we end up **trying** to be holy and failing and **trying** again and again and again... The point of the Sermon on the Mount was that we **can't** make **ourselves** holy. Some Christians even walk away from the faith because they think they have to be good enough, holy enough and they just keep failing.

Listen, you cannot be good enough, holy enough, perfectly sanctified by your own efforts. The good news is that God's got you. If you are born again, Christ is in you and His Spirit will accomplish all that He has for you.¹

Having said that, we are given commands that we must heed in order to continue the sanctification process in this life. Refer to:

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality.”

— (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

“I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.”

— (Romans 6:19)

“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.”

— (Romans 6:22)

However, understand that your initial, progressive and ultimate sanctification is all the work of the **Spirit of God**—call on the Lord and trust Him. Don't try, but rather trust.

(Thanks to Grace Fellowship Church for some of this.)

1. *“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.”* — (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24, NASB95)
“But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.” — (Revelation 21:27 NKJV)

Chapter 56

Lowest of the Low

When the long-anticipated time came for God to redeem His people, the fulfillment of promises going all the way back to Eden and reinforced over the millennia many times, He ignored Judea, the historical ‘heartland’ of His focus and came to Galilee, a place of Jewish contempt largely because of their view of the ‘half-breed’ population as ‘mongrelized’ and thus inferior.

He zeroed in on a place so lowly and remote, it was not even mentioned in the Old Testament, the Talmud or in the historical writings of Josephus. When Nathanael said, “*Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?*” (John 1:46) to Philip, he wasn’t kidding. Not only was it a ‘nothing place’ but it had the reputation of being overrun with foreigners and being corrupt. Hughes writes, it was a “shoddy, corrupt halfway stop between the port cities of Tyre and Sidon,” and “was overrun by Gentiles and Roman soldiers.”

God ignored the temple in Jerusalem and the lavish home(s) of the high priest(s) and chose rather the humble abode of a truly humble 12—14 year old Mary.

“But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are...”

— (1 Corinthians 1:27-28)

God just doesn’t think like us, does He? His thoughts are infinitely higher than ours¹ and yet He goes to the ‘lowest of the low’ to find a mother for His Son. It doesn’t jive with our inclinations because our fundamental human characteristic (sorry, humanists, is not goodness) is pride. It is the primary fruit of

sin and being infected with it, we cannot do the good that we would like to². Tragically, our primary driver in all situations is pride or some form of it.

Pride was Satan's downfall. It undergirds all other menaces such as hate, violence, lust and such. "The vice I am talking of is Pride or Self-Conceit:and the virtue opposite to it, in Christian morals, is called Humility..According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison:it was through Pride that the devil became the devil:Pride leads to every other vice:it is the complete anti-God state of mind."— *C S Lewis*

"For pride is spiritual cancer:it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense. That raises a terrible question. How is it that people who are quite obviously eaten up with Pride can say they believe in God and appear to themselves very religious? I am afraid it means they are worshiping an imaginary God."— *C S Lewis*

For that reason, only broken or humbled people can truly appreciate God's choice, God's relationship with the 'Lowest of the Low'.

-
1. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts." — (Isaiah 55:9 NKJV)
 2. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find." — (Romans 7:18 NKJV)
 "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice." — (Romans 7:19 NKJV)

Chapter 57

The Physician's Account

Luke stayed with and was loyal to the Apostle Paul during his second imprisonment all the way to the end. Just before his death, Paul wrote to Timothy, *“Only Luke is with me.”* (2 Timothy 4:11) He was a historian, a theologian and a physician. Not a Jew, his character appears humble and self-effacing but his Gospel is by far the most lengthy and includes many events that the others do not.

His first words can lead one to surmise that he was a diligent researcher, but we must bear in mind that,

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:”

— (2 Timothy 3:16)

so his scriptural account, the Gospel of Luke, is the result of the Holy Spirit's work Not simply an academic exercise.

Kent Hughes writes,

“Malachi had assured those who loved God that ‘The sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.’

— (Malachi 4:2)

Isaiah had promised that before

“The glory of the Lord will be revealed,” there would come, “A voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God’ ”

— (Isaiah 40:3)

Malachi spoke similarly as he penned the final words of the Old Testament:

“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.”

— (Malachi 4:5)

This is where Luke picks up some 400 years afterward. I'm sure that after some 350 years or so, many thought God was done speaking but actually, the best was yet to come—a marvelous “Sunrise from on high”.

His story begins with an ordinary country priest, one out of about 8000 at the time who were in the region. His name was Zechariah which means “the Lord has remembered”. His wife Elizabeth was also of priestly descent. Tragically, this humble couple was childless and quite elderly. Poor Elizabeth had borne this shame for decades. Barrenness carried a moral stigma for in Jewish thinking of the time, it was not the fate of the righteous; but the couple had not lost hope for the angel Gabriel told Zechariah that his prayer was heard.

Now, it came to pass that Zechariah was chosen by lot to offer incense in the temple and suddenly, he was at the pinnacle of his personal history. The honor was the grandest in all his earthly existence. Many never got that blessing.

As he began, something happened that terrified him and there's a very interesting parallel in the book of Daniel. The angel Gabriel appeared to both men at the time of sacrifice. Both men were terrified and speechless. Daniel's encounter involved the revelation of future messianic times while Zechariah's signaled the beginning of these times.

Gabriel opened with a mindblower for Zechariah, “Your prayer has been heard.” And, “Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name of John” which means “God has been gracious”.

He added, “He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.”

Huges comments, “The Baptist would have a great heart. Jesus would later say of him, “I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist. Next to Christ, Zechariah and Elizabeth's son would develop a soul second to none Not even Abraham, Joseph, or Daniel.”

Furthermore, he added, “And he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from

birth.” This is fascinating as it seems to be unique in all of scripture. And, it was fulfilled, it seems, when in verses 39-41 of the first chapter we read,

“Now Mary (who had just found out she was pregnant with Jesus) arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.”

At that point, Elizabeth erupted in praise and Mary spoke forth a ‘song’ of praise as well. This is another example of the poetic creativity (comparing and contrasting) of the Lord for Elizabeth was elderly and Mary was just 12—14 years old. Elizabeth was carrying the greatest man in human history apart from Christ and of course, Mary was carrying Christ. Both women had gotten the news, directly or indirectly, of their pregnancies from the angel Gabriel. And both had been foretold in scripture.

Three months later, Mary returned to her home and John was born. His birth, unconventional naming and the consequent opening of Zechariah’s speaking ability caused quite a stir.

“Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all those who heard them kept them in their hearts, saying, ‘What kind of child will this be?’” And the hand of the Lord was with him.’ ”

— (Luke 1:65-66)

Then Zechariah, empowered by the Holy Spirit prophesied and rejoiced that the long-awaited time of God’s promised deliverance was at hand. He celebrated the “Dayspring from on high”— the Messiah, and John’s role in preparing the way before Him.

Now, much of this is only presented to us in Luke’s gospel so I’m grateful that the physician was led by the Spirit of God to give us this account. Now read Chapter 1 for yourself.

Chapter 58

Finishing the Feasts

God seems to love festivals and has used them not only to bless His people with reasons to worship and fellowship but also to appreciate His divine plan. That's because each of the seven that He specifically ordained have prophetic fulfillments. Four of them have been fulfilled in the first appearing of Jesus Christ and the consequent birth of His church.

Briefly, Pesach or Passover was fulfilled on the day of this festival when Jesus was crucified. He was the true Passover Lamb that all the sacrifices pointed to since Moses first told the Hebrew slaves to kill a lamb and place its blood upon the door openings and in the basin (see Exodus 12). Where they placed the blood pictured the bloody head, arms and feet of Christ on the cross.

The next feast is all about unleavened bread. The Feast of Unleavened Bread began the day after Pesach and was a continuation of the Passover. It lasted for seven days¹. Recalling that leaven in the scriptures speaks of sin, this unleavened bread pictures a needed purity of that which we as believers take in. Jesus' perfectly pure life fulfilled this. As the spotless Lamb of God, His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary was acceptable to God. Believing that is what we consider 'taking Him in' to our hearts.

Unleavened bread also symbolizes the manna that the Israelites ate when they traveled through the wilderness. This reminds us of Jesus' own words,

“As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”

— (John 6:57-58)

The Feast of First Fruits was celebrated soon after the Feast of Unleavened

Bread². The first of the barley harvest was dedicated to God and brought before Him. The Jewish people recognized that it was God who brought the increase, and it all belonged to Him. By giving the first part, they were recognizing God as the provider. Christ fulfilled this holiday literally with His resurrection, “on the day after the Sabbath” and thus He is called the “firstborn among many brethren”³.

The Feast of Weeks which we know as Pentecost was celebrated 50 days after this last feast. This celebrated the harvest and was again fulfilled to the day when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers gathered together in the upper room. A harvest of three thousand souls were saved that day, and the church was born having a commission to reap the harvest of souls in all nations.

Hence, there remain three festivals or feasts to be fulfilled. They are all in the fall season.

The first is the Feast of Trumpets, Rosh Hashanah. This festival starts the new year with the blowing of the ram’s horn trumpet, hence the name. Since it is a preparation of repentance, the traditional activities center around looking at sins. It has become customary to go down to the sea, filling one’s pockets with rocks along the way. Once there, the rocks are thrown as far as possible into the sea, identifying one area of sin with each rock. As they are thrown, it symbolizes a cleansing, representing God removing the sins to the bottom of the sea.

This feast will be fulfilled at the last trumpet (as opposed to the first trumpet⁴ and the voice of our Savior calling us up in the Rapture of the church)⁵. In a glorious transformation, all our sin will be left behind forever. Though we know the day of this festival, Jesus said that no one knows the day or hour of this event. It is always to be considered imminent. Its position, however, preceding the next feast is very relevant for in like manner its fulfillment will surely precede the fulfillment of the next one.

The sixth holy day is the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. This is the only solemn feast—all the nation of Israel would fast together, coming before God, to atone for their sin. This is the one day of the year when the High Priest would enter into the Holy of Holies, bringing the blood to place on the mercy seat. The temple of God and all the worship items in it were consecrated anew to the Lord. I’m strongly inclined to believe this will be fulfilled when the 144,000 saints of the tribes of Israel are saved by grace, sealed and sent, like the church, to continue God’s witness in a godless world (see Revelation 7). They will bring the atoning grace of God through Jesus Christ to both Jew and gentile in the terrible days of the tribulation.

Finally, there remains the Feast of Tabernacles or Sukkot. This seven-day festival commemorates God’s provision while the nation of Israel wandered in the wilderness. In addition, the people express thanksgiving to God for His continued provision in their lives. During this festival, the people live in, or at least take their meals in temporary shelters, commemorating that time. The family starts building their sukkah (tabernacle) immediately after Yom Kippur. It is noteworthy that this is the only feast that will be celebrated throughout the millennial reign of Christ⁶. As such, it will undoubtedly also commemorate the caring of God for His remnant of Jewish believers in the wilderness during the

tribulation. From its place in the sequence of feasts and its symbolism, I'll suggest that it will be fulfilled in the second coming of Christ, the victory of Jesus and His saints at Armageddon and the ushering in of the millennial age.

-
1. *"And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; seven days you must eat unleavened bread."*—(Leviticus 23:6 NKJV)
 2. *"Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.'"*—(Leviticus 23:10 NKJV)

"He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it."—(Leviticus 23:11 NKJV)

"And it shall be, when you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it, that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground, which you shall bring from your land that the Lord your God is giving you, and put it in a basket and go to the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide. And you shall go to the one who is priest in those days, and say to him, 'I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come to the country which the Lord swore to our fathers to give us.' Then the priest shall take the basket out of your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God."—(Deuteronomy 26:1–4 NKJV)
 3. *"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren."*—(Romans 8:29 NKJV)
 4. *"Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled."*—(Exodus 19:16 NKJV)
 5. *"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?'"*—(1 Corinthians 15:51–55 NKJV)
 6. *"And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the Lord strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles."*—(Zechariah 14:16–19 NKJV)

Chapter 59

Welcome to the Last Days

Anytime events like we've seen the last several days take place, we pray for God's will to be done and then look to see what we might do to help those in need. There have been so many lives lost already—elderly, women, children, even babies among them. And undoubtedly, there will be many more casualties.

And I can't help but believe that we are seeing the prophetic stage being set for some very sobering endtimes events to come. Hamas will not destroy Israel but the carnage will continue and I think we may see Hezbollah, Syria and Iran more involved in the conflict. In addition, I think it's very possible that the US will experience catastrophe as well.

The Bible tells us several things we can expect to happen in the near future.

An immense gathering of armies from Russia and Muslim partner nations that will attack Israel called the war of Gog and Magog. The prophet Ezekiel says that God will directly intervene and save Israel.

The instantaneous disappearance of many millions of sincere Christians, taken to heaven by Christ, an event called the Rapture.

That an 'attractive' and persuasive leader will arise to power over the countries of Europe, the Middle East and potentially elsewhere. Initially, he will seem like a savior of sorts to the Jews but later he will turn on them and on everyone who will not regard him as savior and god.

A hellish period of time in which the rich get much richer and most everyone else is mentally, spiritually and economically enslaved. It will last seven years.

Now, the end of the story (as well as the new beginning) is when Jesus Christ physically returns to this planet along with the armies of heaven and will conquer the armies of sin-filled men including their devil-leader.

And though we do not know the details of exactly how this will all transpire, we do know that this present time is prophesied to be a time of

“wars and rumors of war” and a period of world-wide “birth pangs” *in which* “evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.”

— (2 Timothy 3:13)

Welcome to the last days. It’s going to ultimately get worse for all of us unless you’ve got your heart right with God through Jesus Christ.

Chapter 60

Are You Ready?

Upon reaching the land of promise about two years from the time they were delivered from Egypt, the host of Israel, still very young in their experience with the great “I am”, failed a crucial test of faith. They shrank away in fear, cowering before the concept of taking the land. You see, they had learned ‘the talk’ saying, “All that the Lord says, we will do!” But ‘the walk’ was all together a stumbling. You remember the story of how the 10 spies were sent into the land to scope it out, but the report they brought back was one of catastrophic cowardice. Only Joshua and Caleb among them said, “We can do it.”

And so, for the next 38 years they wandered in a wilderness wasteland. It was a time in which the old died and the new people that emerged were honed by the hard times, developed by the difficulties and thus ready to run to the battle. Moses couldn’t lead them in—Moses, as a symbol, represented the Law, and for those of us who have wandered, you know the Law only exposes the nature, the ugly nature, of self.

It took Joshua, the one whose name and leadership represented Jesus, to lead Israel out of the self-oriented wasteland, crossing the Jordan river on dry ground, and into the conquest of the land promised by God to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The same is true today.

The prophetic symbolism in this story is powerful for the dead religion of today, having merged with the value system of the surrounding world at large, has fostered a generation of me-oriented wanderers just like the Hebrews in the desert. It wasn’t that long ago that Jesus-people, the Jesus Revolution, emerged from ‘Egypt’-perhaps a generation or so-but they never ‘took the land’ spiritually.

Instead, they fostered a celebrity-oriented, lukewarm, compromised Christianity. What started out radically different, died out, conforming to the pattern of the previous piety and ultimately left Jesus outside. Many congregations are simply social clubs designed and managed to entertain.

But now, here on the east side of Jordan so to speak, is a final opportunity for God's people to forsake the religious wasteland of the last generation and to selflessly follow Jesus. Allow me to illustrate:

I was scared stiff! Entering into the total darkness of the Space Mountain ride, my little boy and I were not yet securely strapped in and when the car jolted downward in a near free fall, I held desperately onto him. He was crying because he sensed the danger, and I was really freaked because I couldn't see to fix his strap and my own was way too loose as well.

Every twist and turn was without warning and under other circumstances, would have been fun. This, however, was sheer torture and when it was finally over, we both were white as ghosts and worn out by the terror of the seemingly endless series near-death experiences.

So here's the lesson—darkness and a loose grip are indeed a grim pair. Unfortunately, that is indeed the state of the world and the church in our times. Of course, a good deal of the world has always been in darkness but even where the light of the gospel has for millennia transformed pagan societies into caring cultures, advancing in arts, sciences, law and such, we witness everyday more evidence of societal demise as people have turned away from the light.

What the Bible prophetically terms as Babylon in the book of Revelation represents the worldwide congregation of the rebellious against God and today its leaders are introducing darkness into every nook and cranny of our societies. Personally, I am convinced that they will continue to reject redemption. There's no saving the 'Babylonians' now. God is entirely justified in judging them and as sure as the sun rises, that judgment is on its way.

All around us deception is the new norm. Evil is being considered as good and good as evil. Sexual perversion is not only tolerated but extolled by the leaders of the nations-political, judicial and otherwise. Murder is glorified in our entertainment. Moral conduct is routinely mocked in almost every venue from schools to business to the media. Our politicians are ripping off our society and laughing that we were stupid enough to put them in the position to do so. Every media message is polluted.

There's no saving Babylon now. Like the Titanic, its sinking fast and rearranging the deck chairs is absurd.

While there remain many people who will 'abandon ship' and still respond to the life of Christ's light, our societies as a whole are in the stench of rigor mortis. So what hope remains? What are we as believers to do? Do we stick our head in the sand and pretend everything will be alright?

Definitely not! Christ said that the person whom He finds feeding His sheep when He returns will be blessed. He also said to hold fast to what we have—that is, our faith in His grace. We must recognize the nature of the warfare to which we are called—it's spiritual Not fleshly—and do the 'first works'. We must be sure of our own salvation and with regards to the world, live defiantly free from its entanglements.

The true church has always been the community of the faithful to Christ. It has never been Catholic or Protestant, Baptist or Brethren, Calvary or Calvinist.

There is one Bride of Christ period. These are the last days and last days lies are being aimed at the Bride.

The church cannot save anyone through politics or law or entertainment. The church cannot save anyone period. Salvation comes when the church is engaged in lifting up the light of Christ, pointing people to the One Who does save.

Unfortunately, the world is swirling around and down the toilet-path to hell and sad to say, some of the contemporary church is in danger of going with it. The Lord's call is as emphatic as ever—"Come out from among them and be separate!" — separate from the world, its lies and lusts, its parades and passions, its call to self-gratification.

One of the problems with the last days church as explained by Jesus in Revelation chapter three is blindness¹. Absent the light of the scripture and spiritual discernment, this church has a false sense of needing nothing. It is entirely susceptible to deception. As a consequence, some people associated with it may end up following a false messiah into the lake of fire.

Don't you be one of them! Make the break and head for the high ground now. Lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us. Christ will be with you and care for you. Live entirely for Him—entirely. This is the balm that clears our vision and how we do battle against Babylon.

1. *"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—"*—(Revelation 3:17 NKJV)

"I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see."—(Revelation 3:18 NKJV)

Chapter 61

Considering “Things above” – Part One, God Almighty

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is,

“Set your mind on things above Not on things on the earth.”

— (Colossians 3:2)

But, alas, Paul did not provide specifics so I’m going to consider some of those things above that I would set my mind upon. First, I’d consider God Almighty, Father God and some of His attributes. There are things like His:

Love, Holiness, Patience/forgiveness, Grace/Kindness and much, much more.

Let’s first consider His Grace. You know, I have a complete set of the Andy of Mayberry TV shows (now, don’t laugh) because the concept of down-home friendly folks is so appealing. Of course, that’s a fantasy life. Reality is starkly different. People are not normally that kind to one another. Here, ‘outside of Mayberry,’ we are much more inclined to be selfish, trying to get ahead of others.

Honest gestures of selfless kindness are so rare, that I still remember the time when someone I didn’t know in the car in front of me paid for my coffee. That was six months ago but I remember it because such kindnesses are very infrequent. Of course, I’m not including general friendliness. Folks can and do find it in themselves to offer a friendly greeting or to ask how you are doing but extending a genuine act of kindness to someone when it costs something is far less common.

Such sacrificial acts of kindness, bestowing a blessing on someone, is a small part of the concept of grace. I say small part because you have to extend the

notion much further. Grace is not simply kindness but it's giving such kindness, such sacrificial charitability, giving it to someone unworthy, someone who has done nothing to earn or merit the 'reward', perhaps just the opposite. If you know the TV show, it's like Andy, the Mayberry sheriff putting Otis the town drunk in jail overnight night after night, and Aunt Bee bringing in her homemade breakfast for him morning after morning. Clearly, Otis doesn't deserve it, but he accepts it delightedly.

And when it comes to the grace that is a glorious attribute of our God, we still have more to wrap our head around—God's grace was supremely manifested in the giving of His Son's precious life to pay fully, completely and forever, our immeasurably huge debt of sin. Most of us don't get that, we're 'numb' to the actual cost. That's why Peter wrote,

“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

— (1 Peter 1:13)

As believers, we have all been granted this wonderful gift.

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.”

— (Ephesians 4:7)

And it's been on God's mind for a lo-o-ong time—

“God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling Not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, . . .”

— (2 Timothy 1:9)

Isn't that just amazing! Jesus came to save us and to show us this grace.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

— (John 1:14)

And experiencing this unmerited kindness from God will continue throughout eternity—here's His promise—

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. “

— (Ephesians 2:4-6)

God is eternally gracious, and I suspect we will spend eternity just letting that sink in.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

— (2 Corinthians 8:9)

That is, His ‘riches to rags’ so to speak became our ‘rags to riches’. You could say, He really set the standard by doing the standard right before our eyes—wow, that convicts me!

Now, let’s consider God’s Love. As we begin to consider God’s attributes, we have to acknowledge our limitations. His attributes are themselves infinite, thus we who are finite cannot fully appreciate them nor can we sufficiently describe them.

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.”

— (Isaiah 55:9)

Jesus, Himself quoted what the Jews called the Shema when asked for the most important command in scripture. It says,

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

— (Deuteronomy 6:5)

This was and is considered by the Jews as the most important scripture. However, it should be noted that as important as it is we cannot initiate this commanded love. That’s because we are not the source of this love, God Himself is.

“John wrote, ‘We love Him because He first loved us.’ In this is love Not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

— (1 John 4:9-10)

In other words, we can never obey this critical command to love God unless we first receive and acknowledge God’s love for us. In Eden, we learned from the serpent to doubt God’s love for us; believing his lies sent us spiraling away from God and into self-destruction. However, the good news is that believing in Jesus is believing again that God does love us.

Interestingly, the Old Testament is filled with at least a couple dozen commands like the Shema for us to love God but only a few that speak of God loving us¹. Conversely, the New Testament is filled with verses that express God’s love toward us such as:

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

— (Romans 5:8)

and,

“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life Nor angels nor principalities nor powers Nor things present nor things to come Nor height nor depth Nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

— (Romans 8:38-39)

and,

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, . . .”

— (Ephesians 2:4)

Another example is when Paul prayed for the Ephesians

“that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

— (Ephesians 3:17-19)

Of course, God has always loved His children and He demonstrated that countless times throughout the OT, but the epitome of that endless infinite love was and is expressed in the gift to us of His own Son’s life to take our places and pay for our transgressions. But it doesn’t stop there. His love keeps on giving throughout eternity for...:

“Eye has not seen Nor ear heard Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

— (1 Corinthians 2:9 and Isaiah 64:4)

Now the one thing that we all long for but rarely if ever experience is sincere, trustworthy and enduring love. That’s because people fail us-mates, friends, children. But knowing God, by definition, means knowing His love.

John, the Apostle wrote:

“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

— (1 John 4:8)

and

“we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.”

— (1 John 4:16)

Now it has come to be in vogue to assert “Love is god.” But clearly this is not at all the same thing and is yet another serpent-lie. When you believe that, you by default allow for any trending or politically correct definition of love and thus your god. That of course subjugates your puny fantasy god to your own ideas and ‘agenda’.

Of course, love is a relationship and since God is eternal, it’s a really long relationship (lol) but truly, it’s something that will grow and grow and grow forever. First, believe; then receive and keep on receiving and returning divine love.

Of note, this is what I call a ‘Who’-attribute of God as opposed to a ‘What’-attribute. His amazing Love speaks to Who He is; so how do we recognize this love? We could go into defining the three different words in Greek for love but instead, let’s consider Jesus. How did he show us God’s love?

The first thing that comes to mind is that He gave His life for us on the cross. That is the ultimate selfless sacrifice.

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”

— (John 15:13)

In this selfless act, He not only suffered a terribly painful death, but He carried upon Himself all the sins of humanity—a truly incomprehensible weight. We are naturally so self-occupied that we cannot grasp the selfless love of our Creator. It is the polar opposite of our naturally evil hearts.

But when we are truly saved, His love overflows in our heart empowering wonderful acts of worship as the Holy Spirit embraces us, children of the Most High, filling us with love-light and love-life—and in so doing, grants us the power to recognize and return God’s love.

What this means is that you can talk about, contemplate, ponder and discuss this Who-attribute of God forever but you won’t know it, that is know God’s attribute of Love until you know Him. You must establish an intimate relationship through His Son, Jesus. You see, grasping at least some of the ‘What-attributes’ of God like His sovereignty or His triune nature can be approached intellectually but getting a handle on the ‘Who-attributes’ like love or grace require actual relationship. It is this relationship, which by the way is also initiated by God, that allows us to know and be known by our Lord.

When Jesus said,

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

— (Matthew 7:21-23)

These who will be barred from entering the kingdom of heaven will evidently know about God, but they never actually know God and thus they cannot fulfill Deuteronomy 6:5 to love God. You see, this attribute of God, Love, this is the big one. Don’t debate it, don’t just approach it intellectually. The Pharisees never got it; sometimes contemporary seminarians don’t either.

Come to God on His terms—simple, humble faith. Ask Him sincerely for forgiveness for all the misdeeds of your life; ask for faith to believe in the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus. Ask Him to fill you with His Love.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen”

— (2 Corinthians 13:14)

And now consider God’s holiness. This short lesson absolutely sobers me and presses me into reverence that shakes me.

When we use the word holy to describe God, we face another problem. We often describe God by compiling a list of qualities or characteristics that we call attributes. We say that God is a spirit, that He knows everything, that He is

loving, just, merciful, gracious, and so on. The tendency is to add the idea of the holy to this long list of attributes as one attribute among many. But when the word holy is applied to God, it does not signify one single attribute. On the contrary, God is called holy in a general sense. The word is used as a synonym for his deity. That is, the word holy calls attention to all that God is. It reminds us that His love is holy love, his justice is holy justice, his mercy is holy mercy, his knowledge is holy knowledge, his spirit is holy spirit.

As you can see, when we set our minds on things above, there’s a lot to consider. Perhaps my next post can be about considering Jesus.

-
1. *“The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”—(Zephaniah 3:17 NKJV)*

Chapter 62

Considering “Things above” - Part two, Jesus

The Apostle Paul exhorted us to set our minds on things above (Colossians 3:1-2) but he did not identify those things so our ‘list’ must include God Almighty, Jesus—God the Son, His Holy Spirit, the saints who have gone before us, the godly angelic hosts, and then of course, the throne of God, the heavenly city and the heavenly ‘dimension’. These are the Beings and the things we know are ‘above’ us but likely, there are many more.

Now, this exhortation from the Apostle presents a challenge because, as the scripture says,

“Eye has not seen Nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

— (1 Corinthians 2:9)

So, we cannot rely just on what we have seen or heard or imagined. Therefore, we look to God’s Word along with the leading of God’s Spirit to help us know the Who’s and What’s of the “things above”.

Another challenge is attempting to comprehend or even describe the infinite, boundless, measureless, qualities of the things above—our minds are finite and so small in comparison. The Lord Himself tells us,

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.”*

— (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Simply put, God’s ways and thoughts are infinitely higher than ours.

So, our posts on this subject can only be meager and at best weak starting points-attempts to encourage you as you take heed to Paul’s exhortation.

Considering Jesus Christ, God the Son.

Now with Jesus, we have two frames of reference—the earthly and the heavenly. And we are not just going to consider what He did or said in His earthly ministry, but instead, what we can perceive and appreciate about Who He is.

The question we seek to answer is just what is the Name or more literally, the Nature of Jesus? Of course, He told us that He is in God and God is in Him so as we are considering Jesus, we are also considering God the Father and God the Spirit. And so, there are an infinite number of places we could start from the infinite past in which the Godhead was in perfect communion and evil did not exist, to the creation of all things seen and unseen, to the amazing story of redemption of mankind and of the entire creation to the throne of Heaven where He is seated at the right hand of Father God. You can see that even our best effort will certainly fall short.

In any event, what do we see most ‘clearly’—the nature of Jesus in the Gospels and the nature of Jesus in Revelation?

It boggles the mind to consider that the One the Almighty used to create all things and by Whom all things consist, chose, ... yes, He **Chose** to take on the form of a fetus in the womb of Mary, to live in our fallen, dusty, oppressed world mismanaged, (if you would) by the essence of evil itself. When He made this choice, we do not know.

However, we all know what He accomplished which is recorded for us in the Gospels. So, let’s consider Who He is.

Consider that with this act of ultimately humble submission to the Father’s will, He defined for us Grace—kindness that started sometime in eternity past, exploded into our reality in Genesis chapter 1 and then went ‘nuclear’ on Calvary and, I believe, continues to expand forever on our behalf throughout eternity future.

Every miracle of Christ was an example of this grace, the Father’s grace, which Jesus embodied and put on display. It angered the evil-hearted and brought joy to God’s children.

On many occasions He demonstrated mercy as well—the crippled man at the pool of Bethesda, the widow with the dead son, the man born blind, the demoniac on the shore of Galilee, the woman caught in adultery Not to mention Peter and the ‘boys’ in John chapter 21—I could go on.

And this character of mercy was amplified when from the cross, He prayed, *“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”* Clearly, His nature is forgiving.

One of the reasons we call Matthew, Mark, Luke and John gospels is because they record how Jesus shared the Gospel of the Kingdom everywhere He went. He wanted us to know and to experience new life; to know the nature of Father God, to be warmed and grow in the Life of His Love. Jesus said, “I

have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

After He rose from the dead, He again demonstrated patience with the disciples struggling faith and Thomas’ defiant doubt. He showed humility of the shore of the sea by making and serving a breakfast to the wayward crew.

In the Revelation delivered to John, we see Him as the Lamb of God reigning in absolute power and ultimately destroying death, the devil and all evil.

I’ll conclude with a devotion on His marvelous character of forgiveness:

Fastened by Forgiveness

“Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.”

“Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, ‘This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.’ And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Simon, I have something to say to you.’ So he said, ‘Teacher, say it.’

‘There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?’

Simon answered and said, ‘I suppose the one whom he forgave more.’ And He said to him, ‘You have rightly judged.’

Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.’

Then He said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’

And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’

Then He said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.’ ”

— (Luke 7:36–50 NKJV)

The word the Holy Spirit chose with which to describe this woman means one “dedicated to sin or especially sinful”. Yet when she approached Jesus, she “fastened” to Him. That’s what the word “touching” really means in the verse. Now, this offended the Pharisee, Simon, because the whole premise of the Law of Moses is that sinful man cannot approach a Holy God let alone cling or fasten to Him. ‘One must be clean and pure to come before God.’ In their minds, the same would be true of a prophet, rabbi or anyone strongly adhering to the Levitical system.

But I can relate to this woman. I often wonder why in world God gave me a ministry of encouraging people to be spiritually or heavenly minded. I rejoice in it, but just shake my head at the irony. And I am blessed just wonderfully by this story because in it Jesus directly fastens love to forgiveness. The way Jesus said it, her love led to His forgiveness; and then, implied in the next part, “But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.” is the counter-point that His forgiveness also leads to love on our part. That is, it’s a two-way deal; you see His forgiveness our love His forgiveness our love...

And to boot, this passage also shows that the degree of such love is directly related to the degree of forgiveness. Now, this is awesome because that explains to me why the people I know who clearly love God very dearly are the ones who have been faced with the reality of their own human frailty and sinfulness. And they have acknowledged it in sincerity.

You see, God can (and does) tell us we are sinful creatures, but unless we truly believe Him, we don’t really see the need to accept His forgiveness. Obviously, this is fundamental to salvation, but it is equally relevant to our lives as believers as well. At times, we may be moved to an intellectual response or assent, but we know that that is quite different from a sincere acknowledgement.

Frankly, the ‘better’ we do in keeping whatever moral code we personally believe in, the less we think we need His forgiveness, and thus the less we find ourselves enraptured with love for Him. This is NOT a justification for immoral behavior by the way! For the love that is engendered by forgiveness leads us up the high road of repentance. “We don’t need to go and sin more in order to be forgiven more, thus loving God more-all we must do is become more sensitive to our current state of sinfulness.” (D Guzik)

Simon may have had fewer outward sins to forgive than the woman, but the result was a coldness of heart. He did not even grant Jesus the customary courtesies of water to wash His feet or anointing oil. I’ve known people like that;

maybe you have too. “Good people”. In fact, they are fastened to looking good (notice I didn’t say doing good) to the exclusion of faith, love and humility.

“Simon was a rude host. And in that culture hospitality was something that was treasured highly. When you invited guests to your home, they would leave their sandals at the door, but immediately there would be a servant there with a towel and with a basin of water, and the host would provide that servant to wash your feet in order that you might come into the house to dine. Of course, they wore open sandals; they had dirt pathways that they walked on, and it was just a common, accepted courtesy that the guests that were invited would have their feet washed by the servant when they entered the door of the house. And then it was customary to greet your friends with a kiss. Usually it was a kiss on each cheek. This was just common. And, in fact, in some of those areas it is still practiced today. Italy, the men in the church when they come up and greet you, kiss you on both cheeks. And it’s a sort of a beautiful, loving thing. But it was common in that culture. And then also it was common to anoint with oil. To pour oil on the head of the guest. Which was a symbol of the joy that you’d hoped to share together that evening. And they would then serve you your first cup of coffee No sugar, strong Turkish type coffee, bitter. The idea being that you are washing away now all of the bitter experiences that you’ve had. The second cup they offer you is very sweet. Symbolic of that sweet time that we can now share together, that all of the bitterness was taken away.” — *(Chuck Smith)*

Now, this woman, whom by contrast, we do not even know by name, was washing His feet with her tears. I don’t think it was intentional. You see, she had brought perfume to anoint Him, but finding Him willing to let her ‘fasten’ to Him if you would, she broke into tears at His acceptance. It must have just boggled her mind and heart for in that society and especially in that house she was virtually untouchable, religiously filthy. She probably wiped these loving tears off His feet with her hair in absolute humility perhaps concerned that she’d unintentionally gotten His feet wet. Her hair may have simply been cleaner than anything else she had at hand. Using her hair was a very intimate thing. She didn’t come to wash His feet, but it happened that way because God wanted to expose her love.

Are you willing to be exposed?

And she kissed His feet; kissed His dusty feet. What a humbling thing. Simon had not given Him water to wash which was customary in that culture where most people wore sandals. Jesus’ feet were undoubtedly soiled.

Humiliation, indeed, is a ‘dirty’ experience, but on the other hand, it can lead to a clean heart. Unfortunately, we really know precious little of this in our prideful, self-oriented culture.

Of note is that this woman, the one who was ‘especially sinful’, had to enter the ‘house of hypocrisy’, Simon’s house, in order to reach Jesus and display her affection. She probably could have found Him somewhere else, but she exposed herself in front of the very audience that would have condemned her. In doing this, she faced her accusers and her Lord at the same time, and often times so will we. As we approach our Holy God, say in prayer or worship, we can be sure that we’ll recognize also the drivel and whine of the ‘accuser of the saints’, Satan. If we listen to his diatribes, we may back away.

But deep love beckons onward, into the intimate presence of the One who’s feet have been dusty. The One who walked on earth will not turn you away. If you approach in love and faith, you may proceed. If you will allow the love He’s planted in your heart to humble you, you’ll be exposed. In that, you’ll very possibly kindle rage from the religious but raves from your Redeemer.

And like this woman, it may be you’ll have no ‘name’. You may never be asked to speak at the next conference or huddle with the religious ‘honchos’. But, you see, that’s really the essence of this new life. It’s your love and faith that identifies you with Jesus; it’s a humbling love and that’s your ticket Not your standing in the congregation or the ministry or the movement. When you’re breathing the heavenly air of humble love, your life, your works, and your display are all unto Him and that’s what matters.

The Christian culture of today, especially in the West has fostered many ‘Simons’ if you would—people seeking a name for themselves and their ministries. Once humble ministers, lovers of God, have increasingly been convinced that they deserve more spotlight. As a consequence, they are embracing positions of ministerial power or celebrity more and people less.

David L. McKenna writes,

“Of all the traits that parents instill in their children by example, forgiveness is the most difficult. Early in my career..., a sophomore appeared before me as court of last resort to appeal his dismissal from school. Violation after violation of residence hall rules had exhausted the patience of directors, deans, and disciplinary committees. His hostility knew no bounds. Whatever awe may seem to pervade a president’s office had no effect on him. Anger and hatred exposed a vicious rebellion against anyone in authority. As I listened to him vent his spleen, a contradiction posed itself in my mind. His father enjoyed the reputation as one of the most powerful and effective evangelists in the church. The inconsistency snagged my thoughts. When he had finished and waited for my response, I caught him completely off guard with the unofficial question, ‘Have you ever been forgiven?’ ”

“A slap in the face would not have been more shocking. His eyes emptied of fire, his head dropped, and he choked out a barely audible, ‘No.’ ”

“‘Would you like to be forgiven?’ I asked. His answer taught me a lesson of a lifetime. Sobbing now, he lifted the lid that covered his resentment, ‘I

have heard my father invite thousands of people to come to Christ . . . but he has never asked me if I wanted to be forgiven.’ ”

When I was younger, I was focused on encouraging those to whom I ministered to invite Jesus into their heart. Surely, that’s important, conceptually. But the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. We’ve often heard sermons that highlight the fact that the Laodicean church in Revelation chapter three has left Jesus outside. He says,

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”

— (Revelation 3:20)

But opening the door is just the step in the right direction. The question remains, what will you do when Jesus enters? You indeed may ‘dine with Him’, yet what kind of relationship will emerge? This is critical not just as a new born babe in Christ but throughout your Christian life. Having encountered Jesus, having invited Him into your ‘home’, what attitude will you embrace?

I submit that there is the human tendency to ‘simonize’—to ask Jesus in to our home but to come to treat Him quite casually. The religious and the righteous are not necessarily one in the same. Oh, may God give us a fresh glimpse of how desperately we need Him, and as a consequence, may our hearts be fastened to Him by forgiveness—by our recognition of the need for it, along with our humble, trusting petition, and our honest acceptance.

Have you invited Him in? Dined with Him? Do you love Him? How much?

These are your starting points in considering Jesus. We could go on and on. Like John recorded,

“there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.”

— (John 21:25)

Chapter 63

Considering “Things Above “- The Holy Spirit

In the beginning, He brooded over the chaos
For what was made perfect
Became void and without form, a ruin
But in utter harmony with Father and Son
They brought light and life and beauty
And He was the breath, the grace, the goodness, wisdom and might
In the new creation, from the Father, through the Son
And when the Son came to save us
It was He and the Father Who sent Him
It was He Who created Him in the virgin
And empowered Him
For His fruit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
gentleness, self-control
He gives wisdom, knowledge and faith
He was with Them in eternity past
He was with the first Adam formed from dust
He was in and upon the last Adam
And the last Adam’s children are washed and sanctified and justified by Him
For He is eternally good
For He, too, is God

Chapter 64

Considering “Things above” - Part four, Heaven

In considering heaven and the heavenly city, I’m not going to rely on personal accounts which may or may not be accurate. Rather, we’ll look at what Bible authors have written as our references.

Also, even as we are overpowered by the enormity of the physical universe, we must keep in mind that our heavenly home may be as much, or more, spiritual as physical. Recall, Jesus, after His resurrection, showed Himself as physical but with spiritual capabilities. In other words, heaven may be vastly bigger than the physical universe, perhaps infinite.

Within this infinite vastness is the heavenly city New Jerusalem, where the Bible says God will reside or at least have His throne. The apostle John tried to describe some of it in the book of Revelation.

First, the throne:

“Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.”

— (Revelation 4:2-6)

Next, we learn of the four living creatures and the 24 elders that surround

the throne and worship the Lord. (See the book, “Fire Eyes” for more on this.) And there are at least 100 million angels as well¹.

And though heaven was (or is) the site of warfare, it will ultimately be made new and clean from evil².

“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.’ Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’”

— (Revelation 21:1, 3, 5)

“And of the heavenly city, we read that it has a spectacular appearance: The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.”

— (Revelation 21:18-21)

“Plus, there’s the water of life: And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.”

— (Revelation 22:1)

“And trees with special fruit: In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

— (Revelation 22:2)

“And no need for ‘lightbulbs’: There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light.”

— (Revelation 22:5)

But all this, as amazing as it is, is only what John could see. The really wonderful things of heaven are simply inexpressible—

“Eye has not seen Nor ear heard Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

— (1 Corinthians 2:9)

Consider the loving relationships with the Lord and with all the saints. Consider the new hope New purposes New characters and then there's the new body filled with life and well-being and joy.

Personally, I'm looking forward to an eternity of discovery and growing harmony with all.

-
1. *“Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.”—(Revelation 5:11 NKJV)*
 2. *“And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail. Nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”—(Revelation 12:7–9 NKJV)*

Chapter 65

A Time to Fight

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments (speculations) and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”

— (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

The environment in which we live is ready for revolt. People are done with the steady diet of lies being foisted on us. Now, understand, I’m not advocating revolt. Not physical violence. But we are going to have to engage in the war that surrounds us. Deceit is being exalted over our faith and we need to cast it down.

We must use every spiritual weapon at our disposal—prayer, the Word, our faith and hope and the truth and Courage. Clearly, God has begun to judge our nations for evil is beginning to be unchained—violence, lawlessness, perversity and fearmongering are everywhere.

If you are a believer in Christ, it is time to stand strong in your faith, to speak the truth, to love your brothers and sisters in the Lord, to listen to Him and radically obey His leading. No sticking your ‘head in the sand’ No cowering No ‘hunkering down’ but rather live full-on for Jesus. Get busy doing good, helping those in need. And bear in mind-

“No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.”

— (2 Timothy 2:4)

And understand that your first battle, your initial warfare is your own heart—only Christ can clean it. Of course, that doesn’t mean you become mired in

self-obsession. Rather, you simply confess to God your sins and ask for His forgiveness and cleansing (from all unrighteousness)¹ and then move on in trust and confidence. It's time to fight.

1. *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*
— (1 John 1:9 NKJV)

Chapter 66

Adversity's Advantage

“But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel.”

— (Exodus 1:12)

This illustrates an important spiritual principle. Affliction can birth God's goals. Let me explain:

Have you suffered affliction, a crushing of sorts, or bitter disappointment? Everyone gets these in this life but there can also emerge purpose, hope, even a triumph. During such times it is important to know your Lord and know He is with you. When that is the case, there are many 'advantages' that come out of adversity, for instance:

Increase and might

The nascent church was persecuted and ultimately driven out of Israel, but it grew tremendously thereafter and spread around the world. In Egypt, under the “new Pharaoh”, the nascent Hebrew nation was afflicted and crushed but it only served to cause multiplication and might.

Purifying

“Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.”

— (Isaiah 48:10)

Guidance

“Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.”

— (Psalm 119:67)

Understanding

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.”

— (Psalm 119:71)

Intimacy with Christ

“In all their affliction He was afflicted, And the Angel of His Presence saved them; In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; And He bore them and carried them All the days of old.”

— (Isaiah 63:9)

Glory

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,”

— (2 Corinthians 4:17)

The affliction which God allows for His people brings forth His fruit—obedience and learning His ways. Of course None of us wants or enjoys affliction. Generally, we will try to avoid it but if we can see the other side, see it in hope, we can follow in Jesus’ footsteps.

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

— (Hebrews 12:1-2)

“And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”

— (Luke 14:27)

Then Jesus said to His disciples,

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”

— (Matthew 16:24)

Now, I am not advocating that you seek adversity. Not at all. But if you are following Christ, I guarantee it will find you because our spiritual enemy will seek to derail you just as he did with Job. But God will use it to develop and deliver you. So hang in there and ask God to help you see 'the other side' of your affliction.

Chapter 67

Foreshadowing Redemption

The number of Jacob's descendants in Egypt began with 70 and the fact that they are each mentioned is not just good accounting but significant for multiple reasons. Later, there were 70 elders who accompanied Moses as he approached the Lord (though they remained at a distance). Also, God instructed Moses to gather 70 elders around the tabernacle and He placed a portion of the same anointing of Moses on them. So seventy speaks of origins and of leadership.

It is also part of the illustration of God's faithfulness and provision in spite of desperate circumstances:

*“Your fathers went down to Egypt with seventy persons, and now the LORD
your God has made you as the stars of heaven in multitude.”*

— (Deuteronomy 10:22)

Yes, 70 is a significant number. With it, the book of Exodus begins and since that book is known for its theme of redemption, I'm going to say 70 can also be the number of redemption symbolically.

It is also a number associated with judgement and prophecy because of the following verses:

“In the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.”

— (Daniel 9:2)

“Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy.”

— (Daniel 9:24)

“The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.”

— (Psalm 90:10-spoken by Moses who lived to be 120)

In the new testament, we see it associated with forgiveness:

“Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.’ ”

— (Matthew 18:22)

And with spreading the gospel:

“After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.”

— (Luke 10:1)

So, I think it is very significant to see this symbolically important number presented just as Jacob and his descendants are entering into 30 years of plenty followed by 400 years of slavery. God is giving a sign that the generations of hardship they experienced would lead to blessing, failure, restoration and ultimately, salvation. You could call it preparation for the promises.

After the initial 30 years, a new king arose who feared them because of their numbers and strength which led to their slavery and tasks intended to afflict, humble and oppress them. All this in light of the fact that they had done nothing against the Egyptians nor to threaten them. They simply prospered.

The king assigned task masters who forced them to serve with “Rigor”-harshness, severity, cruelty, crushing.

So nearly from their beginning as a people group, the Hebrews experienced crushing slavery. The Egyptians enslaved them, the Assyrians and the Babylonians enslaved them, the Romans oppressed them and ultimately

scattered them, Hitler murdered them and enslaved them, the Russians oppressed and enslaved them and the soon coming anti-christ will eventually try to eliminate them.

Now, from the standpoint of prophecy, if we can consider Matthew 1:17 as identifying 40 generations from Abraham to Christ¹ and Psalm 90:10 as specifying 70 years in a generation²—(BTW there are 360 days in a prophetic year) we can see approximately 70 (69.5) prophetic generations from Abraham until now.

I won't be dogmatic about this, but I do absolutely believe that God has always had a plan for His people and has been preparing them for a wonderful redemption that is coming soon.

-
1. *“So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.”*—(Matthew 1:17 NKJV)
 2. *“The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.”*—(Psalm 90:10 NKJV)

Chapter 68

Caves

David knew despondency. Hiding in a cave, he wrote:

“I cry out to the LORD with my voice; With my voice to the LORD I make my supplication. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, Then You knew my path. In the way in which I walk... Look on my right hand and see, For there is no one who acknowledges me; Refuge has failed me; No one cares for my soul.”

— (Psalm 142:1, 3-4)

Elijah lost his ‘mojo’ as well and despaired:

“And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ So he said, ‘I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.’”

— (1 Kings 19:9-10)

Christ was moved with compassion:

Jesus wept.

“Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.”

— (John 11:35, 38)

What is it about caves? The large majority of times in the Bible, we see them used for refuge and as tombs. But they also seem to be the places of encountering God. David found the strength of God’s Spirit at his ‘low-point’; Elijah heard God’s voice in a whole new way; Lazarus was raised from the dead by the Son of God.

Encouragement New perspective New life—all associated with a ‘cave-experience’.

Now, some have met God on the mountain top—Abraham did (Genesis 22), Moses did (Exodus 19), Peter, James and John did (Matthew 17). And mountain tops tend to get the spotlight; you know the view can be so impressive. But caves, Biblical caves lead us to impressive ‘views’ as well—oh Not spelunking sights but vistas only seen with the spiritual eyes.

You see, the mountain top encounters are by invitation—Abraham was called up to Moriah, Moses was called up to Sinai, the disciples were called to the mount of transfiguration. But David, Elijah, and Lazarus ended up in caves on their own, and so do you and I. So we like to talk about the mountain top but we are usually embarrassed by the cave—dark, and often stinky. But we need to because all of us end up in our own cave or caves that reveal our problems and our needs—they show us and the world that we are not ‘together’ Not the spiritual giants we want others to see.

But God uses caves. He meets us there and lifts us up from there. So, when you realize your own cave, don’t think of it as your end-point; it’s not. Look for God, listen and you’ll discover that He’s there with you. He has a marvelous new beginning for you, a new life, and hope that makes a way where you saw no way. It’s Jesus.

Chapter 69

Awake

Just before the most significant event in human history, the disciples were sleeping while Jesus prayed fervently.

*“Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter,
‘What? Could you not watch with Me one hour?’ ”*

— (Matthew 26:40)

And although they knew something important was about to happen, they were more interested in their future positions in Christ’s kingdom-

*“And there was also a strife among them (the disciples), which of them should
be accounted the greatest.”*

— (Luke 22:24)

In like manner, today most Christians are spiritually sleepy just as the second most important event in human history is imminent. And many are more concerned about notoriety or comfort than for obeying Christ’s commands to Watch for His Return and Reach out to those in need of His salvation.

Meanwhile, 422 million lethal doses of fentanyl are seized at the border. Yes, 422 million. At the same time, the crime of human trafficking—selling millions of people, many if not most, young children into slavery is now around 150 billion dollars a year. In fact, this global slave market now dwarfs all other crime networks and is nurtured by the most senior politicians and famous celebrities and major corporations.

Yes, as Paul predicted, the evil people are waxing worse and worse—the

world is rapidly becoming planet Babylon, the congregation of those rebellious against God, and the repository of all evil in the cosmos.

“But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.”

— (2Timothy 3:13)

“And he (God’s angel) cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.”

— (Revelation 18:2)

All that is to say that ever since Eden, spiritual warfare over the fate of mankind has been on-going and it intensifies when the stakes are high or upcoming events are important. We can sense and see the effects of this everywhere today. Just as with the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ’s Spirit urges us now to be watchful and alert—to wake up and pray fervently, to follow our Lord closely, to trust Him more than ever. He is at the door.

The (last days) church of Philadelphia was commended for perseverance. Jesus said to them,

“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”

— (Revelation 3:10)

Chapter 70

Persevere

What Jesus said clearly indicates that the people in this last days church will be snatched out of the world, ensconced in heaven, to avoid the hellish tribulation time on planet Babylon—earth. That time, called the Rapture of the church, is imminent. That means when you're not expecting it, boom, you're gone. And you do NOT want to miss it.

So, I urge you all to persevere, by, in and through the Holy Spirit, keep the commands of Christ and don't let anyone or anything steal your faith or interfere with your relationship to the Lord. As a sincere believer, you are deeply loved by God and He will help you.

“The church of Philadelphia is commended for keeping the Word of the Lord and not denying His Name. Success in Christian work is not to be measured by any other standard of achievement. It is not the rise in ecclesiastical position. It is not the number of new buildings which have been built through a man's ministry. It is not the crowds that flock to listen to any human voice. All of these things are frequently used as yardsticks of success, but they are earthly and not heavenly measures.” — *Barnhouse*

However, in this commendation, persevere is in the past tense, showing it is something that the Christians had already done before the hour of trial, which has not yet come upon the world. The promise is a reward for past perseverance. Not the equipping to persevere in the future.

“As far as the Philadelphian church was concerned, the rapture of the church was presented to them as an imminent hope.” — *Guzik, Walvoord*

Have you grown dull or bored or too busy for spiritual issues?
“Never forget that the man most likely to steal your crown is yourself.

‘Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life’ ”

— (Proverbs 4:23)

You are in no greater danger from anyone or anything than from yourself.”
— *Havner*